DOING THINGS WITH WORDS:
A CRITICAL APPROACH TO TEACHING FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION

A Pedagogy Thesis Presented

By

Alexander Slotkin

to

The Department of English

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

In the field of

English

Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts
April 2019
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ABSTRACT OF PEDAGOGY THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English in the College of Social Sciences and Humanities of Northeastern University
April 2019
ABSTRACT

The following is a pedagogy thesis designed around the idea that words are not inert ink stains, dull puffs of air, or even unmoving electronic pixels. Rather, words are events. While the materials contained herein are geared toward the Northeastern University community, informed by my personal experiences as a graduate student, and draw from my teaching experiences at my alma mater, Drew University, they nonetheless present a general case study for how first-year writing instruction might foster student agency through activity theory.

This thesis opens with a critical introduction to my pedagogical materials, which details the reasoning behind my course design, before transitioning to a statement on my teaching philosophy (i.e., the values and beliefs informing my approach to composition instruction). Chapter three contains the syllabus for my first-year writing course, “Doing Things with Words,” while chapter four lays out my writing assignments and methods of assessment. Chapter five lists the works cited in my thesis and presents an annotated bibliography of the sources used in my critical introduction, detailing the ways in which these sources influenced my course design. Finally, I conclude my pedagogy thesis with a copy of my curriculum vitae, making my professional history transparent.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I would like to thank Dr. Elizabeth Britt for her guidance and instruction during the preliminary stages of my course design. The seeds of this project were sown in Beth’s section of ENGL 7392: Writing and the Teaching of Writing in the spring of 2018, the same semester that she agreed to become my advisor—for which I am immensely grateful.

This thesis would also not have been possible without Dr. Neal Lerner’s dedication to this project as my committee chair and my interests as a scholar. At the same time that he was writing me letters of recommendation, reading over my statements of purpose, and helping me craft strong writing samples for the doctoral programs I was applying to, he also found the time to organize bi-weekly meetings to discuss my thesis materials. The conversations that stemmed from these meetings, namely about my passions and goals as a compositionist informed by rhetoric, have left a mark on me.

Lastly, I would also like to thank Dr. Mya Poe for her insightful feedback on my materials, all of which prompted me to think more critically about the theoretical underpinnings of my work and how these ideas are translatable in practice. This thesis would not be what it is today without her feedback.
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WHAT I shall have to say here is neither difficult nor contentious; the only merit I should like to claim for it is that of being true, at least in parts. The phenomenon to be discussed is very widespread and obvious, and it cannot fail to have been already noticed, at least here and there, by others.

—J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (1962)
CHAPTER ONE

A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION: TRANSLATING PRACTICE INTO THEORY

Course Overview

My section of ENGW 1111, “Doing Things With Words,” aims to demonstrate to students that their words are not dull puffs of air, inert ink stains, or static electronic pixels. Rather, their words do things and therefore matter. The idea that words do things stems from J. L. Austin’s book, *How to Do Things with Words* (1962). For Austin, some utterances are performative in that “the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action…To name the ship is to say (in the appropriate circumstances) the words ‘I name, &c.’” (6). But whereas Austin limits his theory of performativity to non-descriptive statements, contemporary activity theorists argue that all “writing mediates—comes between, intervenes in—the activity of people” (Russell 26). I understand performativity theory and activity theory as expressing similar sentiments: that words are actions functioning within social contexts or systems that facilitate and sustain the production of activity. To describe language as performative is to express that words, which *en masse* constitute language, are actions or events; “performativity” and “activity” will therefore be used interchangeably. As a threshold concept in writing studies (Adler-Kassner and Wardle), the idea that language is performative or that words mediate activity suggests that words always do something for and to us physically, emotionally, and socially. By emphasizing what words can do, my course fosters student agency by positioning students to think critically about what they can do with words.

Organizing a class around activity theory is thematically appropriate for a first-year writing course at Northeastern University, a university that emphasizes cooperative education (i.e., “co-op”). As a section of ENGW 1111 at Northeastern University, my course is geared
toward first-year students with proficient fluency in English and an interest in experiential learning. In the broadest sense of the term, experiential learning refers to processes of learning by reflecting on some activity or experience. While experiential learning is often associated with civic engagement and co-op, doing things with words by treating them as actions or events is inherently experiential. By prompting students to reflect on their prior experiences with language, how others are using words to do things, and the actions entailed in the texts they themselves produce (see Writing Assignments 1, 2, and 3), my course design frames writing instruction as experiential learning, suiting my students’ anticipated interests and skill-levels.

In addition to matching Northeastern University’s social and educational context, my course design meets ENGW 1111’s basic requirements. The Northeastern University Writing Program advertises ENGW 1111 as a course for students to read a range of texts in order to describe and evaluate the choices writers make and apply that knowledge to their own writing…explore how writing functions in a range of academic, professional, and public contexts; and write for various purposes and audiences in multiple genres and media. (“First-Year Writing”) Understanding what words can do and how they might be effectively used prepares students to “evaluate the choices writers make,” “explore how writing functions” in different contexts, and “write for various purposes and audiences” (“First-Year Writing”).

Exploring language’s functions is critical to evaluating the choices writers make because the physical, emotional, and social functions of words shapes what a text does. Walter Ong, for example, demonstrates that writing as a social activity invokes audiences by observing what definite articles do in Ernest Hemmingway’s *A Farewell to Arms* (1929): “‘Across the river.’ What river? The reader apparently is supposed to know. ‘And the plain.’ What plain? ‘The
plain’—remember? [...] We have somehow been there together. Who? You, my reader, and I” (13). Although Ong does not discuss activity theory, his analysis explains how words—in this case, definite articles—affect readers socially and emotionally by marking them as Hemmingway’s associates. Students who learn to use the theory of performativity to evaluate the choices writers make gain insight into what a text does, enabling them to practice similar writing strategies in their own creative, professional, and or academic work.

Critically evaluating an author’s performative choices positions students to evaluate how texts function in different contexts, an idea that complicates Austin’s seemingly straightforward theory of performativity. After all, because Austin does not consider a speaker’s identity, he cannot account for a word’s impact when used or received by individuals with different life experiences or in different positions of power. Marginalized groups, for example, may display a keener awareness of the affects of problematic rhetoric than a highly privileged speaker or listener. My students will therefore be cognizant of how texts mediate activity in ways that are heavily influenced by a text’s social context. If, for example, an employer emails the sentence, “Be there at 11:00am sharp,” my students would be able to recognize how the sender’s social influence would lead the recipient to be “there” no later than 11:00am or, in the worst case scenario, panic over being tardy. Hence, students who learn about writing through activity theory are in a position to identify how a text’s social dimensions affect the ways in which a text mediates activity (e.g., the physical and emotional activity of an employee).

Recognizing what words or texts do to readers in a range of social contexts prepares students to themselves begin doing things with words when writing “for various purposes and genres” (“First-Year Writing”). A student writing through a performative lens might, like Hemmingway, establish a social and emotional proximity to his or her readers by strategically
using definite articles in an op-ed article to physically mediate social change. Because “all writing can mediate the *internal* activity of though and emotion as well as *external* behavior” (Russell 27), and because activity theory illustrates language’s performativity, students in my course will be able to compose meaningful texts in a variety of genres and social contexts.

Through writing assignments that scaffold students into understanding how words are performative, my students and I will explore how to do things with words. The assignments begin by touching on general aspects of language’s performativity, such as recognizing our relationship to words through a literacy narrative. But as the semester progresses, my writing assignments begin to tackle more specific elements of doing things with words, such as advocating for or against a position to an interested audience. Beginning with general explorations and ending with tight demonstrations make the material accessible by helping first-year students unpack what it means to do things with words.

**Learning Goals**

Students enrolled in my course can expect to meet the following learning goals or objectives, a subset of the much larger idea that words do things: 1) identify how writing mediates activity; 2) identify and write for an audience; 3) adapt language to fit different genres; 4) articulate, expand on, and defend a position; 5) gainfully revise writing; 6) incorporate and engage with other texts in writing; and 7) research for relevant sources. I tried ordering these learning objectives by what seemed to me a logical fashion, but they need not appear in this order. Identifying how writing mediates activity might call to mind the idea that writing always does something for someone (see Burke; Lunsford “Writing Addresses;” “Writing is Performative;” Russell). A different scholar, however, remembering that genre is a social action (Miller), might switch the second and third learning goals. Nonetheless, my decision to make
these objectives the learning goals of my class is designed to, at a minimum, show student
writers how to do things with words.

Turning core activities involved in doing things with words into learning goals is a way
of modeling for students how knowledge might ideally be organized. According to Ambrose et
al., “How students organize knowledge influences how they learn and apply what they know”
(44). That is to say, how instructors choose to teach students to model ideas influences how well
they understand and use the material taught in class. Ineffective modes of organization may lead
to the misperception that no two ideas or learning goals are related, or that there is no flexibility
in the connection between ideas. By delineating the activities involved in doing things with
words and by calling them “learning goals,” I am looking to demonstrate that knowledge exists
within a complex system of ideas, encouraging students to combine different concepts in new
and exciting ways.

Course Materials

Throughout the semester, my students and I will engage with Joseph Harris’ book,
Rewriting: How to Do Things with Texts (2013), an exploration of successful writing moves in
academia. Because Harris writes in the “mode” of J. L. Austin by “trying to show [readers] how
to do things with texts” (3), Rewriting is an appropriate choice for a writing class focused on the
performatve nature of words. The text, moreover, is accessible and details critical practices in
academic writing, such as coming to terms with another author’s voice.

Other texts will be assigned throughout the course of the semester to help scaffold writing
assignments.
Writing Assignments

I. Blog Posts

Students in my class will complete and submit three informal writing assignments or blog posts, three formal writing assignments, peer-review assignments, and a final portfolio. Each blog post is intended to scaffold upcoming formal writing assignments by giving students the option to begin some part of their paper in a low-stake environment. The first blog post, for example, requires students to identify one or more discourse communities they belong to and to describe and define terms and or gestures that outsiders would most likely misinterpret. This blog post helps prepare students to write a literacy narrative, their first formal writing assignment, by prompting them to think about what constitutes a discourse community, which discourse community or communities they belong to, what terminology is specific to their respective discourse communities, and how members of their communities use language.

“Blog Post 2” prepares students to write their second formal writing assignment, a rhetorical analysis of a visual text. The turn toward visual texts in a course dedicated to doing things with words stems from the visual nature of contemporary genres of communication (e.g., billboards, comics, television, etc.), many of which mediate physical, emotional, and social activity. Although J. L. Austin only applies his theory of performativity to written or spoken utterances, his work is applicable to all texts. All texts do things because all texts engage in at least one genre, the rhetorical classification or interpretation of “similar” things such as objects or narratives (Miller 157). As Carolyn Miller explains in her article, “Genre as Social Action” (1984), genre is an action of interpretation or classification “which acquires meaning from situation and from the social context in which that situation arose” (163). Hence, the move
toward visual texts is not only in line with my course theme, but is also deeply practical for students interested in simultaneously doing things with words and imagery.

Every student will have the opportunity to practice rhetorically using both words and imagery in their second blog post. For this assignment, students must select a visual text and, in about two hundred fifty words, explain what they think the text is doing rhetorically by analyzing at least one piece of supporting evidence from the text. Because the second formal writing assignment asks students to identify a visual text and interpret its persuasiveness, the second blog post serves as a noncommittal opportunity for students to choose an image for their paper while also putting forward a tentative interpretation of the text.

“Writing Assignment 2” also requires students to integrate one or two secondary sources that either support their reading of the text or offer a different, nuanced reading. By asking students to integrate a piece of supporting evidence from their respective visual texts, “Blog Post 2” fully scaffolds the second formal writing assignment by having students practice integrating another author’s voice into their own writing.

Lastly, “Blog Post 3” requires students to draw on our previous conversations about Harris’ *Rewriting* by “coming to terms” with a narrative or position they recently encountered before “forwarding” or “countering” it. Forwarding or countering an idea prepares students to write an op-ed for “Writing Assignment 3.” The narrative they choose to address might be the same topic they choose or expand on for their third formal writing assignment. Experience with forwarding or countering an idea prepares students to write persuasive op-eds. After all, op-eds are usually argumentative.
II. Formal Writing Assignments

The formal writing assignments are designed to serve as assessments of how well students grasped the course’s learning objectives and enacted strategies for doing things with words. “Writing Assignment 1” is a literacy narrative drawing on students’ “Guided Self-Placement” essays. This assignment aims to have students reflect on their literacy development through the unique discourse communities they belong to, requiring them to identify and write for a specific audience (i.e., readers who are interested in but unaware of their discourse community’s practices). Students explore the ways in which they personally use and are used by language, analyzing how their perceptions of everyday words and everyday events, or even their own identity, changed as a result of learning one or more community’s lingo. By reflecting on their literacy developments, students are introduced early on to the idea that words do things (i.e., create communities or marshal identities). This social dimension of what language does subsequently raises the idea that “writing acts, that it can make things happen” (Lunsford, “Writing is Performative” 44) both to and for us (Burke 59). With an understanding of their relationship to the performativity of language, students may then transition to studying how others use language through a rhetorical analysis of a visual text.

“Writing Assignment 2” requires students to choose an image with some language component and discuss how the text persuasively expresses an idea or ideas with the help of at least one outside source. By the time students are ready to approach the second writing assignment, they will be able to identify how writing mediates activity, identify and write for an audience, articulate, expand on, or defend a position, and incorporate other voices into their own writing. Additionally, “Writing Assignment 2” introduces students to the idea that all writing is performed with an audience in mind. After all, analyzing how a visual text is persuasive
necessitates a careful consideration of whom it was created for and how its message resonates with different groups of readers.

“Writing Assignment 3” is an op-ed article coupled with an analysis of the moves students make in their own work. Students will identify an audience and possible venue for their work, support or criticize an argument or narrative, and write within the confines of the op-ed genre. Afterward, in three or four pages, students will discuss who their intended audiences were and how they practiced the conventions of the genre, constructed their argument, and found helpful or relevant sources. By completing this assignment, students will demonstrate that they can identify how writing mediates activity, identify and write for an audience, articulate, expand on, and defend a position, incorporate and engage with other texts, adapt their language to different genres, and research for relevant sources. For extra credit, students may submit their articles for possible publication.

These three writing assignments—the literacy narrative, the rhetorical analysis of a visual text, and the op-ed article accompanied by a reflection paper—are all aimed at encouraging students to reflect on what words do, how they may be effective used, and the actions or events entailed by their own word choices. All three assignments are linked or connected therefore by their ability to prompt each of these three activities in different ways, with literacy narratives prompting reflection on how language affects identity or vice versa, visual analyses encouraging consideration for how words interact with their social contexts, and op-ed articles requiring metacognitive reflection on what a writer is presently doing (or trying to do) with words.

III. Peer-Review

The texts and materials the students will engage with the most are the texts they and their peers produce. After all, “a writing course is defined less through the texts you assign students to
read than through the work you do with the texts that students write” (Harris 127). A student-focused approach to first-year composition instruction is manageable through deep engagement in peer-review. As Corbett and LaFrance maintain, “Peer review can be considered a microcosm of composition practice itself” (11). Students engaged in peer-review consider the moves they make as writers while simultaneously studying the writing moves their peers perform. Engaging heavily with a peer’s text during the peer-review process not only encourages everyone to treat any piece of classroom writing as seriously as the academic texts they read, but also connects back to the course theme.

As part of the writing process, peer-review requires students to consider a text’s intended function, how it performs (or fails to perform) that function, and how it might better perform its function. In other words, borrowing from the Northeastern University Writing Program’s language, students must consider what a text does in a given context and genre while also evaluating the effectiveness of the choices its writer(s) make (“First-Year Writing”). Activity theory, as discussed in this paper’s introduction, is integral to evaluating a writer’s choices because what words do en masse affects what a text does, impacting its overall effectiveness or message relative to its intended function in a given context or genre. Peer-review then positions students to critically evaluate a scholarly text through a performative lens.

When the first draft of any writing assignment is due, I ask students to peer-review another student’s work in randomly assigned pairs. In about five hundred words, each student must articulate to their partner what worked well in their text and what might be done to further their aim(s). But while students are asked to peer-review their first formal writing assignment for homework, they are required to peer-review their second formal writing assignment inside and outside the classroom. This spatial approach to peer-review transitions during the third formal
writing assignment transitions into classroom work. By transitioning from peer-review as homework to peer-review as classwork, students will learn to take all instances of peer-review seriously.

In addition to peer-reviewing formal writing assignment drafts, I will be asking students to peer-review other students’ peer-review feedback, ensuring that all students recognize the elements of useful feedback. Most feedback that I provide students will be given in scheduled meetings with student writers and peer-reviewers. Trusting students to provide written feedback to one another—after discussing, of course, what effective peer-review looks like—affords me the opportunity to teach rather than tell students how they might improve as writers. As Nancy Sommers explains in “Responding to Student Writers” (1982), “Rather than writing lengthy explanations about how to formulate a thesis or how to state the main point of a paragraph in a topic sentence,” face-to-face conferences allow instructors to “personally teach these elements, one lesson at a time” (30). Teaching rather than telling students how to more effectively do things with their words enhances student learning for both the writer whose work is under consideration and his or her peer-reviewer.

While most of my feedback to students will be verbal, I intend to give written feedback on formal writing assignment drafts, as well as peer-review feedback, before meeting with students. This written feedback will be given after scheduled meetings to encourage students to pay attention to what I teach them (or what we teach one another) rather than what I write. I will also provide written feedback on each of their blog posts so as to help students prepare to write their formal writing assignments. Written feedback will also be attached to graded papers so that students may gainfully revise their work for their final writing portfolio.
IV. Writing Portfolio

The final assignment is a portfolio composed of students’ formal writing assignments and a one or two page reflection on their growth as writers over the semester. Students will have the opportunity to gainfully revise one formal writing assignment for a higher grade. Any student electing to revise a text will need to submit their revised paper along with its previously graded counterpart, as well as an additional one-page paper discussing the changes they made.

Writing Assessment

Major writing assignments will be assessed according to individualized grading rubrics (see pages 34, 36, 38-40, and 42-43). To resist using writing rubrics as a tool for establishing or supporting standardized writing, my rubrics will reflect the specific writing goals associated with their respective writing assignments (see pages 33, 35, 37, and 41). If, for example, an assignment is aimed at helping students identify and tailor their writing to a specific audience, the assignment’s grading rubric may be used to measure if a student’s language persuasively “speaks to” their audience. These rubrics are divided into four major components or elements (e.g., significance, development, organization, and mechanics), and each section is graded on a twenty-five-point scale. Hence, each assignment is graded on a one-hundred-point scale.

Peer review assignments and blog posts or informal writing assignments are also graded on a one-hundred-point scale. However, they are not graded or assessed according to a rubric. These assignments will be assessed according to whether or not they meet or exceed the assignment’s requirements and, in the case of peer review, whether it meets the peer review criteria or expectations set by the class. Ten points will be deducted from each assignment for each missing part or infraction.
Conclusion

Students enrolled in my section of ENGW 1111 will have finished the semester knowing that their words matter because they do things, both for us and to us. Their writing assignments will demonstrate different understandings of how language marshals identity through literacy, visual narratives, and rhetorical argumentation, sharpening each student’s awareness of the rhetorical moves implicit in persuasive writing. Whether they are writing an email or completing a seminar paper, students who successfully complete my course will have demonstrated how to do things with words.
CHAPTER TWO

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

As a compositionist informed by rhetoric, my aim is always to help students understand that their words matter because words do things; language is not made of inert ink stains, dull puffs of air, or unmoving electronic pixels. This dynamic understanding of language encourages students to take their writing inside and outside the classroom seriously by opening discussions on how words function as events that uphold and or attack hegemonic power. Because this approach to language frames words as forms of social action, I want students to understand that writing is a social and rhetorical activity by emphasizing peer-review, audience, and different ways of making knowledge.

The writing assignments I ask students to complete enact my beliefs about the power of words. In my first-year writing syllabus, for example, I ask students to first write a literacy narrative reflecting on the ways in which they use and have been used by writing and rhetoric. Building on the idea that words do things for and to us, I ask students in the second writing assignment to conduct a rhetorical analysis of a visual text, paying particular attention to how others do things with words. Because many forms of multimodal communication involve the synthesis of imagery and language to compose messages for particular audiences, the assignment appropriately captures how language and genre function as forms of social action. Lastly, I ask students to practice doing things with words by writing an op-ed article on something they are passionate about, accompanied by a reflection paper on the moves they make in their writing. Although these assignments build on one another, they all require engagement in peer-review during the writing process.

Like a matryoshka doll, peer-review introduces students to the idea that all writing is
practiced with an audience in mind and that readers bring different experiences to the texts they read. Writing and rewriting with peers puts my learning goals into conversation by demonstrating that all writing reflects and interacts with the world around us. When students give and are given feedback from their peers, even when the feedback pertains to how their feedback is given, they observe firsthand the impact their writing has on their audience. Overall, the ways peer-review shapes student writing harkens back to the idea of linguistic performativity, with words functioning as forms of social action through the social and rhetorical activity of writing with peers.

Oftentimes peer review will bear out discrepancies between what students believed they wrote and how their readers interpreted their writing. As an undergraduate writing fellow, I led weekly writing workshops to create spaces for students to explore these discrepancies together, prompting consideration of how our belief-systems impact the way we consider a given subject. By discovering through a friendly conversation how their work is perceived within different epistemological frameworks, students are empowered to invoke more diverse audiences in their writing.

Diverse audiences are invoked when students synthesize foreign perspectives—particularly perspectives informed by diverse identities and experiences—with their own voices and beliefs. Considering diverse audiences in their writing encourages students to work through the ways their work rhetorically acts upon readers, something I oftentimes observed as a writing center tutor. In this way, peer-review shapes student writing by encouraging students to consider who they are writing for, how their writing may be understood, and what impact their words have on diverse audiences with diverse beliefs.
My approach to writing instruction—grounded in peer review, as well as diverse audiences and epistemologies—is meant to empower students by encouraging them to experiment with their own words in a friendly, supportive environment.
CHAPTER THREE

SYLLABUS

ENGW 1111 First-Year Writing

Doing Things With Words

When a bit of talking takes place, just what is doing the talking? Just where are the words coming from...We hear of “brainwashing,” of schemes whereby an “ideology” is imposed upon people. But should we stop at that? Should we not also see the situation the other way around? For was not the “brainwasher” also similarly motivated? Do we simply use words, or do they not also use us?

—Kenneth Burke, Language as Symbolic Action (1966)

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Course Hours: M, TR 11:45-1:25
Course Location: Holmes 400B
Office Hours: W 10:30-1:30 or by appointment
Office Location: TBD

Course Description
We often think of words as inert ink stains or dead puffs of air crafted to express ideas or describe the world around us. To some extent, we disregard words as frivolous, believing that “actions speak louder than words” or that “an image is worth a thousand words” (that’s a pretty uneven trade!). But what if your words did things? What if our words are events that uphold or attack the values underpinning society? It would certainly appear as if they are, seeing as the white marks STOP on a red hexagon make us slam our car breaks. And at weddings, ministers
join two people in marriage only by saying a variation of, “I now pronounce you married.” How do words do things and what do they do? To whom do words do things and for whom? We will be exploring these questions together throughout the semester.

We will first begin by reflecting on our own experiences as writers, namely in relation to our literacy development and how we have used (and have been used by) writing and rhetoric. Afterward, we will transition to studying how the written word, in conjunction with imagery and space, do things in the world. In particular, we will explore how language and genre influence readers. Once we have a working understanding of how writing and rhetoric do things in the world, we will transition to doing things with words by writing op-ed articles on issues that we care deeply about with the hope of effecting some social change. At the end of the semester, you will reflect back on your experiences as a writer and discuss the ways in which you have seen yourself change throughout the semester. These four assignments—a literacy narrative, a rhetorical analysis of a visual text, an op-ed article (accompanied by a reflection paper), and a final portfolio—are all aimed at encouraging you to reflect on what words do, how they may be effectively used, and the actions or events entailed by your own word choices.

**Writing Program Learning Goals**

1. Students write both to learn and to communicate what they learn.
2. Students negotiate their own writing goals and audience expectations regarding conventions of genre, medium, and situation.
3. Students formulate and articulate a stance through and in their writing.
4. Students revise their writing using responses from others, including peers, consultants, and teachers.
5. Students generate and pursue lines of inquiry and search, collect, and select source appropriate to their writing projects.
6. Students effectively use and appropriately cite sources in their writing.
7. Students explore and represent their experiences, perspectives, and ideas in conversation with others.
8. Students use multiple forms of evidence to support their claims, ideas, and arguments.
10. Students provide revision-based response to their peers.
11. Students reflect on their writing processes and self-assess as writers.

**Required Texts and Materials**

2. You will find all other reading on our Blackboard site under “Course Materials.”

**Course Requirements**

1. Come to class prepared. Read and think carefully about the texts we will be discussing before each class. **Reading the text in preparation for class is required, not optional.** If you come to class prepared, you will find class discussion much more interesting and take better notes, a major benefit when writing a paper. You must bring a physical copy of relevant texts to class.
2. Three formal writing assignments, one final portfolio assignment, blog posts, peer
review, and in-class participation.

**Classroom Etiquette**
Students are expected to behave with respect in the classroom, both to each other and to the instructor. Beside your own intellectual growth, this course is also about what we do together as members of the Northeastern Community. Inappropriate language or tone of voice, interruptions, dominating class discussion, and other behaviors that might impede the creation of a safe and comfortable learning environment will not be tolerated. We can’t discuss and debate ideas without respect for our friends and their intellectual growth. Treat your peer’s writing as seriously as the articles and books we read.

Be respectful of one another’s identity. Refer to your peers by their preferred personal pronouns (e.g., he/his/him, she/her/her, they/their/them), and show one another the same respect that you would want to be shown. Students who fail to respect others will be asked to leave the classroom. And lastly, please shut off and put away your phones and tablets. Only have your computer out and open when I ask you to. Students’ failure to follow this rule may result in their being marked absent for the class.

**Attendance and Tardiness**
Writing Program policy requires regular attendance at class meetings. Students are allowed three absences in classes that meet for three days a week; they are **allowed two absences in classes that meet for two days a week**. Overall, it is the student’s responsibility to ascertain what each instructor requires in terms of attendance and absence policy.

Students have the right to a limited number of excused absences for conditions listed in the Northeastern University Attendance Requirements, including absences due to specific university-sponsored activities, religious holidays, military deployment, and jury duty. Students are responsible for notifying instructors in writing when facing an extended leave of absence or extenuating circumstances. Please note that University Health and Counseling Services will not issue documentation of students’ illnesses or injuries.

Because writing classes are conducted workshop-style and focus on revision, a student who misses too many class meetings is not earning credit for the same course as the rest of the class. In that case, the instructor may suggest that the student withdraw from rather than fail the course. **More than four unexcused absences will result in a student failing the course.**
Grading Scale
This class will be graded on a 100 point scale, with the following letter and percentage grades:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93 – 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90 – 92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87 – 89</td>
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<td>B</td>
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<td>C-</td>
<td>70 – 72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>60 – 69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>59 and below</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: A student must receive a grade of C or better in order to pass all required writing courses in the Department of English (C is required for graduation). Any student earning a C- or lower will need to repeat the course in order to fulfill the writing requirement.

Grading Distribution†
20% Writing Assignment 1 20% Final Portfolio*
20% Writing Assignment 2 10% Peer Review
20% Writing Assignment 3 10% Blog Posts + Class Participation

†While different writing assignments are assessed or graded according to individualized criteria—all of which may be found attached to their respective assignments—the following is a general overview of what each letter grade represents:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>“A” papers far exceed the goals of the assignment. The drafts are thoughtful, the writing is clear, the content is sophisticated and demonstrates critical thinking, and the reflection is candid and shows growth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>“B” papers meet and sometimes exceed the goals of the assignment. Perhaps there are some mechanical or organizational issues, or the process is not what it should be, or the thinking could be more developed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>“C” papers fall short of the goals of the assignment in some way. They might not demonstrate critical thinking, or they might not include a part of the process, or fail to show significant revision based on feedback, or lack of clarity and effort.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D/F</td>
<td>“D/F” papers fall significantly short of the goals of the assignment, are missing significant pieces, or show significant lack of clarity and effort.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Any portfolio receiving lower than a C must be reviewed and signed off on by a committee of 3-6 Writing Program instructors at the end-of-term program meeting.

Academic Integrity
Northeastern University is committed to the principles of intellectual honesty and integrity and to respecting intellectual property. All members of the Northeastern community are expected to maintain complete honesty in all academic work, presenting only that which is their own work on tests and assignments. In required writing classes, this definition of plagiarism applies not only to borrowing whole documents (other students’ projects, internet articles, published articles) but also to borrowing parts of another’s work without proper acknowledgment and proper
paraphrasing or quotation. In these courses, students will receive instruction on using sources properly as well as feedback from instructors and peers. They will also be directed to important resources on avoiding plagiarism.

However, students bear the responsibility for writing, revising, editing, and proofreading their own work. Writing instructors who determine that plagiarism has been committed are obligated to respond. In cases of student error, instructors may provide additional instruction, require the student to repeat the assignment, and warn the student about the consequences of further infractions. If instructors determine that an incidence of plagiarism is intentional, they consult a Writing Program administrator. Based upon the severity of the infraction, the student may a) fail the assignment, b) fail the course, c) be reported to the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution, or d) any combination of these. Students may be failed regardless of whether the matter has been sent to OSCCR and regardless of that office’s finding.

For more information, see the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution’s Academic Integrity Policy (http://www.northeastern.edu/osccr/academic-integrity-policy/).

**Requesting Accommodations**
The university’s Disability Resource Center works with students and faculty to provide students who qualify under the Americans With Disabilities Act with accommodations that allow them to participate fully in the activities at the university. Ordinarily, students receiving such accommodations will deliver teacher notification letters at the beginning of the semester. Students have the right to disclose or not disclose their disabilities to their instructors. For more information about the DRC, go to http://www.northeastern.edu/drc/.

**Late Work**
No late work will be accepted. Barring class cancellations, the odd extension, or other unforeseen circumstances, *all assignment due dates are final unless otherwise stated.*

**Important Due Dates**
All assignments are due at the beginning of class.

**Writing Assignment 1: Literacy Narrative**
- Rough Draft due Monday, 9/17
- Final Draft due Thursday, 9/27

**Writing Assignment 2: Rhetorical Analysis of a Visual Text**
- Rough Draft due Thursday, 10/11
- Final Draft due Thursday, 10/18

**Writing Assignment 3: Doing New Things with Words**
- Op-Ed Rough Draft due Thursday, 11/1
- Analysis Paper Rough Draft due Thursday, 11/15
- Final Draft due Thursday, 11/29
Course Schedule

Week 1
Thursday, 9/6 | What is “writing?” What is a “text?”
- Go over syllabus; collect Guided Self-Placement Essay; Introduce Writing Assignment 1.
- Brainstorm what writing, good writing, and texts are.
  - **Homework:** Read “Literacy, Discourse, and Linguistics: Introduction” by James Gee (pp. 5-17); What the movie *Arrival* (1h 58m).

Week 2
Monday, 9/10 | Literacy and Discourse
- Discuss readings.
- How is what we say influenced by the language we use and the actions we take?
  - **Homework:** Read “The Concept of Discourse Community” by John Swales (pp. 468-473); excerpt of “Definition of Man” by Kenneth Burke; Blog Post 1 Due Wednesday @ 9pm on Blackboard.

Thursday, 9/13 | Discourse Communities
- Discuss readings & blog posts.
- What is a discourse community and what is its relationship to language?
  - **Homework:** Read “Shitty First Drafts” by Anne Lamott (pp. 93-96) & “Responding—Really Responding—to Other Students’ Writing” by Richard Straub (pp. 136-146); Writing Assignment 1 Rough Draft due Monday (bring a printed copy to class and email me a copy by the beginning of class).

Week 3
Monday, 9/17 | Shitty Rough Drafts and Peer Review
- Discuss readings.
- Create expectations of and rules for peer review.
- With your assigned peer review partner, sign up for times to meet with me in my office Thursday during class. You and your assigned peer reviewer will share a conference appointment to discuss your work, the feedback you were given, and the feedback you gave.
  - **Homework:** Peer Review due by Saturday @ 5pm on Blackboard.

Thursday, 9/20 | Writing Assignment 1 Conferences
  - **Homework:** Read Chapter 5, “Revising,” from *Rewriting* by Joseph Harris (pp. 98-122); Work on revising your rough draft. Revise your peer review by Sunday @ 5pm on Blackboard.

Week 4
Monday, 9/24 | Revision and Peer Reviewing the Peer Reviewer
- Discuss Chapter 5, “Revising,” and what gainful revision is.
- In assigned pairs, read one another’s current drafts and the peer review feedback
they were given. Then, write a response to the feedback your partner was given about what their peer reviewer did well and what might have been done differently in the peer review feedback. Were specific portions of the essay, for example, cited to support the peer reviewer’s feedback? Afterward, note the ways in which the author did or did not incorporate the feedback they were given. And lastly, give the original writer additional feedback.

- **Homework:** Read “With These Words I Can Sell You Anything” by William Lutz (pp. 1-7) & excerpt of “Advertising’s Fifteen Basic Appeals” by Jib Fowles (pp. 273-290).

**Thursday, 9/27** | Activity Theory and Visual Rhetoric
- Collect Writing Assignment 1; Introduce Writing Assignment 2
- Discuss readings.
- What do advertisements do and for whom?
  - **Homework:** Read “Definition of Audience” by ThoughtCo.com; Watch the move The Cabin in the Woods (1h 35m); Blog Post 2 due Sunday @ 9pm on Blackboard.

**Week 5**
**Monday, 10/1** | Genre
- Discuss Blog Posts and introduce audience; Define genre and Aristotelian modes of persuasion.
- Close read ads together as a class.
  - **Homework:** Read Chapter 1, “Coming to Terms” from Rewriting (pp. 13-33).

**Thursday, 10/4** | Coming to Terms
- Unpack “Coming to Terms” in relation to Writing Assignment 2.
- Discuss citations and how to find trustworthy sources.
  - **Homework:** Writing Assignment 2 Rough Draft (bring two printed copies to class and email me a copy by the beginning of class).

**Week 6**
**Monday, 10/8** | **Indigenous Peoples Day; No Class**
**Thursday, 10/11** | Peer Review
- Review class expectations of peer review.
- In assigned groups of two, peer review one another’s rough drafts (see peer review assignment sheet). Then, by the end of class, share your feedback with the person you peer reviewed and a third, assigned peer reviewer. Sign up for a conference time slow with your original peer review partner.
  - **Homework:** Read the second paper you were assigned. Peer review it, and then peer review the feedback the author’s other peer reviewer wrote. Email your work to the original author, the original peer reviewer, and myself by Friday @ 11:59am. Revise your peer review by Sunday @ 5pm on Blackboard.
Week 7
Monday, 10/15 | **Writing Assignment 2 Conferences**
- **Homework:** Revise Writing Assignment 2; Read Walter Ong’s “The Writer’s Audience Is Always a Fiction” (pp. 9-21).

Thursday, 10/18 | Audience
- Collect Writing Assignment 2; discuss our work.
- Discuss reading & introduce Writing Assignment 3.
  - **Homework:** Read Chapter 2, “Forwarding,” from Rewriting (pp. 34-53); Read “How to Write an Op-Ed or Column” (pp. 1-2).

Week 8
Monday, 10/22 | Forwarding
- Unpack Chapter 2, “Forwarding,” as a class.
- Discuss op-ed as a genre; read and dissect op-ed in class.

Thursday, 10/25 | Conducting Meaningful Research
- A librarian will be speaking to us about citations and research, as well as helping us navigate the library.
- Search for secondary sources that you think you might use to write an informed op-ed article.
  - **Homework:** Blog Post 3 due Sunday @ 9pm; Read Chapter 3, “Countering,” from Rewriting (pp. 54-72); Read “Stasis Theory” by Purdue Owl.

Week 9
Monday, 10/29 | Countering
- Unpack Chapter 3, “Countering,” as a class.
- Do you see yourself forwarding or countering in Writing Assignment 2?
- Discuss and define *stasis*.
  - **Homework:** Op-ed Rough Draft (*bring two printed copies to class and email me a copy by the beginning of class*); Read Chapter 4, “Taking an Approach” from Rewriting (pp. 73-97).

Tuesday, 11/1 | Taking an Approach
- Unpack Chapter 4, “Taking an Approach,” as a class.
- Consider how you will be taking an approach in your analysis paper.
  - **Homework:** You will be assigned to read two op-ed rough drafts; peer review them and be ready to discuss your feedback in class. Outline your accompanying analysis paper, and bring your outline to class.

Week 10
Monday, 11/5 | Peer Review
- In groups of three, discuss your feedback with the op-ed authors you were assigned. Peer review the written feedback they were given by the other peer reviewer by the end of the class.
- Discuss your outline for your Writing Assignment 3 with your peer reviewers.
- Sign up for a conference appointment with your peer reviewers. We will be discussing your op-ed article, the feedback you were given, the feedback you
gave, and your analysis paper outline.

Thursday, 11/8 | **Writing Assignment 3 Conferences**
- **Homework:** Work on revising your op-ed article; Analysis Paper Rough Draft
  (*bring a printed copy to class and email me a copy by the beginning of class*).

**Week 11**

Monday, 11/12 | **Veterans Day; No Class**
Thursday, 11/15 | Peer Review
- In assigned groups of three, read your peer review partners’ op-ed and analysis paper, and peer review the latter. Additionally, peer review the feedback given to your partners by your partners.
- Sign up for a conference appointment with your peer reviewers. We will be discussing your analysis paper, the feedback you were given, and the feedback you gave.
- Introduce the Final Writing Portfolio

**Week 12**

Monday, 11/19 | **Writing Assignment 3 Conferences**
- **Homework:** Complete Writing Assignment 3 by the next time we meet; Have a good Thanksgiving!

Thursday, 11/22 | **Thanksgiving Break; No Class**

**Week 13**

Monday, 11/26 | **Thanksgiving Break; No Class**
Thursday, 11/29 | Workshop
- Collect Writing Assignment 3 and discuss our work.
- Work (in class) on either revisions you intend to make for your Final Writing Portfolio, and or your accompanying reflection letter.
- Peer review as needed while you write.
- Come with questions that either your peers or I can answer about your work.
  - **Homework:** Work on your Final Writing Portfolio

**Week 14**

Monday, 12/3 | Class Reflection
- Reflect on class (and eat donuts).
  - **Homework:** Final Writing Portfolio

Thursday, 12/6
- You may turn in your Final Writing Portfolio by 3pm.

**Week 15**

Monday, 12/10
- You may turn in your Final Writing Portfolio by 3pm.

Thursday, 12/13
- **Last day to turn in your Final Writing Portfolio by 3pm.**
CHAPTER FOUR

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSESSMENT

Peer Review
Your peer review will be graded based on the effort you put into your work, which includes the usefulness of the feedback given. If it is clear from our meetings and your written feedback that you have followed or exceeded the assignment’s instructions and sincerely put effort into giving productive feedback, you will be given a “100” on each peer review assignment. Peer review feedback which is missing one or more element of the peer review assignment, or is not in line with the peer review criteria we establish as a class, will be marked down 10 points for each missing part or infraction.

Read your assigned partner’s (or partners’) work, and then read it again. After the second reading, offer your partner(s) constructive feedback in about 500 words, drawing on what we discussed in class about peer review and our peer review expectations. Be sure to say something that worked well and something your partner(s) might change to further their work. Remember to point out and quote specific examples from the paper(s) you read in your feedback. Email your feedback to your peer review partner(s) and myself unless asked otherwise.

Blog Posts
Your blog posts will be graded based on meeting the assignment’s requirements. If it is clear that you have followed or exceeded the assignment’s instructions, you will be given a “100” on each blog post. Blog posts which are missing one or more element of the assignment will be marked down 10 points for each missing part.

Blog Post 1
Only begin this assignment after reading “The Concept of Discourse Community” by John Swales.

Reflecting on our reading about discourse communities, as well as our previous discussion about literacy, linguistics, and discourse, select and describe an impactful discourse community that you are or were a member of. In your description, given your classmates and me some insight into the language used in your discourse community by defining specific terms and gestures that outsiders would most likely misinterpret or simply not understand. You might, for example, describe the “language of football” by explaining the significance behind certain hand gestures or terminology. Your blog post should be around 250 words long (+/- 50 words).

Blog Post 2
Select a visual text that you find especially compelling or interesting. It could be a static image (e.g., a poster or a sign) or a sequential image (e.g., a comic strip). Explain why you are attracted to the text and what you think the text is doing. Provide at least one piece of supporting evidence from the text itself and be sure to include an image of the text in your blog post. Your blog post should be around 250 words (+/- 50 words).
**Blog Post 3**

Only begin this assignment after reading “Countering” from *Rewriting: How to Do Things with Texts*.

Identify a trending subject of interest to you, as well as a mainstream or dominant narrative or argumentative position on the subject. Using the moves we discussed in your readings from *Rewriting* throughout the semester thus far, come to terms with the argument or position put forward and then either counter or forward it with ideas of your own. Your blog post should be around 300 words (+/- 50 words).
As you consider our working definition of literacy and discourse, as well as discourse communities, I would like you to reflect on your own literacy practices and a significant moment of literacy development. Whereas your Guided Self-Placement Essay describes the prior experiences with writing and reading responsible for your current level of confidence and skill in writing, this paper should explain and explore a specific memory of your literacy development and draw a deeper meaning from that experience. You may choose to expand on something discussed in your Guided Self-Placement Essay, or you may choose to discuss an experience you had not mentioned previously.

Ideally, your literacy narrative will touch on an instance in which you used language to do something, or noticed language doing something to you. Your literacy development need not related to academic writing. If we remember that literacy describes proficiency in any medium of communication, then our literacy development may take place in non-academic discourse communities. You might choose, for example, a significant event in your life through the lens of one or more discourse communities you partook in (e.g., a religion or a fan-club).

Given that your audience (i.e., me and your peers) may not be a member of the same discourse communities as you, a strong literacy narrative will include a definition of the language associated with your discourse community (e.g., the “language of football” as described by its hand gestures, physical movements, or in-game terminology), as well as a moment or moments of struggle in your attempt to become literate. You should also touch on how you overcame or may still be trying to overcome the challenges you face in becoming literate. Your literacy narrative should be about 1-2 pages long.

**Writing Goals** | *For this assignment, you should...*demonstrate your ability to 1) identify how writing mediates activity, 2) identify and write for an audience, and 3) gainfully revise your writing.

**IMPORTANT:** Save the graded, paper copy of Writing Assignment 1 with my comments. You will need it for your Final Writing Portfolio.

# Writing Assignment 1 Grading Rubric*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grading Criteria</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Acceptable</th>
<th>Needs Work</th>
<th>Unacceptable</th>
<th>Total Points</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25 pts.</td>
<td>20 pts.</td>
<td>15 pts.</td>
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<td>5 pts.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Significance</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Connects events to the larger meaning of your work.</td>
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<td><strong>Language</strong></td>
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<td>Displays strong verbiage or descriptions to set the scene or move the narrative forward (you may use dialogue sparingly if appropriate).</td>
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<td><strong>Organization</strong></td>
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<td>Proceeds in a logical manner, exploring your experience with literacy or the role of literacy in your life.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mechanics</strong></td>
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<td>___/25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shows development through the writing process (i.e., drafts, peer review, conferencing, revision, and editing).</td>
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**Final Grade: ____/100**

**Characteristics** | **Significance**
--- | ---
Excellent | Meets or exceeds the assignment’s specific requirements; Displays knowledge of the writing goals.
Good | Meets and sometimes exceeds the assignment’s specific requirements; Displays knowledge of writing goals, which, at times, could be more focused.
Acceptable | Meets the basic requirements of the assignment, including its writing goals.
Needs Work | Fails to meet some of the basic requirements of the assignment; Does not meet one or more writing goal.
Unacceptable | Fails to meet all or most of the basic requirements of the assignment; Does not meet any or most writing goals.

Although the word “text” is normally taken to refer only to writing, we know from previous class discussions that we may take “text” to mean anything that people can interpret or figuratively read. In today’s textured world, mass-communication often takes the form of imagery (or a mixture of imagery and language) with the aim of making us do something. We already learned to read texts by their function or what they do, putting this into practice through a rhetorical analysis of some visual texts. And because we have reflected on our relationship to language through our literacy narratives, you will be conducting a rhetorical analysis of a visual text rather than a non-visual text for this assignment.

Visual texts are texts with such a strong image component that without their image(s) they would lose most if not all their meaning. The image you select may be static (e.g., an advertisement) or sequential (e.g., a comic strip). Note also that a visual text almost inevitably participates in more than one genre. A series of postage stamps that display state flags, for example, could be analyzed as political propaganda. **Rhetorical analysis means analysis of all possible means of persuasion.**

You should critically study different elements of the text, such as shapes and colors, arrangement and emphasis, or even font styles and sizes…and, of course, the words or language used. Such factors speak to the “how?” of visual rhetorical analysis (i.e., *how a text is doing things with images and words*). **Your rhetorical analysis should involve some discussion of language and its relationship to imagery, even if it pertains only to an image’s title or a #hashtag.** Feel free to draw on the modes of rhetorical persuasion we discussed class, such as kairos, ethos, pathos, and logos to help you better analyze the function of the different elements of your text.

As always, find something about your target text that is not obvious—something below the surface. Your paper must be 2-3 pages long, plus image(s). Drawing on our discussion of “Coming to Terms” with a text in Harris’ *Rewriting*, as well as class discussions about finding reliable sources and using other authors’ words to do things, integrate one or two secondary sources into your writing. They may be used to support your interpretation of the text or to present a different reading of your primary source. Use MLA formatting, and include both in-text citations and a “Works Cited” bibliography.

**Writing Goals** | *For this assignment, you should…* demonstrate your ability to 1) identify how a text mediates activity, 2) articulate, expand on, and or defend a position, 3) incorporate and engage with another text in writing, and 4) gainfully revise your writing.

**IMPORTANT:** Save the graded, paper copy of Writing Assignment 2 with my comments. You will need it for your Final Writing Portfolio.

*Adapted from Eric LaFreniere’s course, “GWRTC 103,” at James Madison University.*
# Writing Assignment 2 Grading Rubric

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<td>Focus</td>
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<td>Demonstrates an awareness of how the text’s content and rhetorical moves—both contained in and outside the text—influence its message.</td>
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<td>Development</td>
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<td>Supports each portion of the analysis with either a) evidence from the text itself, b) evidence from a secondary source(s), or c) some combination of the two.</td>
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<td>Organization</td>
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<td>Employs (and follows) a clear and informative thesis paragraph, beginning with your thesis, the number of parts of your paper, and what each part does.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mechanics</td>
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<tr>
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**Final Grade:** ____/100

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<td>Good</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unacceptable</td>
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</table>
Writing Assignment 3
Doing New Things with Words

In your previous assignment, you conducted a rhetorical analysis of what a visual text was doing, demonstrating your knowledge of genre and audience. That is to say, you explained and unpacked what someone else was doing. This assignment is an opportunity for you to do something new with words (and maybe even have them published!) before explaining the moves you made as a writer.

For the first part of this assignment, you will identify a trending subject of interest to you and research the dominant narrative about the subject. Reflecting on our discussion of Op-Ed as genre, you will write your own Op-Ed article on the subject by a) identifying a publication that would foreseeably publish your piece, b) identifying an audience that would be interested in your thoughts on the issue(s), and c) forwarding or countering a dominant narrative as you see fit.

Your Op-Ed article should be about 750 words (+/- 50 words) and, for extra credit equal to a quarter of a letter grade, may be submitted for possible publication to a newspaper, journal, or website. If you would like to earn extra credit, you must submit documentation of having properly submitted your work for possible publication.

The second part of the assignment is a 3–4 page analysis paper of the moves you make in your Op-Ed article. A strong analysis paper should explain how you briefly came to terms with a dominant narrative, as well as how you forwarded or countered it. Your paper should point readers to specific passages through quotations. Successful papers will also identity who your target audience is, how you marshaled your audience’s identity in your writing, and your reasoning behind selecting the publication that you think would publish your work. Lastly, a strong analysis paper will cite the sources you used to write an informed Op-Ed article and explain how they helped you to write your piece. Use MLA formatting for all citations.

Writing Goals | For this assignment, you should...demonstrate your ability to 1) identify how writing mediates activity, 2) identify and write for an audience, 3) adapt your language to fit different genres, 4) articulate, expand on, and or defend a position, 5) gainfully revise your writing, 6) incorporate and engage with other texts in writing, and 7) research for relevant sources.

IMPORTANT: Save the graded, paper copy of Writing Assignment 3 with my comments. You will need it for your Final Writing Portfolio.
# Writing Assignment 3 Grading Rubric

*Rubric for Your Op-Ed Article*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grading Rubric</th>
<th>25 pts.</th>
<th>20 pts.</th>
<th>15 pts.</th>
<th>10 pts.</th>
<th>5 pts.</th>
<th>Unacceptable</th>
<th>Total Points</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose/Focus</strong></td>
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<td>Clearly articulates an argument or opinion, as well as specific recommendations for social change or civic engagement.</td>
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<td><strong>Audience</strong></td>
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<td>Demonstrates an awareness of the text’s intended audience by, for example, providing enough background information for readers and drawing on the readers’ interests and concerns.</td>
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<td>Includes clear transitions between different ideas, moving the narrative forward in a clear and logical manner.</td>
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<td><strong>Mechanics</strong></td>
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<td>Shows development through the writing process (i.e., drafts, peer review, conferencing, revision, and editing).</td>
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**Final Grade: ____/100**

*Adapted from Nichole Hughes’ first-year writing course rubric, [http://www.sjsu.edu/people/nicole.hughes/courses/engl1aspring13/s1/OpEd-rubric.pdf](http://www.sjsu.edu/people/nicole.hughes/courses/engl1aspring13/s1/OpEd-rubric.pdf).*
Rubric for Your Analysis Paper

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<td>Significance</td>
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<td>Explains and justifies your argument, rhetorical moves, and writing moves more generally (this should include a discussion of your engagement with the op-ed genre and your audience).</td>
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<td>Successfully and fairly comes to terms with, forwards, and or counters secondary sources.</td>
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<td>Employs (and follows) a clear and informative thesis paragraph, beginning with your thesis, the number of parts of your paper, and what each part does.</td>
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<td>Shows development through the writing process (i.e., drafts, peer review, conferencing, revision, and editing).</td>
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Final Grade: ____/100

**Characteristics** | **Significance**
---|---
Excellent | Meets or exceeds the assignment’s specific requirements; Displays knowledge of the writing goals.
Good | Meets and sometimes exceeds the assignment’s specific requirements; Displays knowledge of the writing goals which, at times, could be more focused.
Acceptable | Meets the basic requirements of the assignment, including its writing goals.
Needs Work | Fails to meet some of the basic requirements of the assignment; Does not meet one or more writing goal.
Unacceptable | Fails to meet all or most of the basic requirements of the assignment; Does not meet any or most writing goals.
This assignment is an opportunity for you to demonstrate your growth throughout the semester. In a 2-3 page reflection, describe what you believe to be the importance of the written word, and perhaps language more generally. Reflect on your growth throughout the semester, drawing on your relationship to literacy and writing as discussed in your Literacy Narrative and Guided Self-Placement Essay. How have you changed as a writer? And how do you see yourself using what you learned in this class after the semester is over?

Attached to your reflection paper should be your three, graded formal writing assignments (with my feedback) in the order in which they were assigned. Doing so will allow me to have a better sense of your progress as a writer. **Failing to do so will result in a penalty of half a letter grade (e.g., an A becomes an A-, while a B+ would become a B).**

If you would like to revise one of your three writing assignments for a higher grade, now is the time to do so. Should you choose to revise a paper, you **must** include in your portfolio the graded paper (with my comments attached), the revision, and a one to two page analysis of the moves you made in your revision. Hence, you must discuss why you made the changes that you made and how they work to further the aim of your paper. Keep in mind that you may only revise one writing assignment.

**Writing Goals** | *For this assignment, you should...* demonstrate your ability to 1) identify how writing mediates activity, 2) identify and write for an audience, 3) adapt your language to fit different genres, 4) articulate, expand on, and or defend a position, 5) gainfully revise your writing, 6) incorporate and engage with other texts in writing, and 7) research for relevant sources.

**IMPORTANT:** Attach your graded copies of Writing Assignments 1-3 to be eligible for earning a “100.” You may also attach any other written feedback you would like, assuming you explain its significance to your portfolio’s overall message.
# Final Portfolio Grading Rubric

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<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Significance</th>
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<td>Highly-Persuasive</td>
<td>Meets or exceeds the assignment’s specific requirements; Displays knowledge of the writing goals.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Persuasive</td>
<td>Meets and sometimes exceeds the assignment’s specific requirements; Displays knowledge of the writing goals which, at times, could be more focused.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acceptable</td>
<td>Meets the basic requirements of the assignment, including its writing goals.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Needs Improvement</td>
<td>Fails to meet some of the basic requirements of the assignment; Does not meet one or more writing goal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unacceptable</td>
<td>Fails to meet all or most of the basic requirements of the assignment; Does not meet any or most writing goals.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER FIVE

REFERENCES

Works Cited


“First-Year Writing.” Northeastern University, www.northeastern.edu/writing/first-year-writing/.


———. “Writing is Performative.” *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies*. Edited by Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle, Utah University Press, 2015, pp. 43-44.


“Stasis Theory.” *Purdue Owl*,
owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/the_writing_process/stasis_theory/index.html.


**Annotated Bibliography**


Kassner and Wardle’s book is, in part, of collection of short pieces written by prominent writing studies scholars, all of who work to define writing studies’ central ideas or threshold concepts. In addition to housing these short pieces, the book describes and defends the pedagogical and theoretical importance of threshold concepts in writing studies.

This book emphasizes activity theory as one threshold concept within a network of threshold concepts in writing studies. By situating the theme of my course (i.e., doing things with words) as a core topic or concept in writing studies, Kassner and Wardle’s work was critical to determining how to effectively teach first-year writing through activity theory.

Ambrose et al.’s book aims to help educators understand how different pedagogies affect student learning while simultaneously offering research-based approaches to teaching. The authors work throughout the book to establish a definition of learning and delineate principles or elements common to student learning.

The pedagogical principles and approaches from Ambrose et al.’s book influenced my curriculum design, encouraging me to think deeply about how I scaffold and encourage student learning over the course of a semester. More specifically, the authors’ discussions of how knowledge is effectively organized helped me think about how to best organize my learning goals.


In this treatise on the philosophy of language, the author puts forward the thesis that all instances of writing or oration are performative. That is to say, all texts or utterances perform some action using words or symbols. Austin challenges the notion that words are inert reflections of reality by offering examples of illocutionary acts, actions that can only be performed with language.

The thesis or argument of my course, that our words matter because they do things, is inspired by Austin’s theory of performativity and impacts both my learning goals and my writing assignments. Given Austin’s influence on speech-act theory, this book is critical to demonstrating that words do things.


This essay defines human beings as symbol-using animals and discusses at length how symbols constitute and or impact identity, knowledge, and physiology. Burke also distinguishes between symbolic action and non-symbolic motion or events, emphasizing that symbol using animals attribute symbolic meanings to non-symbolic things.

Burke’s discussion of how symbols constitute and or impact identity, knowledge, and physiology demonstrates that words always do things to us just as we do things with them. The idea, for example, that a rhetor’s own rhetoric can unintentionally deceive him or herself is important for developing a dynamic understanding of our relationship to words, especially in a class dedicated to exploring what words do and for whom.

The introduction to Corbett and LaFrance’s book touches on the pedagogical value of peer review, treating it as a microcosm of writing. This introduction also surveys existing literature on peer review while discussing what effective peer responsive pedagogies might look like.

Corbett and La France’s work gave me practical and theoretical grounding for using peer review in my course as a powerful pedagogical tool, particularly through their discussions of peer review in relation to composition. This introduction demonstrated the pedagogical value of peer review as a learning moment in and of itself.

“First-Year Writing.” Northeastern University, www.northeastern.edu/writing/first-year-writing/.

Northeastern University’s writing program webpage gives a general overview of the different first-year writing courses available to students. The webpage describes the goals of each course as well as the audience that each class is geared toward.

It would be difficult to create a first-year writing course for Northeastern University students without consulting this webpage. The writing program’s discussion on the expectation of ENGW 1111 First-Year Writing, particularly its aims and the students who might be interested in the course, helped me model my class to fit its institutional context.


This first-year writing textbook outlines and describes some of the moves used in academic writing to do things with texts. Writing in the spirit of J. L. Austin, Harris begins with the idea of coming to terms with another author’s ideas before transitioning to the moves needed to forward or counter a text. The author ends his book with a critical discussion of the role of revision in writing and how, in his opinion, first year writing courses should ideally be taught.

Harris’ book serves as the major text my students and I will be engaging with throughout the semester. The author’s attention to doing things with texts connects well with my pedagogical focus on doing things with words, both of which are indebted to Austin’s idea of linguistic performativity. Moreover, Harris breaks down and describes critical writing moves in a way that is both beneficial for and accessible to first-year student writers.


Lunsford’s brief essay introduces the idea that writing always creates an audience. She describes how writers invoke audiences while also outlining the dynamic interactions between authors and audiences involved in the reading of or listening to a text.
The social nature involved in writing and reading a text was consequential in my decision to make peer review a central activity in my course. Interactions between writers and audiences, both in the author’s mind and in real time, connects peer review to the idea that words do things, such as creating communities or audiences.

———. “Writing is Performative.” Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies. Edited by Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle, Utah University Press, 2015, pp. 43-44.

The essay introduces and briefly touches on the idea that writing is performative (i.e., words elicit action or create knowledge).

Lunsford’s work connects the performativity of language with the idea that all writing invokes or creates an audience by discussing what the written word might do to readers. Her essay helped me begin to delineate different learning goals embedded within the broad idea that words do things, eventually connecting peer review to speech-act theory.


In this essay, Miller defines genre as a rhetorical action rather than an object or substance by highlighting the social motives found in recurrent situations. These motives influence the organization of themes, topics, or elements under diverse headings, turning genre into a discursive system for communities or groups of people to create meaning.

Miller’s work brings genre theory into the domain of activity theory by turning genre into a social action, making any discussion of genre fit the theme of my course. By making clear that writers, in part, do things with words through genre, Miller’s work was crucial in expanding J. L. Austin’s theory of performativity to describes all texts, not just what he calls “performative utterances.”


Differentiating the role of audience in relation to writing and oration, Ong describes how all writing is geared toward imaginary or fictionalized audiences, including how authors invoke or marshal their audiences’ identities in writing.

Ong’s essay was important in understanding how writing as a social and rhetorical activity creates or marshal’s and audience’s identity. His work in particular informed how I perceived activity theory would help students evaluate the choices other writers make (i.e., how other writers do things with words).

Russell’s essay introduces the idea that writing mediates activity socially, emotionally, and physically. The author illustrates different ways that words mediate activity while situating his understanding of activity theory within the larger framework of threshold concepts in composition studies.

This essay was useful when thinking about the relationship between activity theory and composition instruction. Russell’s work enabled me to make connections between my course theme and learning goals by embedding texts’ mediating potential with other aspects of writing, such as the idea that writing is a social and rhetorical activity.


Sommers discusses her research on different styles of written instructor feedback, drawing particular attention to the effectiveness and implications of different feedback practices. Throughout her work, the author rhetorically analyzes examples of instructor feedback.

This essay was useful for identifying how I might best give feedback on student writing. Sommers’ work encouraged me to think dynamically about how feedback is best delivered to students, influencing my decision to have students and myself give and critically discuss feedback on student writing. This article helped me carve out my role as an instructor in a class that prioritizes peer review.
CHAPTER SIX

CURRICULUM VITAE

Alexander Slotkin

[Address]
[Phone Number]
slotkin.a@husky.neu.edu

EDUCATION

M.A. English, Northeastern University, Fall 2017 – Spring 2019 (expected).
   Pedagogy Thesis: Doing Things with Words: A Critical Approach to Teaching First-Year Composition | [GPA]

B.A. English & Philosophy, magna cum laude, Specialized Honors in English & Philosophy, Drew University, Fall 2013 – May 2017.
   Honors Thesis: The Republic: A City in Translation OR No Translation is Innocent | [GPA]

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

2016 – 2017 Drew Seminar (First-Year Writing) Fellow, The Drew University Writing Fellows Program, Drew University
   • DSEM 100: From Plato’s Allegory of the Cave to The Matrix (x3)
   • DSEM 100: Personal Identity and Immortality

2016 – 2017 Subject Tutor, The Center for Academic Excellence, Drew University

2014 – 2017 Writing Center Specialist, The Center for Writing Excellence, Drew University

2015 – 2016 Writing Across the Curriculum Fellow, MUS 303: Music of the Classic and Romantic Eras, The Drew University Writing Fellows Program, Drew University

2013 – 2013 English as a Second Language Teacher, ESL Program, Neighborhood House

PUBLICATIONS

Other

Peer-Reviewed Articles

Fiction
Slotkin, Alexander (Forthcoming). “In His Wake.” HelloHorror.


ACADEMIC CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

- “All is Good for Plato the Monist,” 7th Annual Undergraduate Philosophy Conference, Moravian College, Bethlehem, PA, April 1, 2016.

HONORS AND AWARDS

**Graduate Essay Prize: Writing and Rhetoric**, English Department, Northeastern University, 2019.

Awarded annually to one student for the best essay submitted amongst graduate English students in the category of Writing and Rhetoric. A panel of faculty judges all submissions anonymously.

**Burke Prize in Language and Literature**, English Department, Drew University, 2017.

Awarded annually to a graduating senior who has majored with distinction in language or literature and who has also demonstrated a high level of competence in classical studies.


Awarded to undergraduate students with a strong academic record and exceptional leadership. Baldwin Scholars must complete an advanced 21-credit curriculum that includes an 8-credit senior thesis, participate in a community initiative, and maintain a GPA of 3.5 or higher.


Awarded to students who have demonstrated a sustained commitment to civic engagement. Students must be in good academic standing, enrolled in 12 or more credits each semester, and continue to actively participate in the Civic Engagement Program (measured through workshops, on and off campus service projects, and at least 100 documented service hours annually).

**Baldwin Research Grant**, Baldwin Honors Program, Drew University, 2016.

Competitive grant awarded to undergraduate students enrolled in the Baldwin Honors Program, Drew University’s honors college. Funds were used to travel to the 7th Annual Undergraduate Philosophy Conference at Moravian College.


Awarded to undergraduate writing fellows for Writing Intensive and Writing in Major courses throughout the College curriculum. Fellows receive training in writing and literacy theories, writing
center theory and practice, academic genres, and discipline-specific conventions and citation styles.


Scholarship awarded to support students participating in academic internships involving substantive engagement with the community.

**ACADEMIC SERVICE**

*Northeastern University*

*English Department*

English Graduate Student Association (EGSA)

- *Graduate Student Government Representative*, 2018 – Present
- *Secretary*, 2017 – Present

EGSA Annual Conference Planning Committee, *Member*, 2018 – Present

*Graduate Student Government*

Graduate Student Government, *Senator*, 2018 – Present

*College of Social Sciences and Humanities*

Masters Student Advisory Group, *Masters Student Representative*, 2017 – 2018

**INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE**

Intern and freelance writer, SmithSolve Communications Consulting, a healthcare communications PR firm, from 2015 – 2016

**PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS AND MEMBERSHIPS**

National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)

Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC)

*Sigma Tau Delta*

**LANGUAGES AND SKILLS**

- Middle English (reading proficient)
- Computer language skills include TEI, RELAXNG, and basic HTML