

# Chapter 3. One White Woman Stumbles Toward Equity in Student Feedback Processes

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The first time I asked students to tell me how to grade them, it did not go well. It was my fourth year teaching as a Ph.D. student at a large, research-intensive university in the Southeast. The course was an undergraduate advanced composition class that was required for English majors in the professional and technical writing track. The class was twenty-five students. I'd taught the class once before, and it had gone fairly well. But I wanted to try new things, and I'd begun seriously thinking about assessment in light of my commitments to critical pedagogy/postpedagogy.<sup>1</sup> I amended my syllabus with some vague language about "deciding together" how assignments would be graded and mostly left it at that. As I thought about the first time we'd "decide together," I imagined an empowering and productive conversation: I would open the floor to students, ask some vague guiding questions, and students would intuitively know what things they could ask for feedback on and what mattered for each assignment. If you've ever undertaken a similar conversation about grading/assessment/feedback, you can likely imagine the sound of the classroom that day: absolute silence.

There were any number of problems with my approach the first time I tried to include students in the assessment of their own work, but there's one that stands out above the others: my questions were vague and seemingly out of nowhere; I hadn't done anything to create a context or foundation for having that conversation. I hadn't provided resources or readings about how language practices are embedded in histories and constructed by ideologies. I hadn't asked students to think deeply about what they wanted from the class or their work. I hadn't asked students to think about what success or effectiveness look like. I hadn't done enough work to help students think about genres, audiences, or expectations. And I certainly hadn't done the work necessary to help students feel like they had the right and ability to decide for themselves what mattered for our class. Instead, as a White woman teacher who loved school and excelled at reading and writing,

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1. As I have argued elsewhere (McIntyre, 2018), postpedagogy is characterized by an emphasis on creativity, student-directed inquiry, space for messiness/failure, and deep reflection. It shares many characteristics with critical pedagogy, but the primary mode of engagement is not critique; rather, through limited constraints and deep reflection, it encourages experimentation and creation.

I presumed my students shared my experiences and my view of the classroom as a productive, supportive space. This presumption is, notably, the first of Asao Inoue's (2021) *Habits of White Language (HOWL)*, and the insidious invisibility of these kinds of presumptions is one of the reasons that so many literacy educators continue to demand adherence to a single standard of language correctness: we don't see our own language histories and practices as rooted in particular racial and class-based identities. Instead, the racial and socioeconomic dimensions of these language practices are rendered invisible as those practices are naturalized and universalized.

As a first-generation, rural, working-class, White woman, there were certainly times I was excluded by the practices of the academy, particularly the tacit, social knowledge about how to connect with my peers and professors and the assumptions about what it means to "sound educated." But in literacy classrooms, because my own language education had taught me early how to assimilate and had rewarded me for doing so, I found (or perhaps made) a home. It's certainly the case that my access to White language practices and my early willingness to eliminate my accent and the related vocabulary were necessary prerequisites to this kind of acceptance. But this comfort, and the relative privilege of my position as a White woman, was the main feature of my teacherly persona, and I assumed that giving students the opportunity to participate would be enough to make my assessment process more equitable—because by the time I made it to a college literacy classroom, getting such an opportunity was enough for me.

But it's not nearly enough. It's not enough because our educational systems (literacy and English classrooms, in particular) teach minoritized students, particularly Black students speaking and writing Black English, that their language habits and rhetorical practices are inappropriate for classrooms or wrong, full-stop. Given these previous literacy and other classroom experiences, it's no wonder that it is difficult or impossible for Black, Latinx, Indigenous students and other students of color to trust faculty who ask for their input and participation in this way; that mistrust is an entirely reasonable and appropriate response to the harm that White faculty just like me have done. By the time I reached college, my experiences in literacy classrooms were almost universally positive ones; any personal language or literacy practices that were outside of HOWL's expectations had long been discarded, and I saw myself reflected in significant parts of the reading material for those college literacy classes. But, in part because of the ways that HOWL renders itself invisible and seemingly objective (Inoue, 2021), I failed to recognize, during those first forays into co-creation, that those positive experiences were very likely not shared by my students.

In those early attempts at co-creation and collaboration with my students, I failed to recognize the systemic, structural ways that racism, sexism, and classism shape and are shaped by our language practices, policies, and educational approaches. As Inoue (2015) persuasively argues in his *Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies*, "Racism seen and understood as structural, instead, reveals

the ways that systems, like the ecology of the classroom, already work to create failure in particular places and associate it with particular bodies” (p. 4). Our “standard academic English” language expectations are White; as Geneva Smitherman (1999) reminds us, “academic English” (as a generalized discourse/set of expectations) is itself a product of the backlash against civil rights advances and the increased diversity at many colleges and universities in the 1960s and 1970s. Recognizing and attempting to redress the harm caused by our racist language expectations isn’t enough to create more equitable and just educational spaces, though. As April Baker-Bell (2020) argues, we instead need to fight for Black linguistic justice, which can’t be found in conformist or assimilationist approaches to teaching English. Even in classrooms in which the majority of students aren’t Black, Baker-Bell’s emphasis on Black linguistic justice (rather than just diversity or inclusion) and her rejection of assimilationist approaches to language diversity are vital to creating more just literacy classrooms for all students of color. Linguistic justice begins, then, with centering historically marginalized (particularly Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and other students of color) students’ experiences and needs instead of only an elite White monolingual set of languaging practices. These calls for centering students and their communities also have a historical precedent. They align with the normal school tradition (particularly the Black normal schools most prevalent in the southeastern US) that Iris Ruiz (2016) offers as an alternative foundation for the discipline of rhetoric and composition/writing studies: “student-centered learning, collaborative approaches, as well as approaches that considered the backgrounds of students . . . were especially prevalent in black normal schools” (p. 196).

## De-Centering My Own White Subjectivity as Teacher

Co-creating expectations, guidelines, and ways of giving feedback is one small step forward, but only as part of a wider ecological view of writing assessment (Inoue, 2015) that includes ongoing reflection, flexible attendance and late work policies, and readings, assignments, and discussions that interrogate racist language practices and the role of Whiteness and White supremacy in systemic preferences for so-called Standard English. This is what I mean by ecology: for writing classes, which are primarily focused on writing processes that include modeling, practice, feedback, and revision, assessment, evaluation, and judgment are part of nearly everything we do, and so our policies about attendance, for example, impact students’ abilities to participate in the class in ways that also impact feedback and assessment. All of our decisions about the course—and policies and expectations from outside the course—impact one another. I’d note, too, that my own position as a White woman educator working toward antiracist ends but still participating in institutions and systems built on and continuing to perpetuate White supremacy, makes this work more complex and makes my own ongoing reflection vitally important. When left to my own, unreflective devices, I have perpetuated

the notion that “Standard English” is somehow objective or neutral. I also note that my geographical location at the time of this writing (California) and the identities of my students (the majority of whom are students of color, including Black, Latinx, and Asian/Pacific Islander students) make this work both easier (because of the lack of explicit pressure to ban critical race theory and teaching about racism from high school and college classrooms) and more immediately necessary (because of the ongoing harm done by California’s secondary school systems to minoritized students, particularly multilingual writers and speakers or those perceived to be multilingual speakers). See Juan Cristian Tamayo’s (2022) “Some of the Words Are Theirs: Teaching Narrative and Storytelling through Hip Hop Pedagogy in College Writing and Composition Courses,” in which he relates his own experiences from elementary school through college (all in California) of being singled out and degraded in literacy classrooms:

I was literally removed from the classroom on a weekly basis. The entire class grinded to a halt when the teacher paused mid-sentence and turned his attention to the back of the room where a head peered in, letting in with it a ray of bright white light that was an assault on the eyes. No words were exchanged, just glances. The dead air weighed on the students. Eyes shifting toward the usual culprits. This is how the ceremony of degradation commences . . . If we felt like outcasts before this only served as a confirmation, solidifying it, reminding us of our own inadequacy and inability to fit in and meet the standard. (p. 44)

Tamayo certainly wasn’t alone in his experiences or the feelings that result from these kinds of fundamentally dehumanizing institutional behaviors. In the chapter that follows this one, “Disrupting White Mainstream English in a Hispanic-Serving Institution: Reflections from Two Latina Writing Instructors,” Sonya Barrera Eddy describes how settler-colonial logics othered her in college classrooms:

Even though my family has been in Texas for longer than Texas has been a state, I was seen as a foreigner, so much so that I was offered ESL classes in elementary school . . . My professor seemed to understand and was sensitive to the history of Native Americans in our class, but she couldn’t conceptualize anything outside of the narrow framework of settler colonialism . . . My response was simple, I said, “I am from Texas.” I have spent my life trying to prove the validity of my existence and also judging and policing my own language in the process.

Part of the work of equitable literacy instruction relies on a too-often-unarticulated but widely-held belief: writing situations are specific and contextual. Genres and approaches are adapted to particular communication situations; new

genres are assembled to respond to new and changing contexts. This is, I believe, a fairly uncontroversial assertion in writing and rhetoric, and yet, too often, our assessment of students' writing/work ignores this reality in favor of some sort of "standard" approach or assessment. As Chris Anson and colleagues (2012) note in their discussion of programmatic assessments, one of the problems with generic assessment, including single-standard rubrics (as opposed to more open-ended tools like heuristics or shared sets of questions), is that they ignore the contextual, "in situ" ways that genres are constantly constructed and reconstructed. In addition, such practices also ignore the ways that the invisible framework of HOWL overlays all of our expectations in academic settings. We miss the ways that students communicate in sophisticated and contextually-appropriate ways when we demand adherence to generic (White) language standards.

How, then, can I reckon with the ways that my own language background and experiences (as a White, rural, first-generation college student) have shaped and continue to shape my pedagogy and policies? Can I reorient my classroom to center the experiences and goals of my students without simply reproducing the same HOWL that have almost certainly shaped students' perceptions of success and failure in literacy classrooms throughout their education? If so, how? And what structural barriers and institutional practices inhibit this work? In what ways can collaboration and community create space for students to articulate their own goals and values? And in what ways do those same practices run the risk of simply reinforcing the same problematic and racist attitudes about language variation and rhetorical practices, particularly those practices that don't match the White, middle-class language practices that form the foundation for so-called academic writing?

The answers to so many of these questions are intensely complicated. It's not possible to escape the ways that HOWL structures the larger institutions in which I work and my students learn. But what I can do is demand rigorous honesty and careful reflection from myself. I/we must work to account for the ways that our positionality shapes the decisions we make when we design our courses. I must consider how HOWL shapes my perceptions of myself, the students I work with, and literacy classes more generally. I must find ways to actively confront and dismantle hidden curricula and expectations that (often invisibly) reinforce HOWL. I need to articulate my positionality to my students, offer a wide array of texts that lay bare the White supremacy inherent in our standards and habits of language, and ask students to contemplate how their schooling has been shaped by these forces. These actions and processes are not one-time measures either; they must be consistent and ongoing. I also can't imagine that these shifts on my part automatically mean that students will respond differently to my pedagogies and practices; students have complex lives, histories, goals, and educational experiences.

In addition to the actions above, I've also looked to develop concrete, in-class practices that help me decenter my own judgments about students' work: co-creating feedback guidelines (which I use to give feedback to students over

the course of the writing project and which students use to give each other feedback and which shape students' end-of-project reflections). These guidelines both allow me to dilute my own language judgments while inviting students to think deeply and write reflectively about their own language goals and experiences. I think these concrete practices are immensely valuable, but what is even more valuable are the deep moments of reflection and rethinking they facilitate for me, and sometimes, for students, too. When combined with readings that lay bare the White supremacist foundations of so-called "academic English" and others that explore the value, sophistication, and rhetorical success of other Englishes, this process is one (imperfect) step toward challenging the HOWL that permeate literacy education at the postsecondary level. That step, though, is not necessarily bound up only in the practices I describe but in the rethinking, recentering, and reimagining that they allow me to participate in with the students in my courses. In particular, this chapter outlines my practice of co-creating feedback guidelines with students in both my first-year writing courses and my graduate composition courses. Co-creating feedback guidelines allows me to

1. Engage students in conversations about how their experiences with school-based literacy, almost certainly including feedback tied to evaluation tied to numerical assessments, have impacted them as language users and how the standards they encountered were shaped by HOWL.
2. Interrupt discourses, in both first-year and graduate writing classrooms, about "correctness" and "good writing," which are inextricably linked to HOWL and articulate those connections to students.
3. Complicate students' expectations about the subject, experience, and priorities of writing classes and, for graduate students in pedagogically-focused courses, about why and how we teach writing courses at the college level. This too is about making visible to myself and my students the invisible HOWL-based standards and expectations of the classroom in order to rethink our relationship to language and expand our notions of what it means to write in academic spaces.
4. Acknowledge and help my students recognize that there are myriad ways to accomplish our communication goals and that the narrowness of so-called academic writing offers one set of tools, which, like all language tools, has its own history and politics. In the case of academic writing, that history is explicitly exclusionary and racist.
5. Explicitly articulate my position in relation to HOWL and power in academic settings and acknowledge the extent to which my proximity to and comfort with HOWL have protected me.

What I've learned through these practices is that HOWL structures every part of the writing courses I teach and the discipline in which I participate. They are the all-too-often unacknowledged foundation for the work at the very heart of

writing studies' disciplinary identity. Challenging that requires seeing clearly how HOWL operate in classrooms and their assessment practices and working with students to imagine something new.

## Examining My Subjectivity in an Assessment Ecology

It's not enough to tell students that things are different in our classrooms; we must do the work to demonstrate that difference and offer students opportunities to examine and reevaluate the way they think about assessment altogether. As Jesse Stommel (2018) argues, "Students are increasingly conditioned to work within a system that emphasizes objective measures of performance, ranking, and quantitative marks" ("How I Don't Grade"). The system we all work within is structured by White supremacy, and the language practices privileged by the academy reflect HOWL. In particular, the emphasis on detached objectivity and clarity above all else (both HOWL) intentionally excludes languaging practices that humanize writers and value personal experience and community knowledge. The collaborative creation of feedback guidelines, which I describe below, does not magically erase the primacy of HOWL in my classroom. It, along with an honest articulation of my own positionality, explicit discussions of racism in our institutions, humane course policies, flexible, open-ended assignments, and an ungrading approach to assessment, allows me to invite students to build from their own habits of language. These are all parts of my classroom assessment ecology.

This section, then, describes my work with collaborative assessment and first-year students at a previous institution, a selective private liberal arts college in the northeastern United States. Through this experience, I learned that co-creating feedback guidelines, when combined with ungrading and framed with readings and discussions that explicitly name linguistic racism in academic settings, creates a more equitable assessment ecology, a term Inoue (2015) coins to represent the interrelated elements of the classroom that, when combined, produce assessments: "it is the system, the ecology as a whole, that determines what possible outcomes, effects, changes, or products there will be" (p. 120). But I also learned that I have long ignored how my specific subjectivity has shaped my approach to the classroom. The goal of these practices is to explicitly center students' voices, needs, and perspectives and make space for students who have long been excluded from institutions and the language practices that those institutions enforce, but I can't properly do that if I don't acknowledge my own position and privilege. By also assigning work on diverse literacies, linguistic justice, and antiracist language and literacy practices, I can do more than make space; I can explicitly acknowledge and reflect on my positionality, the privileges that it has afforded me, and the ways that my positionality and literacy experiences are different from those of the White, Asian, and African American students I worked with at a selective liberal arts institution in the Northeast. And through that reflection, I can



make intentional choices to assign texts that offer diverse perspectives on literacy, ask students to compose texts that explore how HOWL structures school-based literacy experiences, and create feedback cycles that emphasize students' own goals for their work, all while being transparent about how our classroom and I as a teacher participate in the institutions that further White supremacist ends. I can construct my classroom as a place that prioritizes and celebrates the diverse literacy experiences my students bring with them without pretending that institutions (or those of us who work within these institutions, including myself) are actually predisposed to support or celebrate those diverse literacies.

My approach to co-creating assessment materials (in this case, a rubric) with students followed these general principles:

- **My assignments have few constraints.** As I've written elsewhere (McIntyre, 2018), asking students to experiment with new approaches, technologies, and genres is a cornerstone of critical, creative, equitable pedagogy. When paired with frequent and substantial reflection, this approach can also contribute to students' positive self-perception, self-efficacy, and even knowledge transfer (Abrami & Barrett, 2005; DePalma, 2015; Nicolaidou, 2012). Over time, however, I've also learned that my own subjectivity and the hidden, often invisible expectation set by HOWL structure even these less constrained assignments.
- **Both the assignment itself and the class-based creation of feedback guidelines include multiple opportunities for substantial reflection.** As you'll see in the sample assignments and project timelines below, students are asked to reflect multiple times on their work and on the process of creating guidelines for feedback. For the definitional text assignment (which I assign in my first-year writing classes), this reflection takes multiple forms over the course of the project: students compose proposals, revision plans, cover letters for later drafts, and project reflections. End-of-class reflections<sup>2</sup> on days when we discuss, compose, review, revise, or apply the guidelines are focused on that experience.
- **End-of-class reflections frequently ask students to make connections between the work we do in the class, the guidelines we create for feedback, and their communication practices outside of class.** These reflections encourage students to think about what successful communication practices look like at home, at work, with their families, in their communities and in other parts of their lives and then consider how those experiences might influence both the criteria we create and how they approach their work in the class. Here, I'm following Django Paris and H. Samy Alim's (2017) culturally sustaining pedagogy model, which, as

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2. At the end of each class meeting, I ask students to spend 10 minutes writing reflectively about our work that day and how it connects to the larger work of the class and their writing and speaking in other contexts.



Paris argued in an interview with EdWeek, positions education as “a site for sustaining—rather than eradicating—the cultural ways of being of communities of color” (Ferlazzo, 2017). But I’m also asking students—and myself—to be explicit about how and why we value particular communication practices and how our subjectivities are related to those values. I pair this work with readings from Gloria Anzaldúa and Luci Tapahonso, and we talk about lived experiences and community/family practices as knowledge-making.

- **Prior to creation of feedback guidelines, we read and discuss work that explores themes of linguistic justice and White language supremacy.** In first-year classes, we read Vershawn Ashanti Young’s “Should Writers Use They Own English?” James Baldwin’s “If Black English Isn’t a Language, Then What Is?” and work from Jamila Lyscott and Gloria Anzaldúa. We talk about what we mean by “correct” and “academic” writing and where our definitions of those terms come from. In graduate classes, we read some of the same work, but we also read April Baker-Bell, Asao B. Inoue, Geneva Smitherman, Victor Villanueva, and others. We have the same conversation about so-called correctness and the myth of academic writing, but we also talk about the ways that the myth is perpetuated intentionally by English and writing pedagogies. And we make connections between all that and our own lived experiences as language users (on the one hand) and the HOWL that structures institutional power.
- **Guidelines are revisable throughout the life of the assignment.** As I note above, this process doesn’t begin until students have drafted their proposals for the project or started working on a draft; I want them to have begun envisioning their work/approach before we start talking about assessment so that their approaches shape the guidelines instead of the guidelines fully shaping their approach. My hope is that, over the course of the class, as our own understanding grows of how subjectivities, experiences, and communities shape our literacy practices, those ideas will also shape and reshape the guidelines we create.
- **Students draft both the guidelines and the explanations of the guidelines, including a description of what success looks like.**<sup>3</sup> As I also note above, students create both the guidelines and the explanations for what it looks like to do something well, adequately, and not so adequately. Much of the process I discuss here and in the following section reflects previous work in writing assessment and pedagogy, particularly Inoue’s

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3. As I plan for subsequent semesters, I’m thinking a lot about how to include both success and failure in our discussions of these guidelines and how I might ask students to reflect on their ideas, prior to fully completing the project, of what it would look like to fail.

(2005) “Community-based Assessment Pedagogy.” In that article, Inoue argues that asking students to build and reflect on assessment tools and approaches is part of a community-based assessment pedagogy, that integrates assessment with the teaching of writing so that students not only learn to assess themselves, taking active learning stances in the classroom, but they begin to articulate how assessment and writing work in their own practices—theorize—that is, they begin to be more self-conscious, reflective writers (2005).

This approach “resists in theory and denies in practice the traditional way evaluation, assessment, and grading happen in the classroom,” including displacing the teacher from their positions as “the evaluator or assessor in the classroom” (Inoue, 2005, p. 223, emphasis in original). In my version of this community-based approach, I work to practice Inoue’s emphasis on co-creation in service of deep reflection and also rely on a completion-based approach to grading in which I separate the feedback process (facilitated by the guidelines students create) from grading, which is based entirely on completion and is, I’d argue, a form of ungrading.<sup>4</sup> I see my practice here as combining the upgrading approaches of scholars like Alfie Kohn or Stommel with Inoue’s work: namely, I wish to, as much as possible, remove the extrinsic pressure of grades and grading and replace that grading process with a collaborative approach to feedback. I want to highlight Inoue’s (2005) discussion of the connections among literacy development, thoughtful and ongoing reflection, and student-led and -centered assessment and feedback practices here because they mirror my own commitments and the values (student-centeredness, care, thoughtfulness, community) that influenced my decision to take this approach in my own classroom.

## Looking Closely at Whiteness in a Specific Assignment

To better understand how this works in practice, let me walk through how a particular assignment results in a particular set of feedback guidelines from students. Here’s one of the assignments from my first-year writing course, a “Definitional Text” assignment:

For our final project, you will choose and define a term that seems vital to your understanding of our course content. This definition may take nearly any form you like except one: you may not compose a traditional essay for this project. In fact, you may use no more than 300 written words in the final draft of this project. You may, however, use as many spoken words,

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4. Inoue (2005) also notes the deep and abiding problem with teacher-based evaluations and grading, noting that these practices “play very little part” in his approach to teaching writing (p. 210).

images, video clips, etc., as you like (within fair-use guidelines and in accordance with copyright law). You will compose a project cover letter, addressed to me, that introduces your definitional project and speaks to the project guidelines we create as a class. You will revise your project draft (including your cover letter) at least twice in response to feedback from me and from your peers.

The process I describe below is a result of the kinds of failed attempts I describe in the opening section. The process also reflects my sense that, especially as a White woman educator whose languaging has largely been accepted as appropriate in academic spaces, an iterative, reflective process that brings students into the conversation about assessment early and often is vital to my own reflection and to creating a more equitable process. In other words, I need the number of check-ins I describe below because without them I've had the tendency to substitute my experiences for my students' and make assumptions about how humane and equitable the process is for them.

This process takes the whole semester, and it starts for me on day one. On the first day of class, I note that being successful in the class will mean making substantive revisions to their work; that I want them to know that they'll have the opportunity to determine what kinds of things I and their peers give them feedback on and what success looks like on a particular project. Then, in the weeks that follow, I invite students to ask questions about the approach to feedback and grading in the class. I also talk to students (via readings, class discussions, and reflective writing assignments) about the concepts of audience, purpose, genre, evidence, language identity, and language bias. My goal here is to make sure students have a wide array of examples of successful rhetorical participation. This means that it's absolutely vital that my reading list reflect that variety and reflect lots of work that has largely been cast as non-academic or outside "standard" English. During the class meeting in which I introduce a new project, we discuss the specific process for developing feedback guidelines for that project, and I invite them, as they write their proposal for the project, to think about the broad strokes of what they'll be creating and what they'll want feedback on. In subsequent classes, we'll begin developing categories and descriptions of the kinds of feedback they want on the project, and after students complete peer review using the guidelines we develop, I ask them to reflect on how the guidelines did or didn't work. What do we need to change? Eliminate? Clarify? Expand? These reflections are the basis for subsequent revisions to the project guidelines. And throughout the process, we continue reading and discussing texts that challenge Standard English and its primacy. These texts help shape the guidelines as we revise them over the life of the project.

Based on these processes, my students create grids of a sort. Here's part of one from my first-year writing class in the winter of 2016. It refers to the Definitional Text Assignment described above:

Criteria	What does it look like to do this well?	What does it look like to do this adequately?	What does it look like to do this poorly?
Text is visually and/or aurally appealing and/or visually and/or aurally interesting	The text displays a high level of creativity. It is clear that the author put a good amount of effort into the presentation and is actively trying to entertain and educate the reader/viewer.	While the author still put in some effort into the visual aspect of the text, it is clear from the audience's perspective that more could be done creatively to make the text more engaging.	The text has little to no evidence of creative effort at all. The author just wrote out the information with little thought or care in how it should be presented. Typical 12pt font Times New Roman. Creatively void.
Definitional text content is appropriate for the message and audience	Content is persuasive, entertaining, or informative, depending on its target audience. It gives the target audience a clear idea of the definition of the chosen term.	Content is relevant, but the choice of content can be more focused or appropriate depending on the audience	Content is vague, irrelevant, and does not relate to the author's definition and the term they chose
Cover letter discusses and justifies rhetorical decisions	Cover letter cites specific examples from the definition text to support claims made about rhetorical decisions. Discussion of decisions is clear and makes sense for the intended audience.	Cover letter talks about rhetorical decisions, but it lacks specific examples from the definitional text. It is not completely clear why some choices were made in the definitional text.	Cover letter touches on the overall structure of the definitional text, but there is no mention of rhetorical decisions. Readers are not able to figure out why the definitional text is written and there is no justification of choices made.

There's so much I could talk about here: how these first-year students have reproduced some of the terms we might expect to see in faculty-created criteria, the breadth and depth of students' view of the project, students' insistence on using "interesting" and "appealing" even though these are slippery terms. But I want to focus instead on how clearly students have articulated writing and creation as context-dependent processes. This was certainly a key point of discussion in our class, and we talked about things like audience and purpose frequently and at some length. But until we created this set of guidelines for our final project, I wasn't entirely certain that students had really understood the importance or complexity of these concepts. Certainly, though, these guidelines (and the process of creating and using them) are not without their problems. Slippery terms like the ones featured in both of the examples I share in this chapter have the potential of simply reinforcing existing racist views of language practice by allowing

readers to continue to base their definitions of such terms on the HOWL that continue to structure most literacy education. I haven't discovered a surefire way to avoid this vexing problem. What I can (and do) do, though, is assign texts and facilitate class discussions about work (from Vershawn Ashanti Young, Jamila Lyscott, Gloria Anzaldúa, and others) that complicates views of what writing can do, ask students to think about their own rhetorical histories and practices as valid and successful, and use the feedback guidelines we create together as a starting point for ongoing reflection both about the writing project they're working on and about their literacy experiences, past, present, and future.

I also want to note the absence of any specific grammatical or stylistic criteria. With the exception of "clear and concise" as part of the explanation for the "Definitional text medium is appropriate for message and audience" guidelines, none of the student-drafted guidelines specifically attend to sentence-level issues. When given the choice, students focused on creativity, audience, context, evidence, and other higher order concerns.

This is certainly not to say that there's not all sorts of HOWL reflected here; students have completed at least a dozen years of literacy education before they reach a first-year composition classroom. And they're absolutely continuing to encounter those same kinds of HOWL-based writing expectations in other classrooms at the same time they're participating in this work with me. And I'll also note my own complicity here: though I imagined myself to practicing a more equitable even antiracist assessment practice here, I didn't take one of the most important steps I could and should have: I didn't explicitly call our attention to how HOWL and White language standards maintain power via supposed objectivity and invisibility. I was (and remain, to some extent) proud of the lack of attention to grammar and style. But I failed to recognize the ways that the invisibility of those conventions also maintains White language supremacy.

Do I think this process moved me closer to equitable writing assessment? I do. But the nagging flaw remains: I didn't do (nor ask students to do) nearly enough of the kind of explicit reflection on the role of race and racism on shaping language judgements that is necessary for antiracist practice, which demands an unflinching acknowledgement of the ways that racism shapes habits, judgements, expectations, and measures of success and failure. I'm reminded here of what Louis M. Maraj, in his chapter in this collection, "Gaming the System: Assessing 'Basic' Writing with Black Male Student-Athletes," says about the rhetorical power of disturbances, disruptions, and interruptions: "What I'm trying to say is, while, for Bartholomae, students invent academic discourses through their approximations, this study demonstrates how disturbing the uses of institutional mechanisms culturing those approximations might shift relationships with assessment." That's what's missing from my own practices here.

As I said at the outset, this process of co-creating guidelines with students is neither quick nor intuitive. And it doesn't automatically redress the harms of White language supremacy. Instead, as my students have noted, it's the

combination of readings that lay bare the racist foundations of “standard” and “academic” English in combination with the opportunity to craft the criteria that moves us toward a more antiracist writing assessment practice. Reading work that challenges internalized notions of correctness is a necessary first step; otherwise, even student-created criteria will simply perpetuate Whitestream ways of doing English. This work is, of course, complicated by my positionality: as a White woman talking to students of color about their literacy experiences, particularly their experiences in my own classroom, part of this process necessarily involves (1) acknowledging both my privilege and complicity in a system that valorizes White language, (2) talking to students about the ways that the policies (around attendance, deadlines, and grading, in particular) and practices of our class are intended to push back on that same system, (3) asking students to reflect on their own positionality and literacy experiences, and (4) making space (in class and via more anonymous means) for students to clarify, question, interrogate, and/or criticize the work and of our class and my approach. And thinking now about how HOWL structures classrooms and institutions via invisibility, naturalization, and claims to objectivity, this process must also include multiple explicit discussions of how our own internalized standards, goals, and practices have been shaped by White language supremacy. In particular, as a White educator whose goals include centering and celebrating the experiences and expertises of students of color, I must be consistently open to feedback from students about whether the course is actually working for them. And then I must implement that feedback. But first, I have to make a space that such feedback is even possible, and that begins with being honest and open about my own position as White woman educator and about the ways the institutions I’ve spent my life in are shaped by White supremacy.

The practice discussed here is one part of a larger ecological approach to grappling with the real harm that single-standard assessments still do to all students, particularly students of color and multilingual students, whose literacy practices don’t align with the White, middle-class English language and literacy practices that underpin notions of academic English. Guidelines like the ones created by first-year students in my courses interrupt some (though certainly not all) of the problematic assessment and feedback practices that so often define postsecondary literacy education. The process of creating these guidelines, when combined with readings that challenge the hegemony of Standard English and invisibility of the racial and socioeconomic dimensions of so-called Academic English, allows me to open space to explore and experiment with language practices that are meaningful to them. And as I learn more about students’ language values and practices, it becomes easier to see how HOWL and White supremacy have structured (and continue to structure) my expectations for myself and my students. The more clearly I see them, the more clearly I see myself and the institution and the ways the both I and the institution are shaped by HOWL and White language supremacy.

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