



**Toward a Taxonomy  
of “Small” Genres  
and Writing Techniques  
for Use in Writing  
Across the Curriculum**

**Richard E. Young**



**PRACTICE & PEDAGOGY**

Series Editor, Mike Palmquist

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# **Toward A Taxonomy of “Small” Genres and Writing Techniques for Use in Writing Across the Curriculum**

Collected by Richard E. Young

The WAC Clearinghouse  
[wac.colostate.edu](http://wac.colostate.edu)  
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The WAC Clearinghouse, Fort Collins, Colorado 80523

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## Series Editor's Introduction

In 1984, with funding from the Buhl Foundation, Richard Young and Joann Sipple conducted a series of writing-across-the-curriculum workshops with the faculty of Robert Morris College in Pittsburgh. For a number of years, Richard – like other WAC scholars – had been considering the difficulties faced by disciplinary faculty who wanted to use writing in their courses but were deterred by the investment of instructional time that would be required to do so in a significant way. In a recent conversation, Richard told me that the key issue was “how to get faculty involved in WAC without increasing their burdens.” His response was to follow the lead of other WAC scholars, such as Elaine Maimon, Toby Fulwiler, and Art Young, who had established the writing-to-learn movement.

“The question I asked was whether we could get faculty to use writing in unconventional ways – ways that didn’t require them to invest a great deal of time in responding to student writing but that would nonetheless give students both an authentic writing task and feedback on their writing,” he told me. Richard brought this concept to faculty from across the disciplines at Robert Morris College, asking them not only to consider some of his ideas for “small genres” but also to develop and share their own activities. The result, he told me, “was quite wonderful.” It is also the basis for the collection of activities found in this document.

In the spring of 1987, while I was taking a course in instructional theory and practice from Richard, he shared a type-written manuscript containing the Robert Morris activities with me and the other members of our class. I kept it, along with my notes from the course. Earlier this year, during a workshop I led at the National Conference on Student Writing and Critical Thinking in Agriculture,<sup>1</sup> I shared the manuscript with the workshop participants. It was well received and I had so many requests for it that I asked Richard for permission to publish it in the WAC Clearinghouse.

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://wac.colostate.edu/resources/wac/proceedings/> for the proceedings.

Richard asked me to encourage those of you who read this collection to contribute to it. If you have your own “small genres” that you would like to share, please send them to me at [Mike.Palmquist@ColoState.edu](mailto:Mike.Palmquist@ColoState.edu). I’ll add them to the document.

The spirit of cooperation and sharing that motivated Richard Young to create this document in the mid-1980s is similar to the spirit that brought about the WAC Clearinghouse. I hope you’ll share your “small genre” activities with us.

– Mike Palmquist, October 2003





## **Preface**

What follows are some instances of writing tasks that seem particularly appropriate to writing-across-the-curriculum programs, along with an explanatory statement. (If the explanatory statement is drawn from a published source, the full bibliographic citation is given.) Your task is to continue the list that has been started below; the easiest way to do this is to jot down ideas as they occur to you, particularly while you are reading, rather than setting aside a chunk of time to be devoted exclusively to the task. The goal is a series of ideas that can serve as a resource for teachers designing courses in writing-across-the-curriculum programs.”

– Richard E. Young, 1984



## The Small Genres

1 Reports, etc. that imitate models of good prose in the discipline and extended definitions of concepts central to the definition—"only in the writing class can students learn to demystify the academic language that they have come to college to learn, the very language that will bar them from knowledge if they cannot imitate and ultimately control it." Pat Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, *Writing across the Curriculum Textbooks*, *Rhetoric Review* 3/2 (Jan., 1985) p 206.

2 Writing assignments that ask the student to write for members in his discipline or profession – "an important writing-across-the-curriculum premise, namely, that disciplines are constituted by their discourses and that students must learn, in Mina Shaunessy's words, "the rituals and ways of winning arguments in academe..." *ibid.*, 208.

3 Summaries of articles, then syntheses of several articles, then critiques of arguments – "Students improve their understanding of the reading by writing, first, summaries of individual pieces, then syntheses of the material from several pieces on the same topic, and finally critiques of authors' arguments. Writing summaries is essential to academic writing of any kind. It is also much more difficult than someone who has not tried to teach it might imagine. It forces students to confront problem of comprehension organization I quotation, paraphrase, and plagiarism. While not in itself a form of expressive writing, the summary is an excellent addition to the invention process. Synthesis forces students to combine sources and begin to see and interpret larger themes. Again, this is an important step in developing writing that is based on reading. It sends students back to their sources with an analytical point of view." *Ibid.*, 212. (of Bloom's hierarchy of cognitive objectives) For a text that provides instruction in this sequence of writing practices, see C. Bazerman, *Reader*: (Houghton Mifflin, 1981).

4 The journal – "Journals 'work' now for most students in my classes because we use them actively, every day to write in, read from, and talk about – in addition to whatever private writing students do on their own. These everyday journal writes take the place of other routine writing assignments from pop quizzes to book reports. Journal writing in class stimulates student discussion, starts small group activity, clarifies hazy issues, reinforces learning experience, and stimulates student imagination. Toby Fulwiler, "The Personal Connection: Journal Writing across the Curriculum," in *Connections*, ed. Toby Fulwiler and Art Young (Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1982).

5 The problem statement: When students ask for an appointment to discuss a problem they are having with course material, ask them to write out as precisely as they can the question(s) that they would like you to respond to. The technique not only saves conference time but encourages students to work through the often fuzzy sense of puzzlement to a clearer idea of what is bothering them. Sometimes the exercise will enable them on their own to the solution that they were hoping you would supply, since a well elaborated problem statement is a partial description of the solution sought. For the theory and pedagogy underlying this assignment, see Richard E. Young, Alton L. Becker, and Kenneth L. Pike, *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1970), Chaps 4 and 5; Young, "Problems and the Composing Process," in *Writing: Process, Development and Communication* (Vol. 2 of *Writing: The Nature, Development, and Teaching of Written Communication*), ed. Carl H. Frederiksen and Joseph F. Dominic (Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1981); Young, "Analyzing and Formulating Problems," in *What Makes Good Writing Good*, ed. William E. Coles, Jr. and James Vopat (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath, 1985).

6 Before a written test pass out test questions and say that the test will consist of two of the questions randomly selected. Students can be encouraged to write out the answers to all the questions – working alone but perhaps more productively in groups since the group might insist that the work not be done in a casual manner.



7 Paraphrase as a way of helping students acquire an understanding of esoteric jargon in a discipline. It is not sufficient to ask them to repeat the definition of the term, though word-for-word definition coupled with paraphrase might be superior to either: used alone, since the former insures that the student has in some sense “understood” the term and has acquired something to paraphrase. Compare “knowing” and “comprehending” in Bloom’s *Taxonomy*, Vol. 1.

8 A preliminary sketch for a project as a means for helping the student to a greater clarity about the project; as a means for improving teaching and especially counseling; as a means for helping the student in the planning and pacing of the project and as a result reducing plagiarism.

9 If students are asked to keep a journal for the course, one type of useful entry might be definitions of technical concepts in the course as they arise. Comments on methods of definition (e.g., genus-species, operational, instantiation, etc.) with model examples would not only clarify the nature of the task but help to cultivate sophistication about the nature of definition. The task serves to increase the student’s understanding of the essential concepts in the course, increases the student’s opportunities to write in the context of the course, and cultivates skill in definition.

10 Doing a survey of a sports medicine program, analyzing physical resources, management organization, and the presenting of recommendations along with justification of these proposals. This allows the student to apply basic knowledge and utilize skills in analysis and summarizing of materials.

11 Developing a report dealing with the evaluation of injured athletes describing condition, recommendation of treatment, follow-up, to higher control indications of treatment. Being able to use and decipher professional jargon. This allows students to read and understand medical reports along with their organization and logic.

**12** Development of “in-out basket” types of exercises so the student will assume the role and behavior of an administrator in terms of completing and sending out written work to the appropriate parties. This exercise allows the student to utilize organizational concepts, set priorities for work, being forced to write memos and letters, initiating action and corresponding with other professionals and colleagues in the field. These exercises would include decisions and responses so writing is done with a purpose. These exercises would include:

- *budget* – how much, categories, justify spending, whereto spend, how to spend the budget.
- *human resource management* – hiring, firing, discipline, evaluation of personnel, writing narrative descriptions of behavior.
- *handling questionnaires/letters* from fellow professionals, working on committees, handling evaluation of athletes from professional teams, composing letters to physicians.
- *setting up departmental reports* to higher authority in department. Develop outline – how to handle logic.
- *writing interdepartmental memos* to – maintenance, student health services, to students, describing problems.
- *organization of daily, weekly, monthly schedule* (itinerary)
- *writing outline* of professional presentation to students.
- *ability to develop outline of meeting* (department) pertaining to staff, clients.
- *responding to critical memo* – situation where the sender did not know the facts. Problem is, the sender is an administrative superior and the writer must justify the situation with facts and *tact* in writing a reply. This helps to develop organizational argumentative and survival skills.

**13** Presentation of case histories where students must write response, first without class discussion of problem, then after class discussion to write about problem. The goal here is to have students learn how the opinions of others can change a point of view and to influence emotions and feelings.

**14** For a brief speaking assignment, 3 - 5 minutes on specific professional topic of choice, the student must write down notes and stick to development of a topic within a period of time. Then the student will analyze notes and evaluation presentation and justify self-evaluation in writing the presentation along with a peer evaluation of the presentation.

**15** Writing an essay, 250 words or less suggesting ways that a professional sports team (Pittsburgh Pirates) could increase attendance. This assignment is given after students have learned what promotion is and how promotional techniques are used. Students are given various articles in handout form, to read and analyze and may synthesize some of this information into the essay.

**16** Compilation of a “current trends” bibliography dealing with sports marketing. Students compile by notebook entry contemporary articles dealing with sports marketing, news stories relating to promotional techniques, etc. Each student turns in a list of sources he or she has collected throughout the semester and the list is compiled and a composite list returned to each student for his or her future reference.

**17** Letter writing geared for the purpose of introduction and research gathering. Each student will write letters introducing himself/herself and asking for information and assistance in relation to the student’s marketing plan.

**18** Written Brainstorming. Students will write down “Brainstorming” solutions to a case study exercise. Students will work in groups of three and write down any and all suggestions offered by group members. Each student will write the list and, after brainstorming has been completed, each list will be reviewed by the group to determine if there was a comprehension of what was being said. Purpose is to develop a writing/thinking discipline to generate understanding of what was said by others – not just your own ideas.

**19** “Blind Faith” – Pass out an article (handout) to each class member and ask them to carefully read the article. After each student has had an opportunity to read the article, assign a writing project unrelated to the handout, but asking them to answer the assignment utilizing the handout as their resource and justification. Let them begin, after 10 – 15 minutes tell them to stop and ask them what they thought of the assignment. They should have experienced some difficulty and confusion – but have gone ahead and attempted to write the assignment. Students and instructor discuss the situation and should come to the following conclusions:

- The connection (logic) involved in reading and writing where analysis and synthesis is required.
- The importance of logically arranging and organizing before attempting to write – in other words: “Don’t write as you go along have an understanding and direction before starting to write.

**20** Content Analysis – newspapers, books – looking for specific references, perhaps even a word. Example: Victorian attitude toward “sex” word sex in journals, magazines, newspapers.

**21** Essay questions that require the student to use historical (data) evidence to prove or support a thesis – then draw his conclusion based upon the evidence introduced.

**22** Cause-effect assignments – arranging causes in order of most prominent to least or some variation thereof.

**23** Summation of movies used in class – or analysis of movies.

**24** Put yourself in place of \_\_\_\_\_. You write the law!! (given the pol. environment).

**25** Pictures without captions. Students are challenged to write captions. Discuss the pictures and re-write captions. I use acclaimed photos of historical events – example: Sunday morning in a mining camp; child labor; lynchings, etc. Also, political cartoons may be used.

**26** Old radio shows – have the students place the content into the historical context. Example: humor, or lack thereof, in the 1930's; World War II shows; TV in the 1950's – “happy people with happy problems.”

**27** In the fall, I plan to have students exchange and read much of the writing that is produced in class. I will ask them to correct, critically, the work of their classmates.

**28** Journals maintained throughout the semester with specific responses to three or four structured topics (e.g. ) for literature courses, students respond to these: (1) emotional response; (2) summary of main point of literary work; (3) literary device/element particularly noticeable in this literary work; (4) definition of problem between reader, writer, and text caused by the work.

**29** Response to a short sequence of on the subject being discussed – the purpose is to draw students deeper into the subject area.

**30** Graphic description of a plan for communicating ideas on subject: Issue trees, flow charts, other graphic designs.

**31** Annotations (particularly for professional writing) of sources consulted in a project whereby students define purpose and scope of the work and offer an evaluative statement about the value of the work in relation to the class project.

**32** Group Report Statements. Small groups appoint a recorder who combines responses in a small group discussion and then reports in writing what those responses are.

**33** Plans for Large Projects. Answers to a sequence of questions (a heuristic procedure) for composing for the benefit of a given audience.

**34** Conditions in the securities markets change frequently due to political, economic or social factors. Stock prices, in particular, move up or down in response to the changing market conditions. This volatility in stock prices can be observed throughout any given semester. Students would benefit by periodically summarizing: a.) current market conditions, b.) how stocks and other security prices are affected by these conditions, and c.) how various industries are affected by the changes.

Students are required to play an investment game during the semester which attempts to mimic real life long and short positions in the stock market. The students have approximately ten minutes of classroom time each week to evaluate their portfolios and plan additional investment strategies. To encourage an honest effort on each students' part and provide an incentive to use realistic strategies, a journal regarding the game plan and evaluation of past decisions should be kept by each group (three or four students).

To provide an additional stimulus for keeping a journal, as well as another learning experience, one group should periodically (perhaps twice during the game period of ten weeks) evaluate another group's journal. This method of "public writing" serves several functions:

- students learn through other students' strategies
- students learn to write for their peers – a necessary, but often, disliked requirement for any job
- students should learn how to criticize constructively (rather than destructively)
- students should learn to accept peer criticism

- less work for the teacher

**35** Transfer to own situation: Students should consider some investment that may be particularly useful in their own financial planning (or someone they may be interested in advising.) Students should be required to report on this investment, ongoing project throughout the semester – how they would go about investing, why they chose a particular type of security, tax implications determining whether this particular type of security is risky, priced according to the market requirements, etc. For example, an individual beginning a new career should also investigate retirement plans, such as an IRA. Then the individual must decide what type of investment would best fit his or her needs for the retirement plan, that is, does he or she want low interest bonds and therefore low risk, etc. The transfer to personal interest should provide the student stimulation for studying Investment Analysis.

**36** Analysis of stocks may determine if a particular security is over – or underpriced. Students should be assigned a particular security, study the characteristics of the security and determine if it is mispriced. A report on this study in place of a written exam, should provide the student more insight into pricing a particular security in addition to the amount of research and time that is necessary to analyze securities.

**37** Numerous articles, written for the practitioner, are available in financial journals. The students should be responsible for reading these articles from the journals and summarizing the contents of the articles. Reading the articles causes an awareness in the student, that is, a realization that this material is used in the securities' industry. By summarizing the material, the student should begin to think in terms of how this information is useful to him. Here, as before, classmates should evaluate each other's writings.

**38** Have students prepare examination questions which may be used on quizzes, midterms and finals. Here, the instructor will gain some insight as to whether the students have

grasped the main concepts for a topic. Also, the students will more carefully evaluate their notes, since it is their own exam they are composing.

**39** Survey: Students should survey individuals outside of the classroom to determine which securities in the market are considered most important for financial planning and provide a brief written summary of their findings. This can aid the student to determine what is important for his own analysis.

**40** Innovations: Recently the market has been flooded with new types of securities: options, futures, options on futures, etc. Students should consider what type of investment they would introduce, why this investment should be considered and what contribution might this investment have for investors.

**41** I require practically no writing. However, I have asked students to prepare written responses to assigned articles and, on occasion, to spontaneously introspect about a particular lecture issue, requesting them to “take five minutes to write down memories about \_\_\_\_.” In both writing instances students are asked to subsequently share their written ideas within their small discussion groups of four to six people.

- My reasons or rationale for the writing:
- Writing commits one to an idea – forces one to focus.
- Assures diversity (usually by responses).
- If they didn’t write them down there would be a tendency to “follow the leader,” i. e., mimic what the first person says.
- Group members receive experience in listening and gaining a sensitivity to the experience of others – in addition to that which is presented in my lectures or in text.

**42** Write a critique of a television program which explores a major issue in education, such as the ABC report on the status of education in the United States and the NBC “white



paper” on the problems of working women. Or, write a summary of the program.

43

Write about an experience in which you have had to deal with a difficult on-the-job problem, such as a classroom experience involving discipline or motivation. Or, write about experiences in the office, such as dealing with sexual harassment.

44

Read a case study which structures a problem relating to a current issue. Write an analysis of the problem, evaluate the pros and cons, and project the possible outcome, such as the case in West Virginia involving a teacher who is accused by her students of being psychologically unfit to teach.

45

Respond in writing to a “what if...” situation which projects a futuristic event. For example: What if voice-activated computers become standard equipment in offices in the next five years?” Write an analysis of how this event may affect your job, curriculum, and discipline.

46

Respond to an “I feel...” situation, which involves an educational issue that affects you deeply, such as the low prestige of business teachers. Select an issue that evokes negative feelings; then select an issue that evokes positive feelings.

47

Write a series of questions which can be used to interview employers concerning their hiring of office workers – what they look for during the interview, what standards they demand in the skill subjects, what educational background they prefer, and so on.

48 Visit another teacher's classroom and observe a class in session. Write your reaction to the class and evaluate the learning, students, and teacher. Then visit another teacher's classroom, look for the same things, and compare this visit with your first.

49 Write your philosophy of education at the beginning of the course; write your philosophy of education at the end of the course. Identify any changes and try to explain how they came about. Compare your philosophy of education with other teachers in the class.

50 View a picture of an office at the turn of the century. View a picture of a modern office. Contrast the differences in equipment, environment, appearance, and personnel.

51 Write what you think would happen if secretaries were to disappear from the work force. Structure one day in the office.

52 Book Reports

53 Reports on specific topics – could be individual or group project.

54 Summaries and critiques of articles – magazines, newspaper, etc.

55 Keep journals

56 Do case studies – individual or group project.

57 Summarization of class notes.

58 Give copies of instructor's notes to students and have students comment on them.

59 Summaries of material read in the classroom.

60 Problem solving – analyze problems through writing.

61 Vocabulary – comprehension, paraphrase

62 Speaking assignment

63 Students will be asked to observe a particular problem in their environment and formulate a simple hypothesis. They will be expected to follow the steps of the scientific method in testing the hypothesis. Controls will be included in the testing. The students in class will read each other's writing. The instructor will then comment on several of the writings.

64 The instructor will present various sets of experimental data. The student will describe the type of statistical test which best validates each data set and given reasons why that

particular test was chosen.

**65** The student: will be asked to write several short paragraphs on the epidemiology of one of the diseases of the modern day such as cancer, AIDS, or herpes. Factors such as age, occupation, life style, etc. should be included and their relationship to the disease process must be stated.

**66** The student will be asked to keep a record of everything he or she ate for a day. The instructor will present the student with an abridged list of the calories found in foods and the student will calculate the calories taken in on that day. The student will determine if his or her diet was adequate for the calories given off per day. The student will then comment on whether his daily diet was adequate for his or her weight, height and age. Students will compare their results.

**67** A movie dealing with diseases of the mind will be shown, The student will be asked to write several paragraphs on various aspects of the diseases; namely, social, psychogenic, chemical, biological, etc. Several students will be asked to read their viewpoints in class.

**68** A paper consisting of approximately five pages on a chosen science topic will be required. This paper will be written in scientific journal format. The student will present the topic of his paper to the instructor early in the term along with adequate references. The student will prepare an outline if the topic is satisfactory to the instructor. Several rough drafts will be written by the student prior to the final draft.

**69** Brainstorm questions at the end of each chapter of the text will be prepared by the student. Several students will be asked to read in class their solution to the problem. The instructor will then read his answer to the question in class. A short discussion might follow.

**70** The student will be asked at the end of each class period to summarize what was learned that day. The instructor will also write along with the students. He or she will read his summary to the class and the students will rewrite their summary as an assignment.

**71** Writing the proper order of operations for all problems involving more than one arithmetic operation.

**72** Writing the step-by-step procedure in all multi-step algebraic problems from basic algebraic simplification to the solution of first-degree equations.

**73** Identify the problem under consideration in written form and then proceed to the written procedures for that type of problem.

**74** Identify the error in a given incorrect solution and write an explanation of what was done wrong and how it should have been done.

**75** Writing statements of equality in words for applications and using these written statements to generate algebraic equations from which solutions are then generated.

**76** Writing summaries at the end of “key” classes...classes in which ideas and procedures “critical” to future algebraic computations are discussed.

**77** Answer the following questions in written form. “What kind of problems are giving you trouble?” This question would be asked of the class before a test to determine review material and after the test for determination of remedial work.

- 78 Writing short statements predicting how basic algebraic computations might be used in future algebraic computations and business applications.
- 79 Ending lectures before time has expired, then having students write summaries of the main points, and finally having them share their summaries with each other to update and review the points. – R. Young
- 80 Stopping during an interesting discussion and having everyone, including the instructor, write down what they would say next. Allows focusing of arguments. – Elaine Maimon
- 81 Assigning case studies of typical problems to be analyzed, with written analysis and recommendations brought to the class by each student. These cases are then discussed in groups to refine the analysis and agree on a consensus recommendation. The groups then are given roles to play. One group acts as a management consultant. The other groups are assigned the roles of principal individuals in the case. After a 15-minute role play, individuals stop and write a summary of the effect of the recommendations from the point of view of the role they played. Students also write a summary of what they have learned.
- 82 Similar to above, but what is presented is a draft version. This is designed to be rewritten and expanded based on group discussion. Success of this (which I have not had) requires structured ways for group members to present non-evaluative feedback, such as checklists for them to fill out. (Suggestion for success from E. Maimon).
- 83 Conduct a debate. Where an issue or subject is being discussed which clearly has (at least) two sides, divide class into two. Have one side write arguments in favor of a point (either prior to or during class) and the other side write

arguments in opposition to the point. Then conduct the debate as a class discussion. It is possible for this to be used for simple issues, like course topics, e.g., “Should a company purchase a Database Management System package?”

**84** An individual or group analyzes a real company or organization and proposes a solution to solve problems. I have students design information systems for companies which focus on decisions to be made, attributes of information required to make the decisions, the location of appropriate data, and a proposal for a system to solve the problem.

**85** To encourage students to appreciate the relevance of information which is external to the firm, especially in the strategic planning process, ask students to choose a particular company, then bring one “current” article review per week to class. The review should have a short written summary and a paragraph or two explaining how the article relates to the company’s strategic planning. It is unusual to find specific articles on an individual firm. I encourage any kind of article as long as relevance can be described, even if slightly exaggerated (e.g., same industry, competition, government actions, severe weather, etc.).

**86** In computer programming, before writing a program,

1. Write an English paragraph outlining the main purpose of the program and the purpose and procedures of each subroutine.
2. Write a Pseudocode description of the program algorithm.
3. Code the program.

The problem this addresses is that students want to code immediately without thinking through the logic. They make serious logic errors because of their haste, and the errors are often very difficult or impossible for them to recognize. When one requires a flowchart or pseudocode with the program, invariably these documents are produced the program is written, and contain the same logic errors.

**87** In a quantitative, problem-oriented field such as Quantitative Business Analysis, instead of having students solve a problem, let them start with a technique, and write a short description of how that model could be used to solve some problem they have had on a job. They should present an overall description of the problem, where they would obtain necessary data, and what improvements they might expect. This is especially useful in a course whose lectures and textbook emphasize the procedures involved in solving quantitative models. Students tend to avoid the more unstructured issues of where and how a technique should be used.

**88** Stopping and asking students to write down questions, the answers to which would enable them to solve a difficult problem. Then progressively work backwards with the new questions until a simple enough set of questions arises which students can answer.

**89** Stopping after an involved presentation and asking students to imagine that the person next to them was unfamiliar with the material and just walked in. Have the students write down one “dumb” question that this person might ask. (Students often avoid asking questions which appear to be “dumb.”)

**90** On my first day with the Business Ethics class I asked each student to write on a piece of paper their concept of who was responsible for the Union Carbide disaster in India.

**91** After completing the section of the course on Pricing in Principles of Marketing, I conducted a writing exercise. I showed them a book by a renowned author published by Batsford, and then one of my books by the same author. I then asked the students to write down all of the factors which I should consider in setting my price.



92 In the past I have not required a term paper in my capstone Transportation course. This year I announced that a paper was required, and I got the best set of papers I have ever received from a class. Working with a local professional group, I was able to announce to the students that the best paper submitted would receive a \$750 award, and the second best paper would receive \$500!

93 Ask students to combine sources and they will begin to see and interpret larger themes. Again, this is an important step in developing writing that is based on reading. It sends students back to their sources with an analytical point of view. Ibid, 212 (of. Bloom's hierarchy of cognitive objectives).

94 The journal – Journals “work” now for most students in my classes because we use them actively, every day to write in, read from, and talk about – in addition to whatever private writing students do on their own. These everyday journal writes take the place of other routine writing assignments from pop quizzes to book reports. Journal writing in class stimulates student discussion, starts small group activity, clarifies hazy issues, reinforces learning experience, and stimulates student imagination.” From Toby Fulwiler, “The Personal connection: Journal Writing across the Curriculum,” in *Language Connections*, ed. Toby Fulwiler and Art Young (Urbana, Ill: NCTE, 1982).

95 Writing a report on a case analysis to be presented orally to the class.

96 In the case of two or more ethical theories, ask the students to compare and/or contrast them, following the principle of symmetry.

97 Class discussions of ethical theories are encouraged but restricted to students that bring their points in writing.

- 98 Simply copy crucial passage into your note book. Observe movement of logic, punctuation etc.
- 99 Translate crucial passage into your own language as carefully as possible. Be true to meaning, imagery, and tone.
- 100 Write a descriptive summary of a work into an entry suitable for *T.V. Guide* or a movie synopsis in a popular newspaper. “Janet Leigh Takes Shower; the rest is history.”
- 101 Find the connection between two obviously dissimilar things – wheelbarrow and life; a bee extracting nectar and war; love and a pup tent; a wall and human relationships.
- 102 Write a cliff notes type introduction to a work suitable for beginning literature students.
- 103 Write the copy and do the art work for a movie poster advertising a poem or book you have read.
- 104 Draw a cartoon illustrating the rhetorical situation of a poem.
- 105 Translate a captionless cartoon into your own language.
- 106 Describe a book for a descriptive bibliography for a newsletter suitable for high school students.

- 107 Write a film treatment for a work – how would you turn literacy narrative into cinema.
- 108 Write a short encyclopedia article on a term, author or work.
- 109 During a classroom argument, summarize your opponent’s point of view fairly and strongly show it to your opponent and discuss it.
- 110 As a third party to a particularly crucial classroom discussion, summarize the major participants’ points of view and show them to the people.
- 111 Translate a crucial passage in a play into narrative, appropriate for a novel or vice versa.
- 112 On a particular issue list in three columns what is interesting, positive, and negative about the idea.
- 113 (For further development) write a critique, summary, analysis, or review of a work.
- 114 Summarize a classroom argument into an epigram (this would work equally well for a literary work).
- 115 Write what you think are the aims, goals or objectives of a character in literature.
- 116 Write an imaginary dialogue between two characters debating a particularly thorny literary issue – i.e.

subjectivity versus objectivity.

**117** Simulation of quarterly reports by managers. Each manager must write not more than a two page [missing] operations they were responsible for. [They should explain] where they failed, what went wrong, how they intend to correct, and how they will take advantage of future problems.

**118** Creative writing assignments that pertain to the content of subject courses. Poems, essays, short stories about a topic related to the course subject help the student see the subject differently, more creatively. Working through a poem, etc., a student might get an insight into problems, issues or values related to the subject area that he or she hasn't been able to deal with in any other way. See "Considering Values: The Poetic Function of Language," in *Language Connections*, ed. Toby Fulwiler and Art Young (Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1982).

**119** Narrative assignments that go beyond journal writes. The student writes a narrative of events connected to a process of learning/discovery whether through writing a paper or classroom discussion or Narration and Understanding even an exam. See "Shaping Experiences: Ibid.

**120** For science courses students analyze an article from a professional journal in class in groups of three or four. Then the instructor critiques the article and discusses the article in class. Students critique a second article chosen by a fellow student. The critiques are shared in class. This assignment helps the student get involved with what is happening in the discipline right now which gives him an appreciation of the real world significance of the field and the content he or she is studying in class. "...approach introduces student to the relationship between scientific methodology and scientific writing." "Reconciling Readers and texts," Ibid., p. 150.

**121** To increase reading comprehension, the instructor may give students questions to answer about a text. These questions should emphasize interpretative and applied knowledge of readings as well as literal. See “What Every Educator should know about reading research.” Ibid.

**122** In a course designed to teach students from various disciplines how to write in their profession, have students go out and interview someone in their profession and see him/her in the context of the job and assign students a resume and cover letter directed to the individual they interviewed. Also , the interview could be the basis of later writings if you have students ask what kind of writing the professional does at his or her job. An idea of Tom Huckin, Carnegie Mellon University, Spring, 1985.

**123** In a professional writing class:

- a. students must write a memo if they need an extension for an assignment; some of my students have written six to eight memos of this type, which I glance at but don't grade.
- b. for each assignment, students write an audience analysis to explain the thinking behind their decisions about audience; I collect them but don't grade them: it helps develop audience awareness (and to link pathos and logos).

**124** Brainstorming exercises – students write down ideas in class; teacher collects and perhaps scans but never grades.

**125** Rich Enos' famous “response statements” – very popular; Rich gives students a question that forces them to organize and synthesize their thinking on a difficult issue; stimulates original thinking and helps students learn the material; they are just one page long, so Rich takes little time evaluating them.

# 126

Elaine Maimon's ideas at a talk at Robert Morris College in Pittsburgh:

- a. at the end of a class, ask students to sum up what went on during the class session (for five minutes); collect but don't read.
- b. during class, discussions can heat up. Stop the class and ask students to write down what they are thinking about, then resume discussion.
- c. stop a lecture and ask students to jot down ideas they're having, then ask them to share them with others in the room.

# 127

Free Writing: Especially good at the beginning of a composition course, free writing helps "the beginning student writer get it down on paper, perhaps for the first time. The emphasis is on the student himself, what he has to say in his own voice. They are intended as a catalyst to get you and your students started and to give you ideas to stimulate your own ideas .... Have your students write for ten minutes without stopping or thinking about what they'll say next. The important thing is to keep the words flowing across the page. They are not to worry about spelling, punctuation, or usage. If they can think of nothing to say tell them to write 'I've got nothing to say,' over and over, until something occurs to them." (Dan Kirby and Tom Liner, *Inside Out*, Boynton/Cook 1981 p. 36.)

# 128

Variation: "For students practiced at free writing, read them a poem or a brief prose passage and have them free write about it without planning or preparation of any kind. This exercise is a way to get those gut-level reactions to a piece down on paper. The purpose is to get feelings and ideas out that can then sometimes be ordered, with more thinking and talking into a more complete paper." (Dan Kirby and Tom Liner, *Inside Out*, Boynton/Cook 1981 pp. 36-37).

# 129

Portrait: This experience also encourages close observation and recording details. Have each student observe one of his classmates but without letting that person know he or she is the subject of the exercise. Tell them they are to

concentrate on details that make their subject unique and interesting. Then they are to paint a verbal picture without using his or her name. Read these verbal pictures aloud and guess the identity of the subjects. (Kirby and Liner, *Inside Out*, p. 42).

**130** The Believing Game and the Doubting Game: This Lee Odell variation of Peter Elbow's concept can be used in almost any course. The student simply chooses, for example, the theme of chapter, the main idea of an article, the argument of any scientist or statesman and writes two paragraphs about it. In the first paragraph, the student suggests the possible ways he or she believes the proposition or theme. In the second paragraph the student presents a statement of the ways in which he or she doesn't believe the writing. This allows students to examine their own knowledge of an issue, their beliefs, and their ability to build an argument. (Paper delivered by Lee Odell at CMU Rhetoric Conference in 1978).

**131** Letters: Letters force students to write to an audience of the teacher's or student's choice and then familiarize themselves with audience constraints in a genre with which they are familiar. Having students write to each other explaining something they have read forces them to comprehend, analyze, explain and sometimes synthesize while keeping their audience in mind.

**132** Problem Statements: Problem statements force students to understand and explain a problem they are studying. They are economical and allow students to compare their work to previously established criteria. "One of the most basic reasons for writing which students, academic writers, journalists and business people share is to discuss and deal with a problem.... But many times the more important part of the problem-solving process is defining the problem itself and deciding what your goal...is." (Linda Flower, *Problem Solving Strategies for Writers*, Harcourt Brace, 1981, p. 19).

**133** A Profile: These appear frequently in the newspaper and offer a format for checking student knowledge of important people in a field or a literary character they are reading, and allowing students to extrapolate from given information. Headings that can be responded to include “name,” “age,” “residence,” “professional background,” “favorite book,” “movie I could see any time,” “book I’d like to get around to reading one of these days,” “first job,” “major influence,” and “accomplishment of which I am proudest.”

**134** The following method is described in an unpublished paper by Marilyn Eanet and Anthony Manzo titled “REAP – A Strategy for Improving Reading/Writing/Study skills.” The authors recommend this strategy as a way to improve analytical reading skills and enhance students’ thinking and writing skills. The REAP strategy involves teaching students to write seven kinds of annotations. Because each annotation requires a different approach to the text, they teach valuable reading and writing strategies.

**Annotations:**

- *The heuristic annotation:* the goal of this annotation is to hint at the main idea of the piece of writing and to provoke a response. To write it, the student needs to find the main point of the text and then choose a quotation that hints at or states this point in a provocative way.
- *The summary annotation:* the goal is to write a brief, clear, and concise synopsis of the main ideas and their relationships in a text.
- *The thesis annotation:* the goal is to answer the question “What one idea or point is the author trying to put across to the reader?” Students write a short, clear statement.
- *The question annotation:* the goal is to direct the reader’s attention to the ideas the student thinks are most important in the text. This may or may not be the author’s thesis. This annotation answers the question, “What question(s) is the author answering with this piece of writing?”



- *The critical annotation*: the goal is to respond to the author's thesis. The student states the author's thesis and his or her position on it, and then defends or explains the position he or she takes.
- *The intention annotation*: the goal is to find the source of the author's belief system and underlying assumptions. The student writes a brief statement which speculates about the author's likely motive(s) for having written certain things. This annotation often requires sensitive psychological – analysis.

**Uses:** Studies have shown that students read primarily to get the information in a text and subsequently miss the rhetorical context. Information-driven reading is fine for certain texts (math text) but may be ineffective for argumentative and other kinds of texts that demand a richer representation of the entire writing context. These annotations will help students become rhetorical readers because they demand critical, sensitive reading. The annotations can be used to spark class discussion (the heuristic and question annotations seem particularly effective for this), and can indicate to an instructor how well students are understanding certain texts. Because these annotations are short (1-4 sentences), they will not increase an instructor's workload substantially.

**135** The following technique was inspired by an assignment given in Dr. Earl Swank's Strategies (first-year composition) class. Students wrote brief memos to a professor in the history department describing how they wrote a particular assignment. Students' analyses of assignments can be enlightening for two reasons: they tell a teacher if the particular task is accomplishing the goals he or she had anticipated, and they allow students to review and understand how their writing process works. If students compare descriptions, they may learn that their strategies for completing an assignment were less effective than other students.' Such short memos can be used in many ways in a classroom: to describe how a math or chemistry problem was completed; how a field trip related to the course material; to recommend material for an exam or review. They allow the students to take a more active role in a course and also create a more professional, responsible atmosphere in the classroom.

# 136

According to James L. Adam in *Conceptual Blockbusting: A Guide to Better Ideas*, one of the most important capabilities in a creative person is a questioning attitude.” He explains that we lose our natural inquisitiveness because we are discouraged from inquiry and learn to play the “great knowledge game” where a “question is an admission that we do not know or understand something.” Adams cites many techniques for creative inquiry, including one from Imagination by Alex Osborn. Checklist for New Ideas:

- Put to other uses?
- Adapt?
- Modify?
- Magnify?
- Minify?
- Substitute?
- Rearrange?
- Reverse?
- Combine?

Apparently, Professor Osborn put these words on cards and shuffled through them to extend his thinking on a problem. This method could be used in a design class for creative projects or in a biology or chemistry class to encourage scientific inquiry. Such a technique discourages premature closure in problem-solving and shows students that they have a wealth of creative information to draw from inside their own imaginations.

# 137

James Adams also suggests that students be asked to keep a chronological list of their thinking as they solved a problem. Such problem journals can be used to practice certain techniques for creative thinking like the one above (checklist for new ideas) and they provide a detailed record of problem-solver at work. Thus, while solving a problem, a student also comes to understand his own thinking processes and strategies. Teachers can collect the problem journals periodically throughout the term and might choose to reproduce some of the moot; effective problem-solvers’ work, sharing “expert” strategies with the entire class. (from *Conceptual*

*Blockbusting: A Guide to Better Ideas* by James L. Adams, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1974.)

- 138** Writing Assignments among class members:
- a. Whenever disagreement arises during a class discussion, have students write a short argument addressed to those with a different view. Then pair or group students with different views and have them read each other's papers. After they have a chance to discuss the papers, have them revise their own, adding any arguments against the opposing view. The exercise can serve either as the basis for further argument or as the lead-in to an essay assignment.
  - b. When a student is absent from class, she needs more than notes about what went on. Assign two students the task of writing a paragraph to the absent student summarizing what went on in class. Have them give their paragraphs as well as their notes to the student who was absent. Finally, allow the three students a chance to discuss any questions or differences of opinion.

**139** Pre-first drafts—When students are working on any large project, like a research paper or a lab report, give them a block of time (probably at least 40 minutes) to write an informal progress report in the form of a letter to you. Example: after they complete research or gather data, have them answer two questions: what do you want to do in your project? how do you plan to do that? Use these letters as the basis of discussions with the students or read them quickly for a general idea of where the student is going. Their main value comes from forcing the student to think through his assignment in that block of time.

**140** Assignment journal—As students work through major assignments have them keep logs about what they do. They should make an entry for every activity related to their project, gathering a bibliography, taking notes, searching for evidence. Periodically, give them a set of questions that specifically asks for progress in a particular phase of the assignment. For example, halfway through the research time, ask them to explain what they

have learned and what they still need to find out. (adapted from materials provided by Jenny Nelson, Carnegie Mellon University, February, 1985).

# 141

Reading quiz or discussion initiator – This is particularly useful when students start complaining about an assignment’s difficulty before any discussion has occurred. Focus in on a key issue in the reading.

Ask students to explain what the reading told them about that issue by doing the following:

- a. listing details from reading that relate to the issue.
- b. writing a sentence that shows a relationship among those details.
- c. using that sentence as the topic sentence to a paragraph explaining the issue to someone who has not done the reading. Example:  
(After first reading in *1984*) Describe Oceania to someone who has not read the book.

# 142

When using writing as a means of learning a discipline, move from simple writing tasks to complex writing tasks. For example:

- a. Initial assignments might ask students to restate lectures or readings, to demonstrate their knowledge of terms and principles of the discipline.
- b. The next set of assignments might give the students a problematic situation and ask them to apply a specific principle.
- c. The final assignments might ask students to solve a broad problem. Here, they would have to select and apply the appropriate principles.

The increasing difficulty of the learning processes may be manipulated by increasing the difficulty of the writing assignments. Herrington used this model in an economics course. See Herrington, Anne, “Writing to learn: Writing Across the Disciplines,” *College English* 43 (April 1981): 379-87.

# 143

Have students read the journals or diaries of scientists who have made major breakthroughs in their field. In addition to learning facts about the field, this offers students an opportunity to see the context in which

scientists operate, how scientists come to discover “felt difficulties,” what steps scientists take to solve problems and create new theory. The diaries may be good models for what people do when solving problem. This would model the kinds of processes students should be doing in their own thesis writing.

144

Odell gave his students the following diagnostic task: Explain what inferences you would make about a person’s attitudes and personality, simply by observing the bumper sticker on his car. It would be interesting to

carry out this assignment with the class, then question the students about the steps they took to complete the task. (Did they make observations about the car, the person? Did they make associations or compare the person or car with similar persons/cars in their pasts?) This would illustrate the complex demands of even a “simple” writing task. This might help non-writing majors discover that writing is a complex process of learning and discovery that might be useful to them in their own fields. See Odell, Lee “The Process of Writing and the Process of Learning,” *College Composition and Communication* 31 (Feb. 1980) 42-50.

145

In-class analyses of an expert’s revisions. Word processors have made it easy to secure copies of old drafts. Have students look at drafts of an expert writing in his or her own discipline. Looking at the entire paper

may not be necessary – you may concentrate on how one section of a paper is synthesized from raw data and notes and transformed into a finished presentation. This helps students better understand the specific methods and techniques for writing in that discipline, and may help them see the value of revision as well.

146

Understanding your audience – After a topic has been identified specify a potential audience. Describe the audience’s relationship to you as a potential writer and to the topic itself. (Kinneavy, *Writing in the Liberal*

*Tradition*. p 55).

**147** Understanding your audience – Write out a list of characteristics that describe the characteristics of the audience you are addressing: identify the audience’s needs, expectations, knowledge, assumptions, beliefs, prejudices, fears and so on. Which of these characteristics would you consider the dominant one. Tell us how knowing these characteristics helps you mount more persuasive arguments. (Kinneavy, *Writing in the Liberal Tradition*. p 55).

**148** What counts for a fact? – Locate in a popular magazine an ethical problem. Find another treatment of the problem in another source. Have the students compare and contrast the different treatments being careful to note the differences in facts. Decide which facts are closest to the truth and explain the reasons for your choice.

**149** Acknowledging the difference in the ways we explore problems – Ask the student to pick two fields in which he or she has an interest. Ask the student to compare and contrast the methods of investigation in each. Ask the student to identify the subject matter of the discipline and how that subject matter is studied and to what end.

**150** Have the students write an extended definition of “arguing.” What constitutes an argument between friends, professional colleagues, and disciplines?

**151** The value of summarizing – Dave Kaufer and Chris Neuwirth stress the value of having students learn to write sound, logical summaries of controversial issues. They claim that not only does summarizing “distill a wealth of vague impressions” about an issue but it also provides the expert with a method of assessing where he or she should begin to argue in response. Teach the students to summarize in a logical fashion the readings of the course. (for more info see “Integrating Formal Logic and the New Rhetoric: A Four Stage Heuristic” *College English* (1983).

**152** Mastering the descriptive mode while building an awareness of difference between interests and disciplines – Have the student pick within his or her area of special interest a powerful object, structure, or symbol. For instance, for a geologist – a mineral deposit; for the social scientist – a town or a tribe; for the theologian – a religious symbol. Have the student describe in detail his or her choice. List the distinctive features, especially those which differentiate one object, structure or symbol from another. In a class discussion explore with the students the differences in the style of description as it reflects what is being described.

**153** Cultivating “poetic language” the midst of a science-based curriculum – Art Young asked his students at Michigan Technological University to write and then evaluate four “imaginative writes” in response to literature read in class. Three of the imaginative writes were in relation to novels the students had read: (1) a monologue from the point of view of an obnoxious character, (2) a dialogue by two characters that takes place five years after the novel is over, (3) a brief story focusing on one character in a man/woman situation, (4) a poem in the style of their choice.

**154** Cultivating a narrative sense – Assuming that you have assigned journal writing as a component of the course, ask your students to read their journals with an eye toward identifying a problematic situation – money, work, pain, authority, insecurity, failure or perhaps even joy! Ask them to develop a narrative of that problematic situation from the standpoint of an imaginary character.

**155** Focusing on the act of observation – its similarities and differences. Using assignment #20 in *Teaching Composing*, by William Coles, have student write a response statement regarding Shaler’s recollection of his teacher Louis Agassiz. Ask the students to speculate about the meaning of the piece and the role of systematic observation. How would you have felt if you were Shaler with Agassiz as your teacher?









## Toward a Taxonomy of “Small Genres”

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In 1984, with funding from the Buhl Foundation, Richard Young and Joann Sipple conducted a series of writing-across-the-curriculum workshops with the faculty of Robert Morris College in Pittsburgh. For a number of years, Richard – like other WAC scholars – had been considering the difficulties faced by disciplinary faculty who wanted to use writing in their courses but were deterred by the investment of instructional time that would be required to do so in a significant way. In a recent conversation, Richard told me that the key issue was “how to get faculty involved in WAC without increasing their burdens.” His response was to follow the lead of other WAC scholars, such as Elaine Maimon, Toby Fulwiler, and Art Young, who had established the writing-to-learn movement.

“The question I asked was whether we could get faculty to use writing in unconventional ways – ways that didn’t require them to invest a great deal of time in responding to student writing but that would nonetheless give students both an authentic writing task and feedback on their writing,” he told me. Richard brought this concept to faculty from across the disciplines at Robert Morris College, asking them not only to consider some of his ideas for “small genres” but also to develop and share their own activities. The result, he told me, “was quite wonderful.”

*- Mike Palmquist, Series Editor*

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