

Preface

In editing this series of Reference Guides to Rhetoric and Composition I have been motivated by the need for the field of composition to synthesize the work of the last several decades of its professionalization. I have also wanted to gather the perspectives of people who have been deeply engaged in building this practical and research knowledge in each of its subfields to assess what we have learned.

I arrived in the profession via the City University of New York during the early years of the pioneering Open Admissions Policy, a few years before the first murmurings about Writing Across the Curriculum. This policy put the issue of what writing skills were necessary for college success front and center to those teaching writing. The nontraditional students we taught were frequently basic writers, and we needed to help them develop quickly and in a focused manner sufficient writing competence to deal with the demands of higher education. What that competence was, however, was under-defined and under-studied. There was virtually no understanding of what, if anything, distinguished academic writing from other forms of writing, particularly literary writing and popular journalism. A number of us, urged by Mina Shaughnessy, started probing this issue.

When we first caught wind of the writing across the curriculum movement being born in other regions, we immediately saw the great value of this. I remember a contingent of us heading down the New Jersey Turnpike in Spring of 1978 to the Delaware Valley Writing Conference with the theme of Writing Across the Curriculum run by Elaine Maimon at Beaver College, just outside Philadelphia. From my perspective, this seemed exactly what we needed to begin to understand what academic writing was, how it varied across disciplines, and how work in various disciplines supported the development of academic writing or penalized the lack of it. While WAC had great force as a programmatic and practical endeavor, it also created the

need for research into writing in the disciplines at both a professional and classroom level.

Over a quarter of a century later, we have learned much about writing across the curriculum and the associated disciplines and professions. We also have learned much about how to grow and run successful WAC programs in different campus cultures. This book draws the history of the movement together with the research and programmatic savvy we have developed. I hope the synthesis here will help us make sense of where we have been and where we are heading. Working with my coauthors Joe Little, Lisa Bethel, Teri Chavkin, Danielle Fouquette, and Janet Garufis, who were viewing this material with a fresh eye, I have come to appreciate much more all that has been accomplished in this period. We would also like to thank Susan McLeod, Michael Palmquist, and David Russell for their careful reading of the manuscript and helpful suggestions.

We hope this reference and synthesis will spur a new generation of research, theory, and program development. We are now starting to understand the writing challenges students face in their educations and how programmatic support can be offered to help them meet these challenges, but we need to know much more and at all levels of education, from the primary years through graduate school.

—*Charles Bazerman*