

# Writing Into Awareness: How Metacognitive Awareness Can Be Encouraged Through Contemplative Teaching Practices

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**Abstract:** According to a growing body of research, fostering a metacognitive awareness of the writing process is integral to the development of strong writers. Writing scholars (e.g., Driscoll & Wells, 2012; Yancey, Robertson, & Taczac, 2014; Gorzelsky, Driscoll, Pazcek, Jones, & Hayes, 2017) suggest that developing this awareness can improve rhetorical awareness and transfer of writing knowledge across disciplinary contexts. Many of these scholars also suggest that metacognitive awareness can be fostered through reflective (and—I argue—contemplative) writing practices. Informed by this research—as well as scholarship from the burgeoning field of contemplative pedagogy—I designed and taught an upper-division writing course at the University of Arizona (during the fall of 2014) titled “Writing Into Awareness.” Students in this class (who hailed from a variety of disciplines across the arts and sciences) were encouraged to engage in contemplative writing practices in order to explore what Parker Palmer (1998) refers to as the “inner landscape,” while also being mindful of the external expectations placed on a particular writing task. This essay argues that contemplative writing—as distinct from reflective writing—fosters simultaneous awareness of the internal and external factors at work in the writing process. In this course, such simultaneous awareness of author and audience developed students’ meta-awareness, thereby improving transfer.

## Metacognition & Transfer in the Writing Class

When I try to explain what “metacognition” means to my students, I usually start by giving them the simplest definition I have ever come across—I tell them metacognition is “thinking about thinking.” Eventually, we begin to unpack and then complicate this definition a little bit more. Cognitive psychologist John H. Flavell (1976), for example, describes metacognition as “one’s knowledge concerning one’s own cognitive processes and products” (p. 232). Developing this further, we discuss what this concept means for learners in general, and writing students in particular. Educational psychologist Barry Zimmerman has linked metacognitive awareness to self-regulated learning (1986), and says that self-regulated learners are:

metacognitively, motivationally, and behaviorally active participants in their own learning process. Metacognitively, self-regulated learners are persons who plan, organize,

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self-instruct, self-monitor, and self-evaluate at various stages during the learning process.  
(p. 308)

While this definition usually necessitates a brief discussion about why monitoring and managing one's own learning is a desirable goal, it also helps students better understand why metacognition is important, and why all of us—students and teachers—should strive for a learning environment that fosters metacognition. In short, metacognitive awareness allows us to recognize where we are succeeding as learners, where we need to work harder, and how we can go about achieving our goals.

Recently, writing scholars have added to the conversation on metacognition and learning by arguing that fostering a metacognitive awareness of the writing process is integral to the development of strong writers. These scholars suggest that the development of metacognitive awareness not only helps to improve writing motivation and self-regulation, but also improves emotional management, rhetorical awareness, and—perhaps most notably—the transfer of writing knowledge to other contexts (Nowacek, 2011; Driscoll & Wells, 2012; Yancey, Robertson, & Taczak, 2014; Driscoll & Powell, 2016; Gorzelsky, Driscoll, Paszek, Jones, & Hayes, 2017; Moore & Bass, 2017). Much of this recent research on metacognition and writing transfer relies on the idea that helping students develop a meta-awareness of genre knowledge, as well as the rhetorical moves or choices they make, will allow their writing knowledge to transfer. As Jessie Moore and Randall Bass (2017) note, university programs can “teach for transfer” by:

constructing writing curricula and classes that focus on the study and practice of rhetorically based concepts (e.g., genre, purpose, and audience) that prepare students to analyze expectations for writing and learning within specific concepts, asking students to engage in activities that foster the development of metacognitive awareness, and explicitly modeling transfer-focused thinking. (p.7)

Students who are able to analyze the rhetorical situation of a writing task, ascertain the expectations within a given situation or genre, and then reflect on the choices they made in order to meet those expectations are more likely to be able to repeat those steps for a different writing task, a different college course, or outside of academia all together.<sup>1</sup>

Acknowledging that there is a correlation between the development of metacognitive awareness and writing transfer, and knowing how to best develop pedagogies that foster this kind of awareness, however, are two different things. Nevertheless, many scholars do seem to be in agreement that providing students with opportunities for reflection and reflective writing positively impact their ability to be metacognitively aware. For example, Kathleen B. Yancey, (1998; Yancey et al., 2014) and Douglas Downs and Elizabeth Wardle (2007) have long touted the importance of providing students with opportunities for formal and informal reflection on their writing and writing processes. Basically, these scholars suggest that reflection is a dialectical process that allows students to ascertain whether or not they are achieving the goals they have set for themselves, and devise strategies that may help them better reach their goals in the future (Yancey, 1998, p. 6). Others like Danielle LaVaque-Manty and E. Margaret Evans (2013) suggest that students should be engaged in planning, monitoring, and evaluation activities throughout the entire course to help make these metacognitive concepts explicit to them. For example, one of their activities asks students to type “meta-comments” on their rough drafts before they submit them for peer review. Similarly, E. Ashley Hall, Jane Danielowicz, and Jennifer Ware (2013) suggest that students should utilize a detailed design plan to “achieve prolonged metacognition, or systematic thinking, about composing decisions” (p. 147). Whether engaging in activities like these—or others

like outlining, reverse outlining, reflective journaling, peer conferencing, writing center visits, etc.—writing scholars agree that reflection is key to metacognition.

The close relationship between reflection and metacognition may beg the question: is metacognition, in a functional sense, *just* reflection? Naomi Silver (2013) addresses the conflation of these two terms by educators, and suggests that reflection is not necessarily synonymous with metacognition, rather it is a practice that leads to the development of metacognitive awareness. This practice is often introduced and scaffolded for students within the confines of their writing course. It is embedded in the assignments, syllabus, and class activities. Scholars are increasingly finding that embedding reflection within the course syllabi, assignments, and activities is *essential* for the development of metacognitive awareness among students (Yancey et al., 2014; Lavaque-Manty & Evans, 2013; Hall et al., 2013; Silver, 2013; Gorzelsky et al., 2017). It appears that it is the consistent and systematic engagement in reflection—as opposed to the incorporation of just a few reflective essay assignments—that seems to have the greatest impact on students' ability to be metacognitively aware.

In addition to embedding reflective activities throughout the course, I suggest that one way writing instructors across the curriculum may be able to help students develop a strong reflective discipline—and thereby increase their metacognitive awareness—is by encouraging them to develop a *contemplative writing practice*. I will explain this term at greater length in the next section, but in short, a contemplative writing practice maintains a simultaneous awareness of the interconnectedness of both the writer and the audience by engaging in contemplative practices (e.g., mindfulness meditation, yoga, breathwork, visualization) and consistent reflection (via class discussions and journaling). Often, the kinds of reflection asked of students in writing classes—in the service of helping them develop metacognition—focus on developing an awareness of genre and audience: a rhetorical awareness. The kinds of reflection encouraged by a contemplative writing practice, however, encourage students to increase their capacity for internal reflection (e.g., introspection, reflection on one's writing process, reflection on one's educational path and choices regarding future career) *as well as* external reflection (e.g., rhetorical awareness). Internal reflection is capacitated when students participate in a variety of contemplative exercises (especially early on in the course), which foster an embodied, somatic discipline of introspection and which help to establish a contemplative approach to their writing and their life. On the other hand, external reflection is capacitated when students take part in many of the activities previously suggested by other writing pedagogues (e.g., meta-comments, detailed design plans, reverse outlining). It is this combined focus, on both the external factors *and* the internal factors at work in the writing process, as well as the consistent and embodied performance of reflection, that can help students become more engaged, thoughtful—and possibly more metacognitively aware—writers.

As previously noted, the development of metacognitive awareness has been linked to greater transfer of writing knowledge. If the implementation of a contemplative writing practice can help students develop a greater metacognitive awareness, then it stands to reason that it can help students to transfer their writing knowledge. Additionally, I believe that the adoption of a contemplative approach can also help other—less traditionally academic, but no less valuable—skills to transfer to different contexts. As Daniel Barbezat and Mirabai Bush explain in their book *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education* (2014), contemplative pedagogical approaches have a variety of objectives. Aside from helping students “discover the [course] material in themselves and thus deepen their understanding of the material,” a contemplative approach also helps students develop their capacity to sustain focus and attention, develop a sense of compassion for and connection to others, and engage in personal inquiry and insight (p. 11). In other words, by encouraging reflection in embodied, dynamic, personal, and integrated ways, instructors may be

able to impress upon students the need for sustained reflection in all areas of their educational and personal lives, not just within the context of their writing classes and assignments. Furthermore, a growing body of evidence supports the notion that engaging in sustained contemplative practice can foster a variety of cognitive functions, including memory and attention (Awh & Jonides, 2001; Awh, Vogel, & Oh, 2006; Lutz et al., 2009; Jha & Stanley, 2010; Maclean et al., 2010), as well as the development of inter- and intrapersonal skills like compassion, empathy, and emotional regulation (Hart, 2008; Roeser, 2009; Zajonc, 2013). The embedded and embodied practice of reflection encouraged by a contemplative pedagogical approach may impress upon students the notion that reflection is more than just an instructional tool—it's a discipline (i.e., an activity that provides mental training) with far-reaching implications for all aspects of life. In the remainder of this essay, I will provide an account of a course I taught titled "Writing Into Awareness," and how I implemented a contemplative approach in this course as I attempted to encourage greater student introspection and reflection, rhetorical awareness, metacognitive awareness, and transfer.

## Writing Into Awareness: A Contemplative Writing Class

During the fall of 2014 at The University of Arizona, I had the opportunity to develop an upper-division writing course for students from across the disciplines. This course—Advanced Composition—is an elective writing class, frequently taken by non-English majors. Often, this course is heavily populated by pre-health, journalism, and secondary education majors (and a smattering of other majors) who are required to take an upper level writing course to complete their degree requirements. The students in my section followed this trend and hailed from across the arts and sciences. Most of the students were seniors and juniors, but there were also a handful of sophomores in the class. Although this course was offered by the English Department, many of the activities and assignments I implemented can be easily adapted to courses in other departments and disciplines.

Instructors have a lot of freedom in how they can design and structure this course. The primary goals of the course are to give students the opportunity to write within multiple genres and for multiple audiences, and to encourage students to think of themselves as writers, thereby developing a writerly ethos. Due to this instructional freedom, I was able to design this course based on some of the contemplative pedagogical concepts utilized by Daniel Barbezat and Mirabai Bush (2014), Arthur Zajonc (2013), Mary Rose O'Reilly (1998), Susan Schiller (2014), and Parker Palmer (1998; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010), among others. Essentially, these authors all suggest that higher education should be a joint pursuit—by teachers and students—to educate the *person*, not just the mind. They lament the tendency of higher education to over-value the development of the intellect, and under-value personal growth and fulfilment. As a result, these educators have each developed approaches, activities, and assignments that encourage students to explore what Parker Palmer (1998) refers to as the "inner landscape." In the contemplative classroom, students are encouraged to explore their own "first-person perspective" and perform critical introspection to better understand how they are implicated in the subjects they are studying. "By legitimizing students' experience," Barbezat and Bush note, "we change their relationship to the material being covered...A direct inquiry brought about through contemplative introspection validates and deepens their understanding of themselves and the material covered" (p. 6). Many of the benefits derived from adopting a contemplative approach in the classroom are skills or habits of mind that can also benefit students *outside* of the classroom: greater comfort with and capacity for introspection (leading to insight), greater capacity for "being in the moment" (facilitating focused attention), an enhanced ability to manage stress, enhanced capacity for empathy and compassion, etc. By prioritizing these values, contemplative pedagogues embrace an educational approach that

is reflective at its very core, and set students up for the transfer of these contemplative mindsets to other contexts within and outside of academia.

As a key component of this class, reflection was embedded in both the course structure and content. I designated the kinds of reflection required of students in this class as “internal” and “external.” Internal reflection was any kind of reflection that looked inward: introspection, reflection on one’s writing process, daily reflective journal writing, personal responses to readings or concepts discussed in class, reflection on one’s choice of career or educational career in general. External reflection involved reflection that looked outward: contemplating the expectations of a particular audience, or the constraints of a particular genre or discipline (i.e., rhetorical awareness). By fostering this simultaneous awareness of both the internal and external factors always at work in the writing process, I encouraged students to be mindful (i.e., consistently and non-judgmentally aware) of their personal writing process and their lives in general, take themselves more seriously as “writers,” and become meta-aware of the ways that genre and audience affect writing.

This simultaneous awareness of the internal and external factors always at work in the writing process is integral to the development of a contemplative writing practice. As Barbezat and Bush (2014) explain, contemplative writing “is an acknowledgement of our interconnection: all writers are giving something, and they need a reader who will accept their gift” (p. 123). To engage in a contemplative writing practice is to be aware of and acknowledge that I am always writing for an audience who has specific expectations of my writing, and to also be aware that my role as a writer allows me to express my own unique view of the world, influenced by all of my prior experiences and education. Contemplative writing is the act of holding these two truths simultaneously as we write: awareness of myself as a writer (with a unique perspective influenced by previous experiences and education), and awareness of my reader’s needs. As such, contemplative writing is a practice that emphasizes process rather than product, and includes exploratory genres like journal writing, freewriting, writing about reading, as well as assignments intended to encourage greater engagement with one’s audience (e.g., genre analyses, reverse outlines, meta-comments). While other reflective writing approaches tend to prioritize a focus outward (i.e., rhetorical approaches) or inward (i.e., expressivist approaches), a contemplative writing practice validates and encourages *both* forms of reflection, simultaneously. By incorporating a contemplative approach, ‘mere’ reflection can become an *embodied discipline*; one that can aid students as writers, and as human beings.

Each of the major course assignments, shorter written responses, daily journal assignments, and in-class activities in “Writing Into Awareness” were designed to encourage either internal or external reflection, or both, and—gradually, over the duration of the semester—prompted students to acknowledge and become more (meta)aware of the interconnection between the role of the internal (writer) and the external (audience) in the writing process. In addition to written reflections, students engaged in various contemplative activities (e.g. mindfulness meditation, visualization, deep listening) throughout the semester—but most frequently in the beginning—in order to establish the foundation for a contemplative approach and a discipline of reflection throughout the course (and hopefully beyond).

In what follows, I will describe each of the units, and explain how each unit built upon the previous in order to encourage continuous internal and external reflection on the writing process, as well as the students’ lives in general. The order and topic of each of the units is significant because each unit served as a scaffold for the next. For example, unit 1 focused primarily on introspection and embodied contemplative practice, while unit 2 broadened the focus to external reflection (e.g., reflection on audience expectations and genre constraints). Unit 3 brought these two forms of reflection into a more explicit conversation with each other by requiring students to compose their

final project for the course, and reflect on how both internal and external factors played a role in that composing process. Aside from describing the scaffolding of the units, I will also include some student reactions to the activities and assignments, as expressed in their journal responses, and discuss how these reactions support the claim that encouraging students to develop a contemplative writing practice can foster the development of a stronger metacognitive awareness of their writing process, and greater transfer of writing and inter/trapersonal skills.

## Unit 1: Observation & Contemplative Practice<sup>2</sup>

In the first unit of the course, I introduced the students to contemplative practice by exposing them to a new contemplative activity each class period. The contemplative practices I implemented were primarily from Barbezat and Bush's 2014 book. In this book, contemplative practices are defined as activities that all have an "introspective, internal focus," and include a range of pursuits from sitting in silence, to practicing yoga or Tai Chi, to storytelling and journaling (p. 5). The focus in this unit was primarily on introducing students to the concept and actions of contemplative practice and giving them an opportunity to perform a variety of practices, thereby facilitating introspection and internal reflection. Because contemplative practices are essentially a return to the body as a source of knowing, each of the contemplative activities we participated in were associated with one of the five senses. For example, during the class period associated with the sense of sight, we visited the art museum on campus and engaged in "beholding," or contemplative seeing (p. 47). During the class period on the sense of smell, I brought in a variety of unlabeled spices, and asked the students to smell each of the spices, try to identify them, and then write in their daily pages (a daily personal journal I asked the students to keep; separate from the class journal assignments, which each had designated prompts) about any emotions or memories evoked by that particular scent. During the class on touch, we took part in some breathwork activities and simple stretches, and then participated in a body-scan meditation. For each of the five senses, we engaged in a contemplative activity and then discussed, reflected on, and wrote about the experience. By structuring the contemplative exercises around the five senses, we were able to establish contemplative practice as a somatic, embodied experience. Isolating the senses in this way, and then contemplating on our felt experience of each sense, encouraged students to *feel* reflection, and not just *think* it. Affording students the opportunity to be in the moment, observe their thoughts and feelings regarding being in the moment, and then writing reflectively about those experiences helps them to link deep, embodied, internal reflection with their writing process. By repeatedly engaging in embodied reflective activities, I hoped to encourage the development of a sustained and habitual, reflective discipline among the students.

In addition to serving as an introduction to and overview of contemplative practice, unit 1 also provided students with an opportunity to consider the ways that they were *already* engaging in some form of contemplative exercise, and how that activity impacted their lives. In the first journal prompt of the semester, I asked students if they had ever engaged in a contemplative practice before. Prior to this assignment, I provided students with the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society's *Tree of Contemplative Practice* (see Appendix B) for their reference. In general, the students' responses indicated that they were already involved in a variety of the contemplative activities named on the tree (e.g., walking or running, journaling, prayer, story-telling, etc.), but had never (or rarely) before considered these activities meditative or mindful. In their responses, almost all of the students reflected upon the importance of these practices in their lives. For example, one student noted that running allowed her to achieve a deep level of focus:

When I run, I put headphones in, turn my music up loud and effectively shut out the rest of the world...all I have to focus on is putting one foot in front of the other and hopefully not running into people...it's an easy way to achieve a level of focus I otherwise wouldn't be able to in life's daily chaos.

Even though the way this student describes her running practice (e.g., “shutting out the rest of the world”) doesn't necessarily coincide with how many contemplative practitioners think about their practices, I think this student's description does relate to a particular way of being mindful, one that emphasizes quieting the narrating mind. I think it is important—especially at the beginning of the course—to meet students where they are on their journey towards mindfulness. Developing a contemplative approach—to writing *and* life—is a process. Allowing students the time to simply be present and observe the ways that they may already engage in mindfulness or contemplative practice (even on a very small or limited scale)—and take notice of the benefits reaped from this endeavor—helped many students to realize that mindfulness and reflection may also have a place in higher education. For instance, one student noted the negative impact of *not* engaging in mindfulness or contemplative activities, especially as a college student:

Society today is marked by an ongoing flow of news and information...I too have fallen victim to this quick-paced lifestyle where most information flows in and out of me without any affect. Especially as a student, it...sometimes seems easier to memorize and regurgitate come test day than to truly grasp the concept being explained. However, the repercussions of this are that one can go an entire year feeling as if they have learned nothing...

These students' responses, and others, implied that they were aware of the need for contemplation and mindfulness, both inside and outside of the classroom. Encouraging students to consider the ways that they can benefit from mindfulness or contemplative practice—in all aspects of their lives—may help them to better understand the need for greater reflection in their studies, and sets the stage for the development of a contemplative writing practice, which requires a strong capacity for internal reflection and awareness, as well as rhetorical awareness. In unit 2, I began to incorporate assignments and activities that focused on external reflection, and increasingly saw evidence of students integrating internal and external reflection, (thereby emphasizing the interconnected relationship of the writer and reader) as they continued to develop their contemplative writing practices.

## Unit 2: Understanding Genre & Audience

In the second unit, we began to slightly shift the focus from internal reflection to external reflection (i.e., rhetorical awareness) by conducting genre analyses. By switching to an emphasis on external reflection in this unit (although internal reflection still played a large role), students were encouraged to contemplate the role of the audience in the writing process, with the goal of developing a meta-awareness of various external factors, including genre constraints and reader expectations. Students had been told at the beginning of the semester that they would be able to choose the genre they would use for their final writing assignment. At the beginning of the second unit, we spent some time meditating, internally reflecting on, and then journaling about this decision; thereby ensuring that each student chose a topic and genre that was relevant, timely and significant to them. The majority of the students in this section chose the genre of the personal statement (as many of them were applying to graduate school that year), but a handful of other students chose from among such genres as the newspaper article, the novel (just one chapter), the

grant proposal, and the academic article. It should be noted that even though some of these genres were more creative and others were more academic, all of the students were able to enact a contemplative writing practice. Once the students had chosen their genre, they were required to collect a variety of samples of writing from within that genre, reflect on the rhetorical moves made within that genre, and then write an analysis of it. In addition to developing genre awareness, allowing students to choose their own genre for the final assignment increased the likelihood that students would be personally invested in the writing they did for the class. Students repeatedly mentioned how much they appreciated being able to work on a piece of writing that was important and useful to them, as opposed to a teacher-chosen assignment. Allowing students to write about (and, of course, reflect on) a topic of immediate relevance to their lives, ensured that students were able to find themselves in the course material, and also gave them a more concrete opportunity (than if they had written about a teacher-assigned topic) to practice the kind of simultaneous internal/external reflection that a contemplative writing practice strives for.

After completing the genre analysis, students worked in groups to create rubrics that could be used to assess their own writing from within this genre. By moving back and forth between “what are the audience’s expectations or genre conventions?” and “how should my own writing be assessed within this genre?” students were continually required to perform both internal and external reflection on the writing process. What impressed me the most from the students’ journal responses during this unit was how the reflection on genre and assessment seemed to encourage simultaneous reflection on life-choices in general. In other words, it appeared that students were bridging academic or external reflection with introspection. I’d argue that students’ recognition of the reciprocal relationship between internal and external reflection was set in motion at the start of the course when students were given ample time to take part in embodied contemplative practice, and then as they were encouraged to incorporate internal reflection into their writing process throughout the course. In this way, external reflection was always tethered to internal reflection. For example, in response to the prompt: “Why did you choose this genre? What do you know about this genre already? What will you need to learn about it?” one student wrote:

I...feel that this assignment will allow me to undergo some soul searching. Writing my personal statement, trying to sell who I am to some admissions board, will allow me to put some deep contemplative thought about why I want to be an M.D.... Putting considerable amount of thought into this and using the newly learned contemplative practices...may help me determine if this is truly “my calling”, as some would say.

In addition to encouraging reflection on life choices, assignments and discussions in this unit also seemed to encourage the blending of introspection with reflection on various aspects of the writing process (e.g., genre). It was in this unit that I first began to see some evidence of the development of a contemplative writing practice—a writing practice that performs embodied internal and external reflection simultaneously—as students began to explore the interconnectedness of these two roles in the writing process:

I currently know very little about personal statements...I am very used to writing research papers and argumentative papers...All I know about a personal statement at this point is that it should allow the individuals in charge of admissions to see why I am a good candidate...Because of this it should be persuasive. This may be similar to an argumentative essay in a way, because I will be arguing that I should be accepted and then supporting it with reasons why I should be accepted. I think that personal statements should include more descriptions though, to grab the attention of the



admissions board. They should also show some sense of creativity, but this is only an assumption.

Despite her declarations that she is unsure of how to write a persuasive personal statement, this student indicates that she is quite aware of how the personal statement is both similar to, yet unique from other writing she has done in college. She fluidly interweaves her internal reflections on what she already knows about the personal statement genre (and others) with her external reflections on what she thinks the readers of a personal statement might be looking for. In other words, she performs simultaneous reflection—and demonstrates the interconnected relationship of the writer and reader—by reconciling what she already knows about the genre with what she still needs to learn. Through enacting a contemplative writing practice, this student is demonstrating a growing metacognitive awareness of how genre knowledge impacts the writing process. By stating her previous knowledge on genre, and reconciling that both with what she doesn't know and what she *thinks* she knows about the genre, this student is developing a metacognitive awareness of the ways that the personal statement functions in relationship to genres she is more familiar with, like the genre of the argumentative essay. While this student provides evidence of how a contemplative writing practice can foster a metacognitive awareness of writing, the previous student exemplified how a contemplative writing practice can foster introspection on one's life choices. It is these combined benefits that have the potential to allow students to transfer writing skills (and life skills) to other contexts, and perhaps encourage them to establish a long-term reflective discipline. In unit 3, this kind of metacognitive awareness became even more evident as the students continued to negotiate the internal and external factors at work in the writing process.

### Unit 3: Making Connections

During the final unit of the course, students spent most of the time drafting, workshopping, and revising their final projects. Part of the unit was also spent reading about and discussing how writing is, in many ways, an emotional endeavor, thereby maintaining a focus on the internal and “felt” aspects of the writing process while students prepared their drafts for an external audience. Each student also met with me for a one-on-one conference to discuss how best to revise their projects before the final due date. It was at this point in the course that I began to see the greatest evidence of an increasing metacognitive awareness, among the students, about the writing process (e.g., an awareness of: the rhetorical situation, the role played by genre, the various rhetorical moves a writer must make in order to meet the audience's expectations). In this unit, students were asked not only to produce a final product, but also to reflect on how the internal (writer) and external (audience) each have roles to play in the writing process, and how these roles intersect. Basically, I asked students to bring what was discussed in unit 1 into conversation with what was discussed in unit 2 in order to further establish a contemplative writing practice, and increase their metacognitive awareness of the writing process. These reflections occurred during class discussions, peer review, and conferences, but primarily in their journal assignments.

The first journal prompt in this unit asked students to consider the role of the writer (as opposed to the role of the audience, or genre) in the writing process. One student's response indicated that she was developing an awareness of how the writer, the genre, and the audience are interdependent on one another:

[I]n a scientific journal the audience seems to be more important because there are very specific conventions that must be met in order for an article to be published. In a creative

writing piece, the author seems more important because the description and imagery must come from within the author in order to be of quality.

This student is acknowledging how the role of the writer changes as a result of the rhetorical context or situation in which he or she writes. This student is articulating a metacognitive awareness of the interconnectedness of the writer and audience. Alternatively, another student explained why she prioritizes the role of the audience:

While the role of the writer is obviously important in that they are the person doing the actual writing, I think a lot of the meaning that is actually derived from any piece of writing comes more so from the audience reading it.

Interestingly, this student ended the course having come to the conclusion that, no matter the rhetorical situation of a text, meaning is generally derived by the reader. Even though these two students came to different conclusions about the role of the writer and the audience in the writing process, both of their responses indicate that they have engaged in considerable reflection on the ways that these two roles intersect. By grappling with the notion that writing is a process of balancing internal factors with external ones, students appeared to be refining and better articulating their metacognitive awareness of the writing process.

In the final prompt of the semester, I asked students to look through all of the writing they did in our class and identify any patterns that might help them determine what they do well—as a writer—and where they still need improvement. Although I did not explicitly ask students to discuss the role of the audience in this journal assignment, some students still referenced the role of the audience in their writing. One student explained how reviewing her earlier assignments helped her realize that she has a tendency to write what Linda Flowers (1979) refers to as writer-based (as opposed to reader-based) prose:

I sometimes lose track of the audience...This is demonstrated in my observation essay. Looking back at it, I realize that I spend more time making the observation than reflecting on it. I find it so compelling to write about what I see, so I linger on my observations. This may bore or seem like a drag to my audience who may want short reflections to break up my observations. I need to keep the audience interested. That is an aspect of my writing that needs work.

As this student's response indicates, by the end of the semester, some students were consistently and simultaneously linking internal reflection on their writing process with external reflection on the expectations of their audience; they were developing a contemplative writing practice. As a result, they were becoming aware of the ways that the writer and audience are interconnected, aware of themselves as writers and of their own writing process, and aware of how genre and other external factors affect the writing process (i.e., rhetorical awareness). I have argued throughout that it was the establishment of a contemplative writing practice—a practice that instills the discipline of *embodied* and *simultaneous* internal and external reflection—which can foster this increased metacognitive awareness, and which encourages the transfer of writing skills, and life skills in general.

## Conclusion

Over the past three decades, writing instructors have become increasingly aware of the need for reflection in order to encourage metacognitive awareness of the writing process. Much of the

literature on the kinds of reflection needed in order to foster metacognitive awareness (and thereby transfer), though, have focused primarily on what I have called “external” reflection; that is, reflection on things like genre, rhetorical situation, audience, etc. This is not to say that these scholars have ignored internal reflection completely, because they have not; but it seems that any discussion about internal reflection has often been *couched* in the discussion of external reflection (Nowacek, 2011; Moore & Bass, 2017). While reflection on the external aspects of the writing process is undoubtedly necessary for the development of metacognitive awareness, it is not the *only* kind of reflection necessary. After all, metacognition is defined as thinking about one’s *own* thinking. It is about engaging in critical introspection in order to ascertain what one already knows, what one still needs to learn, and how one goes about the process of learning. It’s about having the capacity to pause and reflect on how one thinks about a particular task, and how one goes about doing that task. In the writing class, this translates to questions like: What moves do I make, as a writer, to meet the needs of my audience or genre? Am I effective at meeting their needs? Are there things I could do differently? What do I do well? etc. In short, acquiring metacognitive awareness of the writing process requires just as much of an ability to take part in meaningful *internal* reflection and introspection as it does in *external* reflection.

With that being said, encouraging busy, undergraduates—whose attentions are drawn in an ever-expanding number of directions—to engage in consistent and meaningful internal or external reflection can be difficult. This is why it is important to provide students with consistent, relevant, varied, embedded and embodied opportunities for reflection throughout a writing class, and not just through an occasional essay assignment. It is important to make the process of reflection personal and academic for students. As a variety of contemplative pedagogues have argued, the consistent and meaningful practice of internal reflection and introspection can be fostered for students through the implementation of contemplative practices, and from adopting an overall approach to education that values the first-person perspective of the student, *as well as* other perspectives discussed in the course. Scaffolding internal and external reflection in the way I discuss above may encourage students to adopt a contemplative writing practice; an embodied discipline that simultaneously honors the students’ capacity to reflect on their personal choices, experiences, knowledge, etc., as well as on various external aspects of the writing process. It is this embodied and simultaneous reflection that I believe has a great potential to foster the development of metacognitive awareness by providing students with a framework for the kinds of reflection that we know are necessary for the development of metacognition. Where metacognition may help students apply their writing skills and strategies to a variety of writing contexts and situations beyond the classroom, the cultivation of a contemplative disposition—including a strong capacity for introspection, mindfulness, and focused attention; a greater awareness of our interconnectedness with one another (perhaps leading to greater compassion), etc.—may be usefully applied to a variety of life’s contexts and situations.

More research into the relationship between contemplative writing instruction, the development of metacognition, and transfer is needed. Although the students in “Writing Into Awareness” appeared to become adept at meaningful introspection and reflection on various aspects of their writing and writing process by the end of the semester, additional study is needed to corroborate these findings, and to better understand how adopting a contemplative approach to writing can bring about a greater metacognitive awareness, as well as the transfer of this awareness to other contexts. Even though this was an English class, instructors across the disciplines should be able to implement a contemplative writing practice in their writing courses. Many of the assignments (e.g., the genre analysis, the student-created rubric, daily journaling) can be integrated into writing courses, regardless of the discipline, and can encourage students to engage in internal and external

reflection on their writing and writing processes. One thing is for certain, students in this course embraced the opportunity to reflect on their lives, participate in contemplative practices and activities, and “discover the [course] material in themselves” (Barbezat & Bush, 2014, p. 11). Writing teachers can employ this interest in introspection and reflection to encourage more engaged learning, (potentially) greater metacognitive awareness, and thereby, more transfer of writing-specific and inter/trapersonal knowledge to new contexts.

## Appendix A

### Unit 1 Assignment

#### Unit 1 Essay: Observing Your World

*To my mind, the idea that doing dishes is unpleasant can occur only when you aren't doing them. Once you are standing in front of the sink with your sleeves rolled up and your hands in warm water, it really isn't so bad. I enjoy taking my time with each dish, being fully aware of the dish, the water, and each movement of my hands. I know that if I hurry in order to go and have a cup of tea, the time will be unpleasant, and not worth living. That would be a pity, for each minute, each second of life is a miracle.*

– *Essential Writings*, Thich Nhat Hahn (2001, p. 30)

*Presence is needed to become aware of the beauty, the majesty, the sacredness of nature. Have you ever gazed up into the infinity of space on a clear night, awestruck by the absolute stillness and inconceivable vastness of it? Have you listened, truly listened, to the sound of a mountain stream in the forest? Or to the song of a blackbird at dusk on a quiet summer evening? To become aware of such things, the mind needs to be still. You have to put down for a moment your personal baggage of problems, of past and future, as well as all your knowledge; otherwise, you will see but not see, hear but not hear. Your total presence is required.*

– *The Power of Now*, Eckhart Tolle (1999, p. 96)

As Thich Nhat Hahn points out, “we lead extremely busy lives.” Our lives are often so frantic and harried that taking a moment to ‘stop and smell the roses’ can seem not only like an inconvenience, but also an impossibility. For your first essay of the semester, however, I am asking you to do just that. More specifically, I would like you to do one of the following:

1. immerse yourself in a familiar, everyday routine, but instead of going about that routine on automatic pilot, I want you to be truly mindful of your actions and the world around you (like the way Thich Nhat Hahn washes dishes)
2. pay attention to an intriguing person, place, object, or event with complete awareness and mindfulness (like Eckhart Tolle’s description above)

Once you have observed your subject fully, with mindfulness and awareness, I want you to write an essay describing your experience of being truly present. What did you see in that moment? Smell? Taste? Hear? Feel? How was observing your subject with mindfulness and awareness different from other times you observed/engaged with your subject? Did you discover anything new about your subject? Did you gain a new perspective on your subject? Did you discover anything new about yourself, or the world, in general? What was it like to “put down your personal baggage of problems”? What did you learn? What new insight have you gained? What was it like to truly live in the moment?

This essay will be graded on how good a job you do of making me feel like I am right beside you, experiencing your moment(s) with you (i.e. sensory detail, images, metaphors, dialogue, etc.), as well as how good of a job you do with your reflection on this experience. Reflection is tricky. You don't want to just tack a moral on to the end of your essay, rather your essay will be much more effective if you can find a way to weave the reflection (i.e. the lesson or insight) into/throughout the essay. The most important piece of advice I can give you is to try not to force a reflection; forced reflections come across as fake and cliché to your reader. It is better to reflect truthfully, honestly, and authentically, even if that reflection feels boring or mundane to you. Sometimes, even a seemingly mundane truth can be profound.

## Unit 2 Assignment

### *Unit 2 Project: Genre Analysis Portfolio*

#### **What is the purpose of this assignment?:**

- On the one hand, you are conducting and writing up a genre analysis of your chosen genre so that when you produce writing in this genre in Unit 3, you will already have a good understanding of the expectations for writing within this genre, and therefore, be able to successfully meet those expectations.
- On the other hand, you are conducting and writing up a genre analysis of your chosen genre in order to show me that you fully understand the expectations, conventions, patterns, etc. of this genre.

#### **Who is the audience for this assignment?:**

There are two audiences for this assignment: you and me. This assignment is for you in that you will use it to help you to complete your project in Unit 3. This assignment is for me in that I will use it to make sure you fully understand the expectations of your genre and can skillfully articulate those expectations to me. I will also be using this assignment to help me assess your project in Unit 3.

#### **The Portfolio:**

You will fulfill this twofold purpose by completing and turning in a portfolio made up of 2 sections:

1. The first part will be a rubric (scoring guide) to be used for the evaluation of a piece of writing within your chosen genre. For example, if you are analyzing the genre of the personal statement, you will write a rubric that someone could use to evaluate a personal statement. You will want this rubric to be specific to the audience, purpose and context of your individual writing project for Unit 3. What I mean by this is, if you are planning on writing a personal statement for Harvard Medical School, figure out what the admissions review board at HMS is looking for in a personal statement (to the best of your ability) and incorporate those specific expectations into the criteria and wording of your rubric.
  - Along with this rubric, you will need to turn in a short document (1-2 pages) that gives me some context/background information on this rubric. Specifically, this will give you the chance to explain to me which of the criteria on your rubric are general expectations of all writing within the genre, and which are specific to your project for Unit 3.
2. The second part will be a collection of three very good examples of writing from within this genre. You should spend some time finding the best examples of writing from this genre that you can. These examples can also be used as models for your Unit 3 project.

- For each of these examples, please write a brief (1-3 paragraphs) explanation of why you chose this particular example, and what this example does especially well (i.e. uses language clearly and effectively, engages audience on an emotional level, paints clear images in the reader's mind, etc.).

## Unit 3 Assignment

### *Unit 3 Project Assignment Sheet*

At this point, everyone knows what they are doing for their Unit 3 Project, so this assignment sheet will not give specific information on how to complete your project, but rather information on what I expect you to turn in with your final draft, as well as some other important notes on how this assignment will be evaluated.

Please include the following documents when you upload your completed project to our course website:

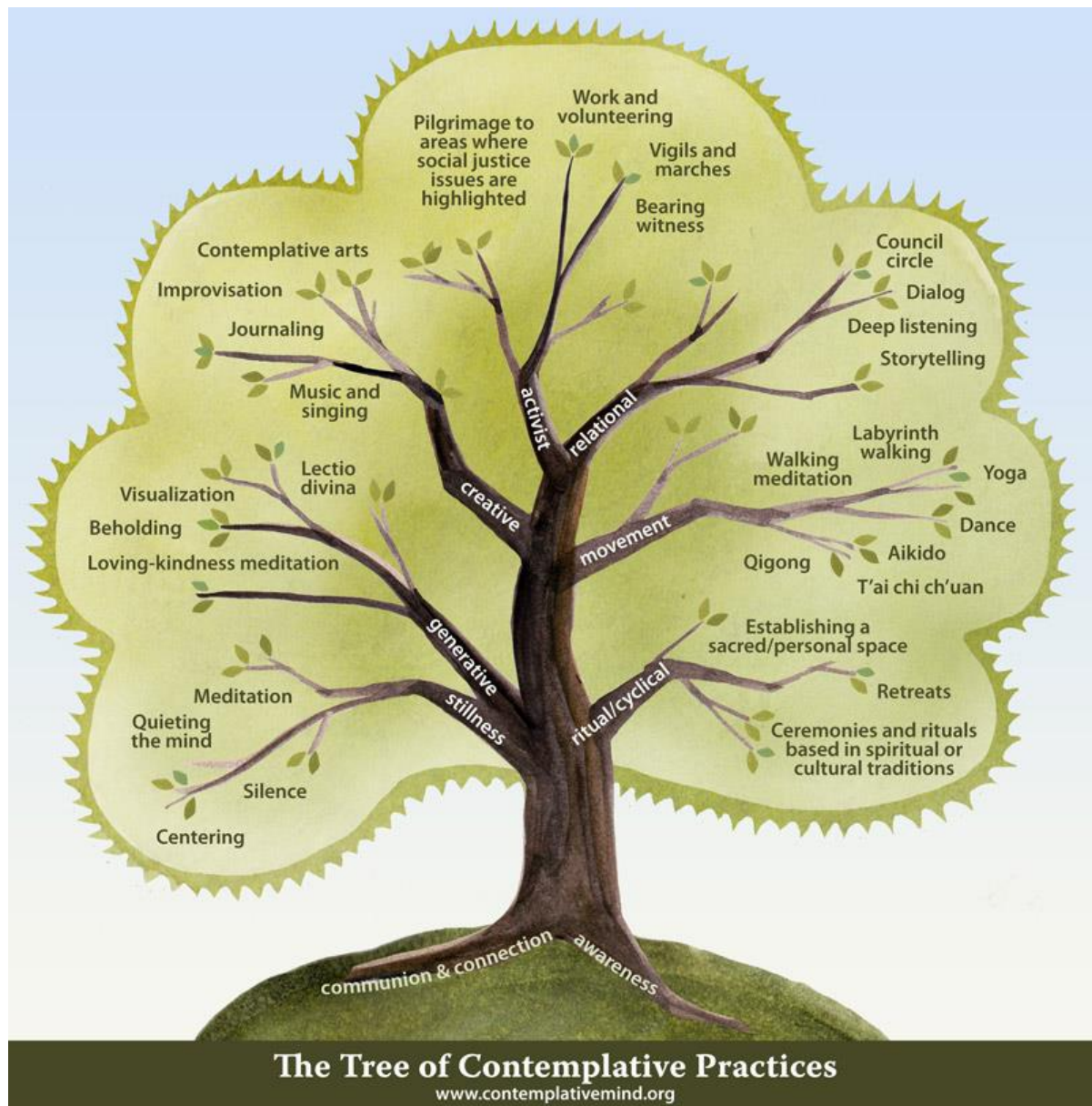
1. Any and all rough drafts, so that I can see how your project has been revised over time. Please label these rough drafts as "Rough Draft #1," "Rough Draft #2," etc. They can each be uploaded as separate files.
2. A "cover letter" that addresses the following questions (this can be uploaded as a separate file):
  - Where do you intend to "publish" your project? For some of you, this will be the name of the program and institution you are applying to. For some of you, this will be an actual publication, such as a newspaper, article or website. I know that not all of you intend to make your project public at the end of this unit, but if you were going to make it public, where would you send it?
  - Does this institution/organization/publication have any special requirements for submissions? Do they have a word count requirement, a formatting requirement, a content/subject requirement? Describe any requirements they have; you can cut and paste directly from their website if you wish.
  - Is there anything else you think I should know before evaluating your final draft?

How this assignment will be evaluated:

Basically, I will evaluate this assignment based on the rubric you submitted in Unit 2 (if I thought your rubric needed to be clarified or revised in any way, I would have mentioned this to you during our conference and showed you the changes I suggested), and the information you provide in your cover letter. I will also take into account how thorough your revisions are, based on the changes made between your rough drafts and your final draft.

As with any assignment you turn in for this class, I am looking for evidence of thoughtfulness and care. This means that in addition to being well organized and well written, there should be absolutely no grammatical or sentence level errors in your piece. I think the best way to approach this assignment is to pretend that your final draft is going to be published, or read by an admissions board, or sent directly to the head of an organization, etc. Imagine that what you turn in isn't just going to be read by me, but is going to be read by your intended audience. Having this frame of mind will give your writing more purpose and authenticity.

## Appendix B - The Tree of Contemplative Practice



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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For more information on how metacognition works at the cognitive level to support transfer, see Gorzelsky et al. (2017).

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A for the specific assignments associated with each unit of this course.

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