

The Value of Purposeful Design: A Case Study of an ePortfolio Reflective Prompt¹

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Abstract: What kinds of questions guide ePortfolio-based reflections that are meaningful, and what kinds of meaning do students make in response to such questions? These questions directed our work in designing a new reflective prompt for an internship ePortfolio completed by students in the Editing, Writing, and Media major at Florida State University. As detailed below, we decided on five progressively oriented questions keyed to time and space. Most obviously, the five questions asked students to address three periods of time; rather than concentrate exclusively on what students were learning in the moment of the internship, the questions directed students' attention to past, present, and future learning. In addition, the questions asked students to consider the learning taking place in three spaces: learning occurring in prior and current coursework; learning experienced in the internship itself; and learning taking place in the spaces between both. Taken together, these dually focused questions constitute a reflective frame, a heuristic intended to tap students' prior and current knowledge, understanding, and practice as it guides them toward describing and making meaning from their internship experiences. This reflective frame, then, is keyed not to predetermined outcomes, but to the learning that students experience in the internship, to a consideration of that learning in the context of school-based learning, and to an articulation of what that learning means for their futures. Moreover, a content analysis of a set of ten ePortfolio reflective texts responding to this reflective frame demonstrates how it promotes meaningfulness, in three ways: by asking authentic questions that only students can answer; by presenting the questions in a progressive sequence moving from more focused considerations to larger, more open-ended ones; and by identifying the parameters governing the reflective texts. In sum, this reflective frame, intentionally located in the two dimensions of time and sites of learning, is defined by features necessary for reflective questions seeking to elicit meaningful student responses keyed to learning.

The Editing, Writing, and Media Internship ePortfolio

Florida State University's English Department began offering their new Editing, Writing, and Media (EWM) major in 2010 (see Fleckenstein et al., 2015). In addition to three required gateway courses (Rhetoric, History of Texts and Technologies, and Writing and Editing in Print and Online) and four optional courses (e.g., Advanced Writing and Editing, Digital Rhetoric), the EWM curriculum requires a 3-credit, nongraded internship that students complete as juniors or seniors while taking other classes; it culminates in a portfolio. When the major was introduced, the portfolio was print-based,

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but within five years, the EWM major began requiring an electronic portfolio. From the start and regardless of medium, however, the portfolio wasn't in fact very portfolio-like. Rather than including selections from a larger archive, students stored all their work in the portfolio, while the prompt for the portfolio reflection invited students to engage in activities closer to number-crunching than to meaning-making. Responding to our directions, students provided the number of hours they had worked, specified the number of pages they had written or edited for the internship, and identified and often described all the tasks the internship had required. A meaningful reflection, of course, might have been built on this information, but there was nothing in the directions to signal that such elaboration was invited or even welcome. Instead, students substituted information for reflection.

Over the years, I'd read several of the portfolio reflections, and I was hard-pressed to find one that was meaningful, despite the fact that students were engaging in fascinatingly diverse internships—writing short articles for the *New York Times* and the *New York Post*, providing press releases for nonprofits in Tallahassee, creating social media for businesses and nonprofits, tutoring students in Florida State University's Reading Writing Center, and curating exhibits for the Florida State University Digital Postcard Archive and the FSU online Museum of Everyday Writing. Moreover, in looking for meaning in these reflections, I wasn't looking for a particular kind of meaning-making, but rather casting a wide net. How did students make sense of their internships? What had the students learned in the internship experience? How did that learning complement or extend what they had learned in coursework? What did they make of this learning? How did they assess their own performance? What impact, if any, had the internship exerted on their future plans? Instead of considering these kinds of questions, the students first provided a variety of logs and then, in closing, advised other students to engage in an internship themselves. Given this analysis, the problem, it seemed to me, wasn't the students or their internships, but rather the reflection prompt itself. In Deweyian terms, the portfolio showed something of students' experiences, but it did not provide them with an invitation to learn from reflecting on those experiences. Key to providing such an invitation, of course, was determining what kind of reflection—among a wide array of options, from descriptions of process to self-assessment—the reflective prompt should invite.

This, then, is the context for this article, which has a twofold purpose: first, to explain the logic of a new reflective prompt; second, to begin ascertaining its efficacy in terms of helping students reflect on, make meaning of, and find value in the internship. Toward these ends, I begin by outlining our new reflective prompt, defining it as a kind of reflective frame that is highly focused, structured enough to be supportive, and keyed to the content of the curriculum, yet also open enough to allow students to think reflectively about the internship experience in several contexts, among them EWM classes, their internships, and students' futures. In addition, I report briefly on what students tell us about learning in those contexts, both cognitively and affectively, before more fully analyzing students' reflections for their learning in terms of practice, knowledge and understanding, and import for their futures. Not least, I close by considering the value of the reflective frame as a structure prompting ePortfolio reflections more broadly, including for other kinds of internships and educational contexts.

The Design of the Reflective Prompt

In thinking about the role the reflective prompt could play in the EWM internship ePortfolio, EWM faculty began with an appropriate uncertainty. On the one hand, we wanted students to tell us what was important to them as they completed the internship, especially given, as indicated above, the diversity of their internships. Just as each student is unique, so is each internship experience. Since there is no way to predict the experience that students will have, their experience seemed a good place to begin. Stated simply, one promising starting point for the ePortfolio reflective prompt was the set of students' experiences—and as important, what they made of them. Likewise, we thought it

important for the prompt to welcome assumptions students brought to the internship as well as to explore how those assumptions might have changed, and what that might mean for their futures. Moreover, we thought such emphases were especially appropriate given that the internship is ungraded: in the EWM internship, the cumulative ePortfolio receives either a pass or a no pass, a situation enabling risk-taking, especially to explore reflectively what students have, and perhaps have not, learned. Other ePortfolio programs oriented to learning have done likewise. For instance, the University of Buffalo general education ePortfolio (Emerson & Reid, 2019) requires that students include evidence of experiential learning, even if such learning isn't always successful. In the Buffalo model, students encountering failure are encouraged to explain what the failure or challenge was and then to articulate how they responded to it, made sense of it, and if relevant, recovered from it. So too for the EWM ePortfolio: we wanted students' representation of their experiences, as well as their reflections on them, to be authentic.

In sum, we intended to design a prompt inviting and supporting learning, one that would, in Deweyian terms, allow students to learn through what we might call an assemblage of activities—of experience, an authentic representation of that experience, and a meaning-making reflection on that experience—and a critical kind of assemblage characteristic of integrative ePortfolios (see, for example, James, Scida, and Firdyiwek, 2019). Carol Rodgers (2002), whose analysis of Deweyian reflection informs several well-regarded ePortfolio projects (see, for instance, Eynon & Gambino, 2017), points to Dewey's emphasis on the role curricular environment plays in setting the stage for learning. "We never educate directly," Dewey (1916) says, "but indirectly by means of the environment. Whether we permit chance environments to do the work, or whether we design environments for the purpose makes a great difference" (p. 19). The EWM internship, however, is not a designed environment: rather, *by design* it is a site of experiential application and repurposing, neither school nor work, offering opportunities for integration of knowledge, skills, and practices. Dewey (1916) accounts for this kind of learning environment as well, however, noting that although experiences in this environment may be out of someone's control, the meaning that might be made from them is not. Through reflection, he observes, learners engage in a "reconstruction and reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience" (p. 76). If students are to learn in an internship, then, reflection is crucial, as is the prompt inviting it.

At the same time, the prompt also needed to operate within curricular boundaries: the students are all EWM majors, and the internship is intended to contextualize the school curriculum by extending and complementing it. We also anticipated that students might encounter advice and direction in their internships regarding composing and editing that did not align or correspond with what they had learned in school, especially given their differing contexts and rhetorical situations. School-based assignments in the EWM major, for instance, tend to take the form of longer essays coherently organized, and even when social media assignments are made, they tend to be non-assessed, writing-to-learn activities. In some internship situations, by way of contrast, students reported composing social media posts that were highly visual and chunked out, and then assessed twice, once by a supervisor and a second time by the audience. Such differences, we thought, could provide particularly interesting opportunities for meaning-making. In sum, it made sense to design a prompt keyed to the relationships between school-based composing/editing and internship-based composing and editing practices.

Primary potential areas for questions included editing and writing, both processes and texts. Also from a curricular perspective, we were very interested in three areas related to the internship: the internship itself; students' courses, which they had taken before the internship, were enrolled in concurrently, and would take when the internship concluded; and the space between courses and the internship, which we conceived of as the liminal area where students could consider and define the new tasks, texts, concepts, and roles introduced by the internship with an authority only they can

exercise. This approach to reflection, with a liminal space as inventive, was also influenced by an ePortfolio program designed for a co-op attached to an accounting program developed at the University of Toronto (Sproule, 2009). This ePortfolio program asked students specifically to reflect on classroom-based concepts like teamwork that students then enacted and reflected on during their co-op. Research on this co-op ePortfolio demonstrated that students appreciated the opportunity to “try out” in the “real world” what they had learned in class and to make necessary conceptual adjustments based on that experience. As we hoped would be the case for the EWM students, the Toronto students learned not only from class and co-op, but also from putting the two into dialogue. In sum, the Toronto process, which seemed to parallel the intention of the EWM internship, provided some assurance that the reflective task we were designing would be both possible for them, in terms of students completing it, and useful.

Writing Transfer Research Supporting the Prompt Design

This approach, asking students to reflect on an internship in the context of coursework, was also influenced by two other lines of research. The first is research on students’ transfer of writing knowledge and practice. Transfer, which refers to the ways learners take what they know and can do in one setting and repurpose it appropriately for another context, has received considerable attention in writing studies during the last 15 years. One important finding is that in taking up new writing tasks, successful writers—that is, those who transfer appropriately—intentionally look across past or concurrent writing tasks, contexts, and texts for similarities and differences so as to draw on that analysis in taking on the new writing task (see, e.g., Yancey, Robertson, & Taczak, 2014). In addition, that line of research, as reported elsewhere (see, e.g., Yancey et al., 2018; Yancey et al., 2019), has also demonstrated that students look to multiple contexts for such transfer, that is, students repurpose writing knowledge and practice in a just-in-time (JIT) manner, as they perceive a need. Such transfer is at odds with many accounts of student writing development as facilitated through a vertical curriculum spanning the first year to graduation. The theory undergirding such a curriculum is that students wait to use learning until it is cued later in their academic careers (see, for example, Hayes, Ferris, and Whithaus, 2016). The *Writing across Contexts* research, and research on the Teaching for Transfer (TFT) curriculum that followed, has demonstrated quite the opposite: while curricula can provide helpful cueing for students, students also engage in writing transfer when they think it’s appropriate, or JIT. Thus, even before students finish FYC, many of them, the research shows, are transferring writing knowledge and practices into other gen ed courses, into workplaces, and into co-curriculars. Moreover, this JIT writing transfer is dialogic, with students transferring both from site A to site B and back again. Students in FYC, for instance, report that they repurpose composing knowledge and practice developed in their first-year composition classes for use in writing across the curriculum (WAC) and co-curricular contexts, *and back* from co-curricular contexts into WAC, as they see opportunity. Engaging in an internship while taking courses, EWM students have a similar opportunity for such dialogic learning.

A second area of research, taken up in the Spheres of Writing project (see, e.g., O’Sullivan et al., 2022), also demonstrates that students borrow freely from multiple contexts as they compose. This project, employing surveys (N=242) and interviews (N=24) of students from six institutions on three continents—North America, Europe (Ireland), and Asia (Oman)—sought to learn from them about the contexts, or spheres, where they write, including self-sponsored, classroom, and internship spheres, as well as about the relationships they perceive across those spheres. Additionally, students’ writing in one sphere is often influenced by writing in another regardless of whether or not students perceive an institutional cue to repurpose earlier work (Holmes et al., 2023). They borrow freely from one context, for instance in self-sponsored writing or in coursework, when composing in another, for instance in an internship.

Given these two related lines of research, the EWM internship, which takes place concurrently with classes, seemed to provide an opportunity for students to think both within and across classes and internship uniquely, in a way only they could do. Equally important, because the audience for the portfolio does not have the experience of either internship or courses, students have reason and motivation to explore and explain both to them. In other words, questions and audiences would be rhetorically authentic, features contributing to the meaningfulness of the reflective task. And as is often the case with reflection, in explaining to others what they had learned, students would, in a Vygotskian moment, also be explaining to themselves (see, e.g., Yancey, 1998), in the process making explicit new knowledge about writing and/or editing for themselves and others. In sum, asking students to reflect on these contexts comparatively seemed to provide several advantages: such a prompt would (a) invite students to identify expectations and assumptions as relevant; (b) invite them to process what they had learned, relative to the internship site and to the compared contexts; and (c) invite them to make observations and interpretations for themselves and others.

The Reflective Assignment

The reflective assignment, as finally rendered, included several components. First, the prompt includes a description identifying the purpose of the reflection as an “opportunity to make meaning of your internship experience.” Second, the prompt reiterates this point with a separate section, “What this is: This essay is a chance for you to make meaning, for yourself and others, of what you have learned through the internship in the context of your prior knowledge and your future plans.” Third, it provides guidance as to the length of the reflective essay as it introduces the five questions.

Assignment description: The reflective essay provides an opportunity to make meaning of your internship experience. Consider how your classroom experience prepared you for your internship, the knowledge and skills you brought to your internship, your daily practices and opportunities for growth during your internship, and applications of your internship experience to future goals and endeavors. Reflecting on the past, present, and future allows you to do the work of effortful meaning-making and synthesis of your many experiences in and beyond this internship and your college career.

What this is: This essay is a chance for you to make meaning, for yourself and others, of what you have learned through the internship in the context of your prior knowledge and your future plans.

Framing questions and length: This essay, ranging from 850-1100 words, should be a thoughtful, independent text that includes responses to the following questions:

- How were your in-class (i.e., school-based) writing/editing experiences and your internship writing/editing experiences alike? Please explain those similarities by referring specifically to at least one text from your internship.
- How were your in-class (i.e., school-based) writing/editing experiences and your internship writing/editing experiences unlike or different? Please explain those differences by referring specifically to at least one text from your internship.
- What is your current definition of writing/editing, and how did the internship contribute to it?

- More generally, how did the internship affect your personal, intellectual, civic, and/or professional development?
- How have you already used, or how will you use, what you learned about writing/editing from the internship in the future?

As indicated above, the new prompt's design, taking the heuristic form of five progressively oriented questions, refers to three moments in time—past, current, and future. More specifically, questions 1 and 2, located in past and present, ask comparatively oriented questions about writing and editing in both course and internship contexts, with question 3, building out more generally based on the earlier specific questions, asking about students' current definition of writing and/or editing as a consequence of the internship. Casting a wider net, question 4, also located in the present, then asks about the effect or impact of the internship on a wider range of contexts, including the personal and the civic. Concluding the reflective prompt, question 5 asks about the significance of the internship for students' future. This culminating question, which asks students to think in terms of the future based on their review of past and current, conceptualizes reflection as a practice in which the past is reviewed in order to set the stage for the future. The reflective prompt thus begins with three spaces of learning—(1) the EWM classes; (2) the EWM internship itself; and (3) the spaces between them—as it moves toward other contexts and the future.

Taken together, these questions function as a reflective frame. Typically, a reflective frame—as explained by various theorists from Stephen Brookfield (1995) and Donald Schon (1987) to Marcia Baxter Magolda (2001)—operates generally. David Kolb's (1984) reflective frame, for example, includes four steps or stages for use in any learning context: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. By contrast, the reflective frame for the EWM internship portfolio is well structured, content-laden, and highly local, focusing on very specific experiences of writing and/or editing, EWM courses, and internship. At the same time, the reflective frame's structure also provides for openness, as indicated in question 4 especially, with its provision for internship influence on multiple contexts outside of the curriculum, as aligned with the research on writing transfer and the Spheres of Writing Project. The goal, then, was to create a prompt within a reflective frame—located in two dimensions: time and site of learning—premised on three general features necessary for reflective questions seeking to elicit meaningful student reflection: (a) authentic questions that only students can explore, (b) a structure supporting such considerations, and (c) the space to do so. This, at least, was our intent, although it is worth noting that precisely how to anticipate the ways others will make meaning is, at some level, nearly impossible, as I have noted elsewhere:

one of the questions reflective teachers often have centers on the how of classroom reflection: what reflective questions should we ask students, and when should we ask them *so that they are meaningful to students*? That italicized part? That's the kicker: it's very difficult to decide in advance what will be meaningful to others. But in a writing class, or a rhetoric class [or, I would say here, an internship], we are situated in an intellectual community where some questions, when reflected upon, have that potential. (Yancey, 2021)

Which raises the question: what meaning did students make of their EWM internships, and how, if at all, did the reflective prompt facilitate such meaning making?

Student Demographics

The new reflective prompt was introduced to students in the fall of 2020. A year later, in order to ascertain how the prompt functioned, the internship coordinator invited all internship students, on my behalf, to share their ePortfolio reflections for this purpose. All EWM students who participated in an internship in the 2021-22 academic year were invited to participate: 61 students interned in fall 2021, 78 in spring 2022. In response to the May 2022 invitation, ten students volunteered. Their reflections, treated here as a case study of a convenience sample divided evenly into fall and spring (i.e., 5 reflections for each term), account for 8% of fall 2021 students and 6% of spring 2021 students. Although as a convenience sample case study, these students do not constitute a representative sample, they are very interesting demographically, especially in the Florida State University context. A public flagship research institution, FSU in 2021 enrolled students from every state in the US and from 131 countries; 37.6% of Florida State University students at that time were students of color, and 58.1% were women. In the EWM portfolio sample, only one student is male, and he is white; the other students identify as female, with four of them identifying as white, five of them as Latina, and several of those identifying specifically as Cuban-American. As Table 1 demonstrates, collectively the students' intellectual interests are rich: six of the students are double majors, as noted by the *and* linking the two majors, with secondary majors ranging from international affairs, athletic training, and criminal justice to media/communication studies and linguistics. Two of the students without double majors have minors in business. Also interesting is the diverse set of internships represented in the sample: three private companies, including a film company, a marketing firm, and a publishing house; one public agency, a city government; and multiple campus locations, including the Florida State University President's office and the Museum of Everyday Writing (this last the internship site for three of the ten students).

Table 1: Participant Demographics and Internship Information

Name	Gender	Race	Major(s) and Minor(s)	Internship Details
Jack	Male	White	EWM with Business Minor	Private: Red Hills Films, 2022
Alexandra	Female	Latina	EWM and Criminology	Campus: FSU University President's office, 2022
Thalia	Female	Latina	EWM and International Affairs	Public: Tallahassee City, 2021
Lindsey	Female	White	EWM	Campus: College of Social Science, 2022
Rachel	Female	White	EWM	Campus: Museum of Everyday Writing (MoEW), 2022
Rae Ann	Female	White	EWM and Com Studies/Media	Campus: MoEW, 2022
Maria	Female	Latina	EWM with Business Minor	Private: Bow Stern Marketing, 2021
Alyssa	Female	Latina	EWM and Com Studies/Media	Campus: English Department, 2021
Andrea	Female	Latina	EWM and Linguistics	Private: Joyce Publishing, 2022
Bailey	Female	White	EWM and Athletic Training	Campus: MoEW, 2021

General Patterns in EWM Student ePortfolio Reflections

These students, drawing on considerable expertise born of their experience and guided toward specific topics within the new reflective frame, persuasively explain the similarities and differences between course and internship writing and editing. More often than not, they speak to the differences, rather than similarities, between school and internship composing and editing processes, like team-based writing for internships, and the kinds of texts they compose, like internship-assigned social media posts. Perhaps the most important difference, the interns say, isn't so much in the writing or editing processes or texts they create, but rather in the role(s) they play in the internship environment itself. Instead of writing for an audience of teacher and classmates and for the purpose of achieving a grade, they write rhetorically purposeful texts for real audiences, as Jack explains in pointing to his internship writing for Red Hills: "My internship taught me ways to present myself and my writing in ways that a typical class could not as I was making real posts for real people rather than just on a discussion board for a classroom that already expects to see my content."

Also notable is the affect students experience in the internships, especially as they begin them. Jack, for example, said that as the internship commenced, he was terrified: "learning that I would be posting on various social media platforms...and reaching a wide array of different audiences terrified me, I did not know how to write casually!" But as the students detailed, they didn't allow their fears to prevent them from taking up new roles and responsibilities, which in turn allowed them to revise assumptions and understandings they had brought to the internship as well as to develop a new confidence as a writer and/or editor. For instance, as a novice editor, Lindsey observed that "in the beginning I was hesitant to give feedback on people's papers or op-eds, but as the semester went on, I figured out the specifics of where a paper or op-ed was failing (editorial wise)." Similarly, Alexandra needed to confront, or at least tolerate, her school-based worry about people rejecting her because of the editorial assistance she might provide:

I have always felt uncomfortable editing other people's work because I am afraid they are going to take it as an insult and cause them to have a negative view of me. But being a part of all of these opportunities, I have been introduced to people who value my opinion and want me to edit their work.

Put another way, affect contextualized the internships for these students²; moreover, as they took on challenges required by the internship, they developed a new confidence in both abilities and roles.

Description and Analysis of Reflections in EWM ePortfolios Focused on Editing

A more detailed review of the EWM student ePortfolios demonstrates the value of the reflective prompt's purposeful design. Across the full set of portfolios, students reported new practices and new knowledge and understanding, especially in a comparative analysis of school-based and internship-based editing and composing. Likewise, in response to questions about the impact of the internship on diverse contexts and futures, students express various connections as well as new confidence about their futures and new plans to realize them.

Although only one student, Lindsey, participated in an internship formally identified as editorial, three of the ten students reported that what they learned largely fell into the editorial realm. Lindsey's role was explicitly editorial given her role as an editor in an FSU research office, while Andrea's writing responsibilities at a publishing house included editorial work, and Alyssa found her greatest learning came less from acting as an editor, and more from seeing how the editorial process

worked. At the center of these three reflections is what students learned, chiefly about how a negative, correction-oriented editing of school becomes a positive, helpful rhetorical practice in the world, an insight transforming their understanding of the practice. Each of these students, building on their schoolwork, found that editing, like writing, is a process, a truism new to each. And guiding these students in making such reflections is a reflective frame encouraging each individual to make meaning only they, drawing on their individual courses and internships, can make.

Lindsey developed skills expanding her editing ability and contributing to an enlarged conceptualization of editing itself: “I figured out how to query authors about why they were using [a] certain sentence, if they were using a sentence wrong, and how to format their posters in Chicago style.” When reflecting on what this new practice meant for her, Lindsey explained that she developed editing expertise through this editorial work, and even more specifically through editorial experience that she found to be authentic: “I think this internship made me feel the real experiences of an editor and what knowledge it takes to be a good editor.” Moreover, based on her editorial internship, Lindsey articulated a new understanding of the editorial process oriented to others that included both its responsibilities and its boundaries.

As the internship gained more momentum, like writing blogs or editing posters for the UROP event, I learned more about all the responsibilities of an editor... For Arthi's research poster, I had to sit down with her and explain some of where the ideas weren't making sense, what sentences she needed to restructure, and ways to structure her poster. In this process, I also learned that some of the questions that researchers ask me are not in the editorial domain. For example, I learned that I cannot help someone figure out their thesis, write their introduction, or format their posters. These are the writer's job, not the editorial responsibility. I never knew that you could turn down an idea or what fell in the responsibilities of an editor.

Lindsey here articulates a new definition of the editor's role, someone who helps others in appropriate ways, but also understands and observes boundaries. In this reflection responding to her experience, Lindsey also seems to be developing a philosophy of the editorial role, what it includes but also what it excludes, a practice and philosophy she plans to continue developing as she decides to continue the internship beyond the EWM one-term, three-credit requirement.

Influenced by her work at a publishing house, Andrea's perspective on editing differed from Lindsey's: given that her role as an editor was bundled into her role as a writer, she believed that self-editing was a first step in editorial work. Thus, also exercising editorial responsibility for her articles, Andrea synthesized her school-based prior knowledge and her new experience in publishing: “Publishing Writing for Home & Yard Magazine at Joyce Publishing, Inc. really helped me to understand how all the skills I had learned in my coursework interacted and came together for the final researching, writing, editing, and layout process that is publishing.” Of particular importance to Andrea was the opportunity to compose a corporate voice wherein Andrea combined her creativity with editorial restraint.

In my Creative Writing courses, I created very imagery-filled, flowing, and entertaining pieces. Although Home & Yard calls for more technical writing –what with the photovoltaic processes of solar power systems and the metallic composition of sterling silver antiques– I found a few places to include little anecdotes for a more personal touch. . . I learned to detach myself from each little phrase and sentence and think big-picture when it came to self-editing my work—the most difficult and biased form of editing, I believe.

Like Andrea, Alyssa also divided her time between composing and editing, although most of what she learned about editing took place not as she edited, but rather as she watched editors working with her texts. The texts she composed were new as well: working as an intern for the FSU English department, Alyssa created Instagram captions, which were then edited and posted by a social media coordinator, a kind of composing, both in its genre (captions) and in its outcome (publication), that were very new to her.

In addition, based on the editorial help she received from others, Alyssa developed a new, more rhetorical definition of editing, as an interactive activity between the page and the editor.

My definition of editing has also grown this semester. I had multiple editors review my work before I would arrive at a final draft. This process of having multiple levels of editors made me realize the importance of editing. Also, at our weekly team meetings, our internship coordinator would share grammar quizzes that we would go over and discuss the different grammar and convention rules. These activities and experience changed my definition of editing and view it now as an interactive activity between the page and the editor.

In sum, Lindsey, Andrea, and Alyssa engaged in very different editing experiences, and in the process defined editing very differently. Each of these definitions emerged from the students' distinct experiences and their making sense of them, as guided by a reflective prompt asking them to think dialogically across contexts and experiences, not to demonstrate learning or outcomes, as is so often the case with ePortfolio programs, but to think about what they have learned in multiple contexts, about what it means now, and about what it portends for their futures.

Students as Writers: The Role of the Reflective Prompt as Flexible Heuristic

In response to the new reflective prompt, the other seven students identified new writing practices they engaged in during their internships. A common theme these students sounded across these reflections was the social nature of writing, although they defined social variously. Three students—Bailey, Maria, and Alexandra—saw the social nature of writing come alive in the communications they engaged in with team members; two students—Jack and Rachel—saw the social nature of writing through the audiences they were addressing and/or seeking to engage; and two students—Rae Ann and Thalia—saw the social nature of writing as a means to contribute to social justice. Put another way, although the theme of the social nature of writing was common, each student, calling on their own unique multi-contextual experiences, defined it uniquely, as the reflection, guided by the new prompt-as-heuristic, both allowed and invited.

Interning with the Museum of Everyday Writing (MoEW), Bailey found that several of her internship tasks required what she considered a collaborative composing process that differed from the individualized composing she performed in school.

The intern team was comprised of four interns, including myself. Another intern, Amanda, and I were in charge of outreach. I had to coordinate and communicate with Amanda to make sure that the Market Wednesday [a public relations event] went smoothly. I found that communication is the key to success, especially within a team setting such as this.

Here, Bailey touched on an issue mentioned by several students, the new kind of composing required by the internship, in her case taking place as she communicates as a team member. Likewise, she found her definition of writing expanding as a function of new composing and new understanding.

I think that after this internship, I have broadened [my definition of writing] to include mundane activities, like social media posting. For me, I put a lot of effort into the Facebook site to make it fun and engaging; now I would definitely count this as writing. I would say my new definition of 'writing' is now more broad and includes all written works that have meaning and purpose behind them.

As Bailey explained, writing for others needs to be “engaging,” and writing itself more generally includes “all written works.” Her reflection, then, was specifically responsive to questions about writing in multiple contexts and what that learning means for her new understanding of writing.

Maria, the second student focusing on collaborative composing, interned with a marketing company. She found the new team-based writing challenging, largely because it differed so dramatically from her school-based writing. In the latter, she wrote alone and submitted to a teacher; in the new internship writing, she was participating in a collective process involving editors who could—and did—change her texts, a process she struggled to accept. Although this team-based writing challenged her idea of authorship, she said that, ultimately, in developing this new writing process, she also developed a new understanding of writing and a new confidence as a writer:

In regards to working on tasks, there was always something that could be improved. The majority of the time, [and] I believe this is also true for other businesses[,] the intern typically is the one who begins the first drafts of a project. In the beginning, this was difficult for me to grasp being the perfectionist that I am, [but] I learned to accept that this was what the editing and curating process was about. ...The opportunity to observe how my content evolved and improved through the editing process was fulfilling.

Thinking about interacting with others as a process of growth and guided by the prompt for reflection, Maria also spoke to her development as a writer, which began well before the internship. Identifying several challenges she overcame, she said that all of them helped her develop her voice, which was a priority of hers, and she said that she was ready to take on the next challenge, which again, is not only allowed by the prompt for reflection, but in fact encouraged by it. Maria's next challenge, she said, was not academic or professional, but personal, relating both to her priority of writing voice development and to her new internship-motivated confidence: “As I sit here, I have signed up to perform at my first open-mic to recite a piece that I am proud to show.” Progression is the way Maria conceptualized her development as a writer, and, in the new context of the open mic, she was ready to take the next step.

A very different kind of collaborative writing was expressed by Alexandra, the third student focusing on collaborative composing. An intern for Florida State University, she wrote for social media, not in her own voice, but rather in the persona of FSU. Interestingly, however, it was in putting the two together, her own voice and the FSU public voice, that she found a way into the composing task: for her, the FSU persona was personable. As she observed, “I wrote about how I felt the university would write if it could write for itself. [O]ne thing that my internship supervisor taught me this semester is that when writing captions and scripts, write through the persona of ... [Florida State University].” Guided by the reflective frame, Alexandra explained that by bringing the EWM past and the FSU social media present together, she could create an FSU persona. Moreover, given her success in this role, Alexandra, like Lindsey, was invited to continue the internship at the end of the term.

Within the prompt for reflection, the next two students identified writing for an audience—especially finding ways to engage and/or create an audience—as their most important learning: Jack writing for a film company, and Rachel writing for the Museum of Everyday Writing. Like other interns, Jack found the writing he composed for a film company new and different than his composing for familiar school-based tasks. He, however, focused less on authorship, more on genre and audience, although it was his attention to audience that provides a throughline to his experience. His adjustment to his new writing tasks was a struggle, he says. In fact, in his reflection, he plotted the relationship of his struggle to his growth as a writer.

I struggled with finding the best way to approach the topic and ended up submitting posts more akin to a discussion than a review. This portion of my internship was much different than anything I had done for my EWM major, but I am glad to have been forced into new situations and to have grown as a writer because of it.

As Jack explained, writing for a new audience in a more ambiguous context was different; for him, learning about how to write to and for a new, real, and live audience was twofold. First, he drew on his earlier, school-based experience, as the reflective prompt invited him to do. Second, he needed, quite simply, to try this new writing in real time, in his case by composing a marketing text, posting it, and then monitoring online audience interaction to gauge its success.

It was almost as if I was writing a persuasive essay like I had learned to do more readily throughout my time as an EWM major and then funneling it through a conversational tone as if I were talking to my boss. In this manner, my academic teachings provided a foundation for how to write while my internship knowledge provided me insight on how to present, making the distinction similar yet differing in the final product. The two styles of writing built off one another: where my EWM classes taught me what to do, my internship taught me how to do it.

Likewise, instead of relying on a grade as an index to success, a real audience informed him: “The final post garnered some interaction and gave me the impression that my submission reached people in the way that I needed it to, making it my first success!”

Working dialogically toward new understandings of writing, as the reflective prompt suggests, Jack theorized different composing practices as working together. Using his school-based writing practices, he created an informed text; using his internship-based writing practices, he delivered it in a conversational tone, the two building on one another, he said. Drawing from these practices, Jack also theorized an expanded definition of writing that he characterized as the layered nature of writing:

The mediums, audiences, word choices, and other facets of writing create a layer of complication that is not readily apparent to those that do not take the time to understand the layered nature of writing. This definition fit my beliefs for all the writing I had done in my college classes, but my Red Hills internship opportunity expanded this definition to all of my writing. Texts, posts, any and all of the interactions I have with another person function similarly to how my writing in academia does, I just did not often think about it. Rather than change my definition of writing, my internship broadened my definition's horizons to extend to any conversation I have with another being.

Responding to the final question in the reflective prompt, Jack reported that his future is now. Using what he had learned about the ability of writing to enhance professional relationships to improve his personal life, Jack engaged in a JIT (Yancey et al., 2018) transfer of writing. “Albeit a bit selfish, my internship skills even taught me how to navigate unapproachable situations to my friends and family through writing, making my experiences a personal gain too!”

Writing for the Museum of Everyday Writing, Rachel, the second student focusing on audience, also wrote for social media, in her case not so much to address an already-available audience as to *create* one that didn’t yet exist. Drawing on her prior personal knowledge about her peers, she explained the logic informing her and her peers’ posts on multiple platforms, including the Museum site and its Instagram account. In addition, much like Jack, she evaluated her success by gauging audience reaction.

In regard to my social media project, I achieved my goals by being active on the museum’s Instagram and increased our non-follower account views through an intern spotlight. The interns have a direct connection with their peers, so I wanted to the museum to use their connections and repost the spotlights to be better seen by the [Florida State University] students. By having the interns post their own spotlight on their account, the spotlight increased exposure of the museum’s account from their [Florida State University] peers who were previously unaware. Ultimately, I discovered that posts on the museum’s Instagram story gain more attention than our usual posts.

Rachel also observed that not only did she understand writing differently as a consequence of completing her internship—“I have come to view everyday writing as a type of cultural marker that—by definition—includes all forms of writing”—but also that this new understanding led to a new appreciation of writing.

Responding to the reflective prompt’s final question about the impact of the internship on her future—on her as a writer, but also potentially on her as a person, student, and future professional—Rachel explained a major change she was making on the basis of her internship experience. She was adding a second major, one in humanities with an emphasis on history, in anticipation of possibly taking up a career as a museum professional:

Due to the unique message and mission of everyday writing, I was inspired to become a double major in Humanities with one of the fields being History. My interest in history has only increased over the years and this internship was the final piece for me to add this aspect to my degree. Depending on how my future schooling progresses, I could see myself working in a museum. This would have never been a serious career option without the new cultural awareness I gained from the internship.

It’s worth noting that Rachel’s reflection in response to the final question, like her consideration of prior knowledge, somewhat exceeded the boundaries the reflective frame seems to suggest. Her prior knowledge, for instance, was less about EWM classes, and more about her personal prior knowledge of her peers and how as a composer, she could employ such knowledge. Likewise, she identified a future that may include writing, but adding a humanities major wasn’t a writing-specific change. As heuristic rather than template, however, the reflective frame, in emphasizing what students have learned and how they find that learning meaningful, is hospitable to such excesses.

The final students whose reflections are included here conceptualized writing as a means of creating a more inclusive world: Rae Ann, writing for the Museum of Everyday Writing, and Thalia writing for the Tallahassee city government. For them, the question about the future, although it appears last in

the guiding questions, overwrote the earlier four. Rae Ann, the first of the students conceptualizing the social nature of writing through the lens of social justice, combined attention to audience with her commitment to an inclusive world. Like Rachel, Rae Ann was writing for a new audience, but while Rae Ann contextualized her writing dialogically, it was not by reference to EWM classes, as the reflective frame anticipates, but rather through her experience with a second internship she was taking concurrently with the EWM internship. Through writing for both of them, she said, she learned a good deal about digital curation as a way of helping museums become “more accessible places”:

In another internship that I have, I work with the Museum of Fine Arts at [FSU] to create an exhibit on oral history work. I have grappled with how to create museums as more accessible places, as they often do not include the voices of everyday people. I found that this digital internship expanded my horizons on what museum work could look like, as it is drastically different from my own coursework regarding physical exhibition spaces in the Art History department. I am infinitely grateful to have had an experience where I learn the workings of digital curation work.

In working for both museums, Rae Ann began to understand more fully how to create a relationship between author and audience, especially when trying to create a more equitable space for others, as she both built on what she had learned in class and *unlearned* some of what she had brought to the internship, a task that was not only challenging, but as she described it, hard:

[A]s I was curating my researched museum exhibit, I had to learn how to speak as clearly and concisely as possible. As the museum is meant for everyday audiences, I had to take academic works and use them to inform my exhibit without academic jargon. The written portion was especially hard because I had to unlearn the writing that we are taught to use in academia in order to create a more equitable space for others. Learning how to juggle these modes of writing has been invaluable in allowing me to become a better communicator.

As important, while her unlearning was especially hard, Rae Ann also found that she also had fun engaging in her internship writing: “What surprised me the most was that I had a wonderful amount of fun while doing it.” Here, then, Rae Ann pointed to the relationship of challenge to development, a connection the students in the Spheres of Writing project also made (Holmes et al., 2023). She also noted how affirming it was to help others—“I realized that both my internships shared a passion for giving voices to the community I am a part of, something more affirming than I could even imagine”—and on the power of writing to create community:

Instead of focusing on what writing is not, I am focusing on what writing is. There are so many ways that we use writing to communicate. I leave with a new appreciation for the work I do, with even more of a passion to write for the community that I am a part of. The Museum of Everyday Writing has taught me, above all else, how to be a more inclusive writer.

How to be a more inclusive writer for multiple audiences, and especially unseen audiences, seemed, for Rae Ann, to be her own goal for the internship. This goal, quite apart from, but in addition to the kinds of goals the EWM program outlines, aligned with the guidance of the reflective prompt asking students to share the meaning *they* made of the internship experience. Having accomplished her own goals, she expressed a new sense of self with new appreciation for writing and even more passion to write for her community.

The last student, Thalia, shared Rae Ann's passion for creating a more inclusive world, although she exercised it as a writer for a municipal government. Writing in a public voice for the Tallahassee City magazine *INCLUSIVE*, Thalia valued interactions between writer and audience, the new world such interactions could create, and the ethical act of authorship in orchestrating such interactions. She also explained the role that editing plays in authoring an inclusive world:

I wrote for, edited, and designed the department's magazine *INCLUSIVE*. The magazine does not explicitly name the author of the written components because our department director wanted us to produce this as reflective of the whole department. Since the final piece represents us all, my supervisor often gives me complete control over what edits are used.

Editing, for Thalia, was thus responsive not only to writers, but to "diverse audiences with varied language proficiency." Simply put, writing and editing, working together, could open doors:

This internship has made me think of the value of editing based on accessibility. Our department does not want to sound nice simply but be understood and reachable to diverse audiences with varied language proficiency. It has made me think of editing as separate from the writer's voice, which I used to consider to be the most important part of editing. However, now my main goal is to communicate what needs to be understood easily.

Thalia also found her definition of writing changing, in part because of what she perceived as the contrast between academic writing and internship writing, a dialogic contrast the prompt on reflection invites, and a theme the interns sounded almost unanimously. Thalia's definition also changed because of the kind of writing she needed to create at the city office, given its mission to be inclusive and given the role writing and language could play in achieving that mission.

I currently understand writing to be a powerful medium for communicating concepts and feelings. It bridges the gap between time and space, especially considering the monumentality of texts in a digital age. Working at the Office of Diversity & Inclusion has broadened the kind of writing I encounter. I am more accustomed to writing and editing academic content, which is a part of working for the City but not [their] preferred communication style. This internship made me realize how valuable simple, straightforward language is, especially as a department that wishes to be defined by inclusivity.

As interesting, taking up the final question in the reflective prompt, Thalia explained that because of the internship, and the power of making change she experienced at *INCLUSIVE*, she was re-considering working for the government:

This internship made me reevaluate working for the government. My disdain for U.S. policy inspired my decision to stop pursuing a government career. However, this internship has opened my eyes to the many ways I could create positive change from within. I felt lost for some time before I found this internship. While I do not appreciate how bureaucratic it is, especially in the fast-paced media world, I think that I could create long-lasting change and bridge the divide between the city government and its citizens. This is the most important realization I have had and has influenced all aspects of my life.

Through their reflections as guided by progressively, often dialogically, oriented questions keyed to prior and current writing practice and knowledge, to school-based and internship-based writing, to new definitions of editing and writing, to new contexts of influence, and to the future, students demonstrated both the power of a reflection prompt that is purposefully designed and the ways it helped them re-imagine and enact new relationships and new worlds. Moreover, as demonstrated here, the reflective frame acts as a flexible heuristic, focusing students' observations while simultaneously permitting and supporting meaning-making about related non-writing experiences and futures.

Making Meaning through ePortfolio Reflections, and the Value of a Reflective Frame

Dissatisfied with the ePortfolio reflective prompt for the EWM internship, we resolved to develop one specifically designed to help students make meaning from three processes: engaging in the experience of the internship, representing those experiences authentically by drawing on multiple contexts, and reflecting upon them. In designing the new prompt, we were influenced by research on writing transfer as well as by other ePortfolio programs in areas as diverse as general education and accounting, which given the intellectual interests of the students here—including EWM, which they all share, to communication studies, linguistics, business, international relations, criminal justice, and athletic training—speaks to the cross-disciplinary value of this ePortfolio prompt. Indeed, in reflecting, students drew on other interests as well: a concurrent museum internship, an open mic poetry reading, a personal discussion and personal values. Carefully considering the kinds of questions that would be meaningful to students in the dual contexts of the EWM curriculum and the internship, we ultimately designed a reflective frame keyed to multiple periods of time, in this case to past, present, and future, and to multiple sites of learning, here to coursework, internship, and the space between. The questions constituting the reflective frame, then, tap the three most immediate contexts of coursework, internship, and future, but also allow for contexts beyond course and internship, among them personal and civic. As a set, the questions themselves move progressively, from specific reports and observations about writing and editing in classes and internship to more general claims or propositions—about definitions of writing and/or editing and about intended and unintended effects of the internship while also permitting articulation of self-designed goals like writing for social justice—not as a template for the reflective text, but rather as a heuristic for reflective thinking.

Moreover, as the review above demonstrates, EWM students accepted the invitation to speak as authorities on their own courses, internships, and their meaningfulness. They reported taking up new roles as writers and editors composing and editing purposeful texts for authentic audiences, emphasizing their new responsibilities, authorships, audiences, and understandings. They reported that their experiences were interesting, challenging, and inspiring, helping them define writing and editing in new ways that sometimes built on what they had learned, and often differed. They reported new practices, from curating texts for a digital platform to writing for social media and writing and editing for inclusivity. They reported new, more capacious definitions of writing and more rhetorical definitions of editing. They reported the influence of the internship in multiple contexts—professional, personal, academic, and civic. They reported that their future plans had been influenced by their internships, and that in some cases they had already enacted those plans. And in reflecting, students often found meaning through multiplicity, that is, in a dialogue across and among contexts: across a class and an internship, between assumptions and realities, emerging from the interaction between professional life and civic aspiration. That multiplicity, which was specific to each student, permitted and supported the making of individual meaning. In these ways, then, this purposefully

designed ePortfolio reflective prompt helped students learn from, and find value in, the trifecta of experience, representation of experience, and reflection on experience.

Key to the design of the reflective prompt is a set of six factors:

- authentic questions
- a progressive design from specific to general
- inclusion of prior knowledge and experience
- a comparison of prior knowledge and experience not in terms of value (i.e., good or bad), but rather to pose questions about similarity and difference as a practice of invention
- inclusion of outside contexts, and
- a consideration of the future.

The design of this reflective frame may also have relevance for other ePortfolio programs and courses. As noted earlier, its design was influenced by programs in accounting and general education, which, like the EWM internship, are located in the two contexts of in school and out. Accordingly, a program already bringing those two contexts together—in service learning, study abroad, internships, co-op experiences—may well find this frame helpful. In using this frame to guide student reflections, such programs would need to be primarily interested in students' responses to authentic questions rather than to whether, or how, students have met predetermined outcomes. The questions themselves, of course, could be adjusted for programmatic purposes, such as to the cultures of different countries in a study abroad context.

This ePortfolio reflective frame could also be useful for academic courses and programs, especially those meeting three criteria.

First, the frame directs students to draw on at least two contexts. When students put contexts into dialogue, they have a point of departure and a site of invention for the making of meaning, one that is especially powerful when the faculty do not have experience, expertise, or authority in one of them. That lack of experience and expertise is what the students do have, which endows them with both agency and authority as they explain the learning emerging from this context in dialogue with another. As the EWM students demonstrate here, within the guide provided by the frame, students may emphasize one context more than another, address one dimension or aspect of a given context, or link to a context they introduce. Because the frame is heuristic, students determine what is meaningful within its focus, and even occasionally outside of it.

Second, one context relates to students' prior knowledge. The first context, then, would be related to prior knowledge, while the second would be a school-based context like a class or a program. As the National Research Council volume *How People Learn: Mind, Brain, Experience, and School* (Donovan et al., 1999) explains, all "new learning is built on the foundation of existing knowledge and preconceived notions regarding the subject of study" (p. 43). Thus, not only allowing students to draw on that learning, but also inviting them to do so signals that their prior context sets the stage for their new learning. At the same time, prior learning is not by definition efficacious; the reflective prompt provides for this by inviting comparisons located in similarity, difference, and both. Indeed, simply asking for the comparison in terms of similarity and difference reminds students that not all prior learning will be helpful.

Third, the curriculum hosting classes, courses, and programs offers opportunities for students to work collaboratively, to contribute to community, and to develop agency, all features the EWM students here identified, explained, reflected upon, and valued. In fact, these features may be especially important to minoritized students when and as they engage in contexts incorporating High

Impact Practices (HIP) such as ePortfolios. Jillian Kinzie et al. (2021) report that in their surveys, “Racially minoritized students’ comments revealed a strong emphasis on the importance of serving and learning with others and making a difference for a community” as did their being awarded “autonomy and control” for an HIP project or in research (p. 12). In other words, while the curriculum should offer opportunities for all students to assume authentic roles, to develop agency, and to contribute to a larger community, such opportunities may be of special import to racially minoritized students.

In sum, with a reflective frame guiding their meaning-making, students can record, think about, synthesize, and plan as they reflect on their experiences, articulating for themselves, and others, their struggles and fears, their new practices and understandings, their successes and plans, that is, their meaningful learning.

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Notes

- ¹ Thanks to Molly Hand, for her assistance in designing the reflective prompt and in inviting students to participate in this study; and thanks especially to the students whose work is represented here.
- ² The role of affect in writing has been addressed most recently in alumni writing and in university students writing. See Alexander et al. for the first and Holmes et al. for the second.

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