Occasional Papers: On Writing

Janice Rowan Poley

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THE HOLLYBUSH SERIES
In 1849, Thomas and Samuel Whitney, glassmakers of Glassboro, New Jersey, built Hollybush, an eighteen-room mansion constructed from brown fieldstone. The mid-Victorian gingerbread house has sheltered such distinguished visitors as Colonel Theodore Roosevelt and President Taft.

In 1917, the State of New Jersey purchased Hollybush and twenty-five acres around it. Hollybush serves as the campus home of the presidents of Glassboro State College, and the College's fifth president, Dr. Herman James, and his family currently reside there.

On June 23, 1967, Hollybush was the site of the first summit conference between a President of the United States and a Premier of the Soviet Union, Lyndon B. Johnson and Alexei N. Kosygin.

Dr. George Neff, Professor of Art at Glassboro State College, created his first drawing of Hollybush, in pencil, several years before the summit. From this original work, two drawings were rendered in pen and ink during the conference.

Neff presented the first pen and ink drawing to President Johnson at the White House on July 12, 1967. In August, as a member of a delegation of Glassboro citizens touring Russia, Neff presented a second drawing to a representative of Premier Kosygin in Moscow.

The original pencil drawing now hangs in the Hollybush mansion.
Occasional Papers:
On Writing
They come to us, these young adults, intent on mastering the world.... To master the word is to master a world.... It is mastered through intense engagement with significant ideas and constant work with writing....

—Patricia Simmons Taylor
Writing in College
Occasional Papers: On Writing

A Collection of Essays and Notes by Glassboro State College Faculty

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Fall 1990
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In a very real sense, the writer writes in order to teach himself, to understand himself, and to satisfy himself.

—Alfred Kazin

Preface

Occasional Papers marks the first of a series of publications describing exciting educational activities at Glassboro State College. It is a collection of essays and notes by Glassboro faculty. This issue describes a variety of innovative writing activities taking place in classrooms across the campus. Future issues will explore other educational themes.

Several areas of the College are represented, including Business, Communications, Education, History, Philosophy and Religion, Psychology, Reading, and Sociology. This sharing of ideas on writing is an important part of our collegial academic enterprise.

Occasional Papers: On Writing also marks the culmination of several years of workshops, discussions, and faculty projects dedicated to the improvement of student writing. During the last three years, Glassboro faculty have become more knowledgeable about contemporary writing theory and practice, especially through the Faculty Development and Write to Learn workshops, all of which spurred interest in the use of writing to enhance student learning across the curriculum. A high point in the series was a panel at the May 1989 workshop, at which Glassboro faculty from various disciplines described their writing activities. The writing workshops and faculty interactions about writing provided the impetus for this publication.
Faculty tried out new ideas in their classes and realized that some of their “old” ideas were very interesting to their colleagues. They learned from one another and developed a new sense of collegiality and academic purpose.

Having participated in this dialogue about writing, our faculty are now prepared to reinvestigate and revise their ideas about the place of writing in their own courses and to expand the core of faculty on campus who are involved in improving student writing. They are anxious to continue the exciting interchange of ideas and conversations on writing.

These are some of our plans for the future: more Faculty Development Workshops, more activities sponsored by the Write to Learn Committee, more issues of its excellent newsletter, and the continuation of our campus dialogue about the form and content of education at Glassboro in future issues of *Occasional Papers*.

It is indeed a welcome sign that faculty from many disciplines have contributed to this issue of *Occasional Papers*. I invite our other colleagues at Glassboro to become involved, to contribute to future issues, and to join in the dialogue about education at our College.

*Minna Daskow*

Dean, Liberal Arts and Sciences
Writing enfranchises by giving people access to their own thoughts.

—Elaine Maimon, et al.,
Readings in the Arts and Sciences

Introduction

In recent years, faculty have been exposed to a great deal of new information about the writing process and its connection to critical thinking, and to a variety of pedagogical techniques for using writing to promote learning. It is indeed a pleasure to present the first edition of Occasional Papers, ten contributions by Glassboro State College faculty. These papers describe our faculty members' special applications of this new information on writing as well as some of their reflections on more familiar writing techniques. In the following pages, our colleagues offer strategies for helping students master the language of academic discourse and for finding their own voices as writers and thinkers.

Denis Mercier and David Applebaum present some very interesting uses for journal writing; Diane Hamilton describes the integration of summary writing into a business course; and Martin Itzkowitz, Jo Cohen, and Terence McGuire provide helpful comments on outlines, rewrites, and peer editing.

Marge Tannenbaum shares her ongoing written dialogue with education students; Linda Packman reports on her use of worksheets to help reading students master course concepts; and Mark Hutter relates how his sociology students write a family history paper. Finally, Lynn Nelson details a variety of writing
assignments created by faculty in the Department of Philosophy and Religion.

Each article or note discusses the way a technique is employed within the context of a particular course, but these suggestions about writing may be transferred to other courses as well. Perhaps faculty may want to add some of these techniques to their own writing assignments or modify them to meet special course needs.

We hope that our readers enjoy Occasional Papers and that among the readership we find contributors to future editions. By continuing to share our ideas on course content and successful teaching techniques, we will continue to build an academic community in the true sense of that term.

Acknowledgements

A special thank you to those who made the publication of Occasional Papers possible: to our authors, whose dedication to good teaching is evident in their contributions; to Dean Minna Doskow for her encouragement and support; to the Editorial Board—Virginia Brown, Carl Burrowes, Janet Caldwell, and Mark Chamberlain, a group as remarkable for their intelligent and perceptive comments as for their cooperation; and to Thomas Kloskey, for his insightful editorial comments and his computer wizardry.

We are also indebted to George Neff for granting us permission to use his superb sketch of Hollybush for the cover and to President Herman James for allowing us to link the distinguished Hollybush name with this publication.

Finally, we are most grateful to have obtained Challenge Grant funding for Occasional Papers.

Janice Poley
General Editor
About
the
Author

Diane Hamilton is a Glassboro State College Business School graduate with a specialization in Management Information Systems. She received her M.B.A. from Drexel University, and is currently working on her doctoral dissertation at Temple University in the department of Computer and Information Science. Her research interests include expert systems, decision support systems, and operating room scheduling.

Diane's first contact with the concept of "writing to learn" was at a workshop sponsored by the Challenge Grant and given by Mary Anne Palladino. Diane will become a member of the Write to Learn resource staff this fall.
Learning
Management Information Systems through Writing

Diane Hamilton
I have been using writing as an effective tool for helping students learn complicated material in the field of Management Information Systems. However, the same writing assignment should prove effective for any other course where (1) the material must be learned prior to coming to class, and (2) the material is sufficiently complex so as to require more than a quick reading to ensure comprehension. Below I have described the course, the writing assignment, and the results which I obtained.

The Course
Seminar in Management Information Systems is a senior level course required of all students who major in business administration and choose to specialize in Management Information Systems (MIS). The course is divided into three sections by topic area, and each section is covered using a different teaching methodology. There are three main topic areas included in the course: expert systems, human factors considerations in information systems, and conceptual data modeling. The first four weeks of the course, the expert systems part, is taught by lecture. Then, to reinforce what's covered in the lecture, students must develop a real expert system as a
semester project. Conceptual data modeling is covered during the final four weeks of the course. During this time, students read about a different modeling formalism each week prior to coming to class. Then, during the class period, I review the modeling constructs, and the class, as a group, develops a data model for a practice data set which I provide. The remainder of the course concentrates on the human factors considerations in information systems, and it is during these seven weeks that I utilize writing assignments to help the students learn the material. Prior to the start of each semester, I compile approximately twenty journal articles on computer-human interaction, which students read at a pace of about three per week. In almost every case, this is the students' first exposure to the research literature in their field, and they find it quite difficult to understand for several reasons:

1. Much of the jargon is strange to them, or, at best, they are not completely comfortable with it.
2. Many of the articles describe the results of some experimentation, a process which is unfamiliar to them.
3. The statistical reporting is difficult for them to understand, even though they have had two prerequisite courses in statistical theory and application.

*The Writing Assignment*

To help them comprehend this difficult information, I require that students prepare a summary for each article, no longer than one typed page. The summaries must be prepared using a word processor, and the final document must have been run through a spell checker. (There is a 20-point penalty for misspelled words to encourage adherence to this second directive.) Each week the students are responsible for summarizing three journal articles related to a specific subtopic, e.g., interactive interface design or user satisfaction, and these written summaries comprise 40% of their final semester grade. The other 60% includes the expert system development and class participation. Giving so much weight to the written assignments provides the necessary
motivation to encourage the students to put forth their best effort. There are three reasons why the seminar course includes this type of writing assignment:

1. To distill a fifteen-page journal article into a one-page summary requires that the student read the material carefully in order to determine the essence of the work and the most salient points.

2. Since the class period is devoted to a discussion of the articles, with further clarification of any additional topics mentioned but not fully explained within the articles, the time students must spend carefully reading the articles and preparing the written summary ensures that students will come to class with a good understanding of this basic material.

3. As we are preparing students to enter the world of business, and since an important facet of business communication requires the summarization of written information, the summarization process itself allows the students to gain an important writing skill which will be called upon often during their career.

Once the students prepare their summaries, they don’t merely hand them in and forget about them. First, the summaries act as memory joggers to help students participate in the class discussion. Second, the students receive feedback on their summaries from three different sources—myself and two fellow students. I respond to their summaries in light of the content which they choose to include, as well as their use of proper grammar and spelling. This takes me only a few hours each week. The feedback from other students takes place during the final twenty-five minutes of each class period (class meets one night a week for two hours and forty minutes). During this time the students form into three-person groups and critique the papers of their group members. Note that group membership is different each week to provide the maximum diversity in feedback. The critiquing process includes, at a minimum, both a
comment indicating what the student liked best about each summary and a comment indicating the most significant weakness of the summary. After each student completes a critique for the other group members, the group is required to come to a consensus about how the three summaries should be ranked for quality. This peer review process offers several advantages:

1. Reading two additional summaries for each article after writing one’s own summary reinforces the content of the journal article.
2. Seeing how other people summarized the same material provides illustrations of how to write a “good” summary as well as what would be a “bad” summary.
3. Although I feel that I can provide good feedback regarding the students’ writing (both content and style), each person naturally has a preferred style. Since I might unintentionally prefer one writing style to another, receiving feedback from numerous other people tempers this stylistic bias.
4. Receiving feedback from their peers helps students to realize that this kind of help is worthwhile, and it will certainly be helpful when they enter the business world.
5. Lastly, many students who specialize in Management Information Systems will find work as programmers or systems analysts. These careers generally involve working with a team, and team review and critique are often a part of the job. Doing this in-class exercise helps them to accept criticism appropriately and learn how to give constructive criticism in a tactful manner.

The Outcomes
I have found that the first set of summaries I receive each semester is very deficient in both content and presentation. Although there are always some students who already have excellent writing skills, the average grade for this first set is generally about a 60. Giving the students repeated feedback about how to improve their summarization skills allows them to
improve substantially throughout the semester. The average grade on the last set of summaries is generally about 80, yielding a significant improvement!

The grade differential, however, is not the most important outcome of the writing assignment. As a result of the time and effort expended to compose the summaries, the students really do obtain a considerable understanding of the assigned reading before each class period. Further, they know exactly what they don’t understand. Since the students are all coming to class much better prepared than they would be if I merely asked them to read the articles, I am able to conduct the class discussion at a higher level. Instead of having to lecture to the students on the assigned material, I am able to use the in-class period to expound upon the difficult parts of the article and to take the time to lecture about additional information which is related to the day’s topic. The end result is that much more material can be effectively covered within the seminar course.

_The Students’ Assessment_

I have been using this format for the seminar class for three semesters now, and the students seem as excited about it as I am. At the end of each semester, I have asked them to give me their anonymous comments on the summary writing and group critique process, and they have overwhelmingly responded that (1) the summaries forced them to really read the articles carefully; and (2) the peer critique process, following the general class discussion, significantly improves their understanding of the assigned topic.

Interestingly, very few students have ever mentioned that this forced, repetitive writing had helped them to improve their writing skills. However, I know their writing has improved. Thus, this process has really reinforced my belief that writing can help students learn. In this class, a very simple writing assignment has significantly helped students to learn the subject matter, and as a side effect, they have been able to improve their summarization skills.
About the Author

Martin Itzkowitz earned his M.A. and Ph.D. in English at New York University. He has taught writing, literature, and theatre at colleges such as the University of Minnesota, Temple University, and Pennsylvania State University, and has taught in the Glassboro State College Communications Department since 1986.

He has published articles, reviews, and poetry in journals ranging from Seventeenth-Century News to Salome. Active in theatre since 1971, he has performed in and directed several dozen community and professional productions and also worked professionally in radio, television, and films.
Sentence Outlines for Research Papers

Martin Itzkowitz

A sentence outline, completed to the third level of hierarchy (I.A.I., etc.) and submitted several weeks before a research paper is due, can improve the quality of the final product.

Unlike the topic outline, a sentence outline compels students to articulate their thoughts completely—indeed, prompts them to discover ideas in the first place. It also permits students to see more clearly the distinctions between subordinate ideas and those of like magnitude, thus enabling them to improve the organization of the paper in progress. Finally, a sentence outline more effectively reveals whatever deficiencies there may be in the general development of a thesis and in its specific support.

Properly done, such an outline may be one-quarter to one-third the length of the finished paper and, because of its thoroughness, may be considered the ABD (all but draft) stage of the research.

Early submission of the outline enables instructors to guide students through their projects more effectively—to indicate strengths and weaknesses, to offer highly concrete suggestions, and to head off at the intellectual pass those who stray from theme and thesis. At the very least, such an approach may eliminate the worst unwanted surprises and, to that extent, minimize the all-too-familiar Kierkegaardian approaches to term paper reading—fear and trembling, and sickness unto death.
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About the Author


Mark's wife, Lorraine, is a Reading Specialist. The couple has two children.

Mark is a Professor of Sociology at Glassboro and serves as Coordinator of the Honors Program of the School of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

This article grew out of Mark's personal experience as the son of immigrant parents. It is a version of a longer paper, "Immigration History as Family History: Utilizing Family Histories as a Teaching Technique," in The Teaching of History: Ellis Island and American Immigration, edited by Virginia Yans McLaughlin (Rutgers, 1985).
Family History, Writing, and the Teaching of Sociology

Mark Hutter

Profile of the Students
At Glassboro State College, Sociology of the Family is a lower-level introductory course. There are no sociology prerequisites. The average class has about thirty-five students, the majority of whom have had little exposure to sociology. Most of these students are freshmen and sophomores. However, there are always some students, about twenty percent, who are juniors or seniors. These students have taken sociology courses as well as other courses in the social sciences and in history.

There are some variations in the social backgrounds of the students who take my course. At the main Glassboro campus, the majority are the first members of their families to attend college. Their families are from the working and middle class. Students represent many white, ethnic, Catholic groups of both the "new immigration," mostly Polish and Italian, and the "old immigration," mostly Irish and German. A significant number of the students are Black, with a smaller number of Hispanics, chiefly of Puerto Rican origin.

The Camden Campus of Glassboro State has a student population nearly half Black and half Hispanic (Puerto Rican). Most of them come from the working classes, are generally
older than students at the main campus, and are attending college on a part-time basis.

While the student populations on the Glassboro and Camden campuses are somewhat diverse, I give the same class project assignment in all my Sociology of the Family courses. That assignment is for students to do family histories.

**Advantages of Family History**

There are several advantages in having students do a family history project. The family history projects motivate and appeal to a broad range of students. Some who take the family course have various personal interests in the subject matter; many are not “into” sociology as are the majors. I find that the project also serves as a facilitator for classroom discussions. The somewhat abstract discussions of family structures, dynamics and processes take on a more personal meaning when students can relate them to their own family histories. For example, the student who knows that her Italian grandmother worked at home as a piece-goods textile worker can really appreciate the economic role of the Italian wife in supporting the family during the turn-of-the-century immigration years. And, by discussing her grandmother’s story in the classroom, the student makes an important contribution.

Family history provides insights into historical events and gives them personal meaning as well. Thus, for example, the historical importance of Ellis Island as an immigration processing center gains a personal poignancy if one can interview family members who actually experienced being on a boat that entered New York City’s harbor, and who viewed the symbol of America, the Statue of Liberty, for the first time. I felt deep emotion, for example, when I interviewed my father, who was processed at Ellis Island at the age of ten in 1920. Further, by “creating” documents of this kind, the student can learn about and question historical evidence.

There are two key elements in assigning a classroom family history project. First of all, it makes the student an active rather than a passive participant in the study of the family. Second, the
research is conducted outside the academic setting. Students’ homes and larger communities provide a corrective to the more abstract and theoretical materials found in textbooks. It brings the course subject “home” in a way that the classroom cannot.

By examining the family within the context of the local community, the student can better understand the relationship among events, behavior, and values and attitudes. Students can apply this biographical knowledge of family to larger state, national and global historical issues. C. Wright Mills, in his highly influential book, *The Sociological Imagination* (1959), says that the sociological imagination embodies the primary lesson of the social sciences: “the idea that the individual can understand his own experience and gauge his own fate only by locating himself within his period, that he can know his own chances in life only by becoming aware of those of all the individuals in his circumstances” (1959:8).

The sociological imagination allows the individual to see the inextricable linkage between “personal troubles” and “public issues.” That is, the values cherished by individuals—and felt to be threatened—are related to the values cherished by the larger population, that are also felt to be threatened. Mills emphasizes how personal concerns are often caused by structural changes in personal environment. It is required that one looks beyond these concerns toward structural changes in societal institutions. Mills uses marriage as an example. While a given marriage between a man and a woman may experience personal troubles, the high divorce rate in the society may indicate an underlying structural issue having to do with the institution of marriage and the family and of other institutions that impact upon them. The sociological imagination—and I suspect historians would recognize it too—brings one to an awareness of social structure, of the linkages among a great variety of settings. In my opinion, the use of family history by students may be one technique to sharpen and develop the student’s sociological imagination. Later in this discussion, I will apply family history to the study of one topic in the field of family—immigrant ethnic history.
History of the Family and Family History

When I begin the discussion of family history as a term project, I inform the students of the difference between the history of the family and family history. The history of the family refers to the social/historical investigation of family structures and patterns. It includes within its scope the disciplines of demography, history and sociology. On the other hand, I refer to family history in a more particular manner. Family history is the story regarding the life of a given family over several generations. In class, I talk about family history within the context of students' investigating their own family backgrounds.

The concern I wish to encourage is with the historical dimension of family change within the broader context of societal change. The concern is with the social/historical articulation of such sociological themes as marital and familial gender roles and generational relationships in a given family's history. I am concerned with such historical events as industrialization, urbanization, immigration, economic depression, recession and recovery, wars, and other forms of social disruptions as they impact on the experiences of individuals in families. For example, I suggest an investigation of the impact on the family of the movement to suburban New Jersey communities from such cities as New York, Philadelphia, Camden, and Newark. This family history can then be tied to the curriculum unit on urbanization and suburbanization and the family.

While the course is concerned with changes within the family system itself, the impact of changes through marriages, births, and deaths, I impress upon the students that family history is not genealogy. A family history is much more than a genealogical chart of names and dates. Genealogy is primarily concerned with the cataloguing of biological lineal descent of family generations. A family history may build upon the information found in genealogical charts, but it moves beyond genealogical concerns, placing a family into a broader context and revealing social and historical information about members.

The family historian strives for a broader and more rewarding understanding of family life in the past and of the family relations
with the outside world. It can include discussions on family job history, household structures and living arrangements, major problems, struggles and adaptations to those problems, social, religious, ethnic, and educational activities, and social class experiences. To adequately answer questions generated by these and other discussions, family history relies less on genealogy than on information gathered by interviewing family members, by searching for family records such as naturalization records, marriage certificates, and military records, and by studying family heirlooms, letters, and photographs.

The Family History Term Paper

My expectations concerning the family history term paper are open. The only stipulation that I make is that the students relate the history of their family in some way to larger family patterns discussed in the course. I impress on students that either a genealogy or an autobiography is not acceptable. I jokingly tell them that the only ones interested in when, where, and how their relatives were born, lived, married, and died are other relatives, friends, and the Internal Revenue Service.

The organizing theme of the individual student’s term paper revolves around course topics. Some have done papers relating their family dynamics to macro-level concerns. These include comparing family life in rural as opposed to urban settings; changes in the helping patterns that exist with extended kin; comparisons of ethnic family systems in the “old country” and in America; changing ethnic family patterns; the impact of poverty on the family; and changes in social class that are reflected in changes in the family. Papers dealing with micro-level family concerns have included generational comparisons of dating practices; changing attitudes and behavior regarding working wives; changes in parent-child relationships; the changing role of the elderly in the family; the effect of divorce on the family; family violence; and single parenthood.

Students are told to integrate their family history with materials found in the assigned texts and with classroom discussions. Where appropriate, I suggest other texts, monographs, and journal
articles to the student. The students are asked to relate the sociological and historical analyses in these works to their own family historical analysis.

**Class Procedures**

At the beginning of the semester, I suggest that students make themselves familiar with the structure of the course content as quickly as possible. Using the course syllabus as a guideline, the students are asked to skim through the assigned text and reader for potentially interesting organizing themes.

As I present the beginning lectures of the course, I spend part of the class period indicating how students can integrate lectures and assigned materials into their term paper. This pedagogical technique continues throughout the semester. After the first exam, which covers the "heavy" theoretical materials such as modernization theory and family change, I encourage the students to take an in-depth look at the more substantive Sociology of the Family topics that will be the focus of the balance of the course.

A class period is usually allocated for some informal discussion of students' ideas. I find that in this open-ended atmosphere students are willing to interact both with me and fellow students in a free interchange of topics and ideas. Typical concerns that students wish to pursue in their term papers are changes in parent-child relationships, and changing marital and familial gender roles. Students are then required to present a one-page research proposal on what they want to do; why they want to do it; who they are going to interview; when they are going to do it; what they hope to find; and how they plan to integrate it back into the course. These proposals are discussed both in class and in private meetings with me. Students, some of whom volunteer, discuss their work in progress at the beginning of each class period, after class, and in conferences. Depending on time allocations, students are invited to present their papers in class. This is always done on a purely voluntary basis. Students are also encouraged, but not required, to submit working drafts of their papers, and final term papers are due at the end of the semester.
Oral History as a Technique in Doing the Family History

A key source of information that should be utilized in the study of family history is oral history. Oral history has the potential to illuminate family behavior and attitudes in a way that goes beyond the capabilities of quantitative data and material artifacts. In this instance oral history as a research technique is of particular importance in the social/historical study of the family. Student researchers can take an instrumental role in gaining family data of greatest interest to them by directing questions regarding particular areas of family history to their respondents.

Oral history makes possible a more three-dimensional portrait of family life. It can focus on internal family processes— the roles of husbands and wives, parents and children, emotional intimacy and conflicts, dating and courtship, sexual behavior and attitudes, fertility patterns, including contraceptive use and abortions, and general involvements—in a way prohibited by other research techniques. Oral history as applied to the study of the immigrant family also has wide applicability to focusing on external family processes—the relationship of the family to labor markets, community patterns both rural and urban, immigration and ethnicity, social class variations, religious and educational institutions, and so on. Oral history can illuminate the significance of immigration and the emergence of ethnic communities through the eyes of those who experienced these historical processes—processes which transformed not only their own and their families’ lives but American society and culture as well.

Suggested Interview Topics for Immigrant and Ethnic Family History

A standard curriculum unit in the Sociology of the Family course covers ethnic and class variations in the American family. In this unit, instructors often focus on a given ethnic family group, e.g., the Italian-American family, the Chicano family, the Japanese-American family, the Black family. The discussion follows both historical and sociological lines. Typical is a history of an ethnic family in America and a sociological presentation
that deals with some sociological themes, e.g., marital relations, parent-child relationships, and so on. This mode of presentation is also followed in Sociology of the Family textbooks.

Therefore, because the assignment is a family history that centers on some dimension of ethnicity, the student can pick virtually any substantive topic in the Sociology of the Family course and tie it to ethnic family patterns. I tell students that there are many topics in which they can become involved when doing oral history relating to immigration and ethnicity. One strategy is to integrate their concern with immigration and ethnic families with the substantive Sociology of the Family topics found in such textbooks as my own *The Changing Family: Comparative Perspectives* (second edition, 1988). Following the presentation of topics found in that book, a student could write about his or her immigrant ethnic family in the following ways:

1. Modernization processes and the ethnic family
2. Social and occupational mobility and the effect on family ethnicity
3. The impact of the industrial city on the family
4. Family assimilation and acculturation processes
5. Emergent ethnicity: its manifestation in the family
6. Education and the effects on family ethnicity
7. Family life comparisons before and after coming to America
8. Work and family member involvements
9. Assimilation and acculturation of the family: kinds of adjustments, pressures to conform, etc.
10. Ethnicity and sex roles
11. Ethnic values and parent-child socialization patterns
12. Influence of ethnic background on children’s friendship patterns
13. Ethnicity and marital relationships
14. Ethnic families and extended kinship involvements
15. Ethnicity and dating and courtship patterns
16. The effects of intermarriage on ethnicity
17. Ethnicity and marital sexuality and intimacy
18. The role of the elderly in the ethnic family
19. Ethnic family violence
Students select their own topics. I do not select topics for them, nor do I provide them with an initial set of questions. It is my belief that students must take an active role in developing their own family history with minimal interference from me. In this manner they can develop their own research project with their own sociological style and language. For those students who waver and insist that I give them a specific family history assignment, I do, but with a catch. I assign them a topic that I think they would be uninterested in doing. Hence, I am not surprised, but pleased, when a student of African-American heritage protests the rhetorical suggestion to study Northern European immigration families because that history has little to do with what really interests him or her. When students complain, I suggest they give me alternative suggestions. The same strategy is employed in question design. The questions I supply often are preposterous given students' concern and sensitivity regarding matters of family privacy and respect for older family members they will be interviewing. Once students make a sincere effort to generate a bank of questions, I modify the questions and add some that are designed to elicit sufficient information for their term project.

The Family History Interview Process

Students are taught that interviews can be autobiographical or topical. An autobiographical interview does not center on a given topic, such as parent-child relationships or growing up in an ethnic village, but tries to trace the flow of significant events in an individual's life. On the other hand, the topical interview is designed to obtain information about particular topics or themes. In my Sociology of the Family class, I require students to conduct topical interviews around substantive sociology topics that parallel the course outline, class discussions, and the textbook table of contents.
From a methodological standpoint, students learn through "on the job training" how to interview. I provide students with some general guidelines on how and what to ask their families. But, as this is primarily a Sociology of the Family course, and not a course on methodology, I prefer that the students see for themselves what techniques work best. In addition, students who collect family photographs, documents, and heirlooms as research aids are able to assess for themselves the limits and utilities of such materials in the analysis of their family histories.

In interviewing family members, I inform students of the benefits and limitations of formal and informal modes of interviewing. In the formal interview, predetermined questions are asked in a rigid, non-varying sequential order. Often, the questions are designed to elicit yes-no or three-to-five category responses. For example: "Do you believe your marriage was a happy one? Yes or No"; or "How would you rate your marriage? 1. Very Happy 2. Happy 3. Acceptable 4. Unhappy 5. Very Unhappy." These are not open-ended questions. The prime virtue of this method is comparability and uniformity in comparing a large number of interview schedules. This format also permits the researcher to put together large numbers of responses and to report statistical results.

In contrast, the informal interview schedule contains general guideline questions that demand the respondent to answer questions discursively rather than simply "yes or no" or "1, 2, 3, 4, or 5." For the purpose of oral history, I strongly recommend the informal interview as the appropriate format. When conducting informal interviews, students can ask open-ended questions or engage in non-directive conversations. I suggest to students that a question be framed in such a manner that it would direct the respondent to answer the inquiry and would also allow sufficient leeway to bring up topics and materials that may serve as leads to further avenues of inquiry. Students find this a satisfactory interview format. Often those who restrict the interview to the formal mode find that they asked insufficient questions, or that questions asked were not pertinent or informative enough. The informal mode allows greater latitude...
and permits modification of the interview schedule on the spot.

Guidelines for interviewing are discussed in class. I follow the format used by Kyvig and Marty in *Your Family History* (1978: 23-26). They make the following suggestions. Before the interview, explain the project and make arrangements in advance to meet at a convenient time. If possible, gather some background information on the persons being interviewed, e.g., country of origin, when they came to America, when they were married, family circumstances. If you use a tape recorder, check it out before the interview. Practice using it beforehand. Start the interview by situating yourself in a comfortable and quiet place that insures some privacy and little likelihood of interruption. Relax before starting, chat informally, and begin by talking in a conversational style. Check the time, the length of tape, and sound level of the recorder. Try to schedule your interview to take between sixty and ninety minutes. While conducting the interview, let the subject do most of the talking. Keep your questions brief and to the point. Do not break in on a good story, even if it goes off on a tangent. It may disrupt the mood of the session. Further, it may provide leads for additional questions. Ask for details and greater specificity of people, places or events. Use photographs, documents, or other props to encourage and direct conversation.

After the interview session, it is a good idea to tell the students to listen to the interview a few times. (Also, they should offer to play back the recorded interview at their respondent’s request.) Students should take notes, highlighting important information and possibly indicating to themselves additional areas that they may investigate if another interview can be arranged. For their term paper, they should integrate the family history with the substantive sociology theme that they chose. For example, if they are concerned with changing dating patterns, they should interweave their sociological discussion with illustrative materials gathered through their family history.
Family History as a Voluntary Assignment

Currently, in my family course, the family history assignment is offered as an option to the students. It is not a course requirement, although it is strongly encouraged. Students have the option of doing other term projects. These have included more traditional library research; pilot questionnaire surveys; and content analysis of popular fiction, television programs, and films. The reason for not making family histories a mandatory assignment is that some students may have trouble gathering information for a variety of reasons, such as the death of key family members or their inaccessibility as a result of divorce, separation or geographic distance. In the latter case, letter writing often proves to be an unacceptable way to gather data. It is too time-consuming and often does not elicit satisfactory responses. Another important factor for making family history an optional assignment is that some students may not have open lines of communication with either nuclear or extended family members. Finally, some family members define such term projects as an invasion of their privacy, choose not to participate, and ask students to respect this request for nonparticipation for their sake and that of other family members.

Textbook Assignments in Family History

In Sociology of the Family courses, I assign a textbook, such as my own book, *The Changing Family: Comparative Perspectives*. Other texts that present a similar comparative perspective in the sociology of the family are Gerald R. Leslie and Sheila K. Korman’s *The Family in Social Context* (1985) and Maxine Baca Zinn and D. Stanley Eitzen’s *Diversity in American Families* (1990). The reader, *Ethnic Families in America: Patterns and Variations* (1988), edited by Charles H. Mindel, Robert W. Habenstein, and Roosevelt Wright, Jr., has proved useful for students working with ethnicity as an important variable in their family histories.

In some classes, I have required a family history handbook. I have used Allan J. Lichtman’s *Your Family History* (1978) or David E. Kyvig and Myron A. Marty’s *Your Family History: A
Handbook for Research and Writing (1978). Both have extended discussions on research techniques that include strategies for conducting, recording and interpreting interviews with family members. Both also provide some illustrative questions that could be asked relating to certain substantive themes. Outside of the classroom, these handbooks provide a convenient source of information that nicely supplements my own presentations.

Conclusion

The produced family history is often prized by the student. The history itself becomes incorporated as an important family historical document. I have found that a much greater percentage of students ask for the return of this project at the end of the semester than other forms of term papers. While the overall quality is often uneven, I do find that the exercise serves to enhance students’ personal interest in the subject matter, and often helps to develop a “sociological imagination.”

For instructors, family histories can often provide additional insights into social/historical processes. As a practice, I return all term papers. I do ask selected students’ permission for a copy of their papers. If they desire, I will not share the papers with other faculty or students. For those who give permission, I occasionally share them with others. However, I never reveal the authors’ names. I prefer to be overly cautious and sensitive to personal and family privacy. Particular case studies, anonymously discussed in future classes to preserve the privacy of families, make interesting discussion illustrations.

References


About the Author  
Dr. Margaret Tannenbaum has been teaching for over twenty-five years at the pre-school, elementary, secondary, undergraduate, and graduate levels, including substituting in all subjects K to 12 for one semester. In addition to teaching in her major area of history, she has taught geography, reading, grammar and literature, philosophy, and computer science.  

Walking, gardening, and the Macintosh computer are her main interests. She gives workshops for public school teachers and volunteers in the local schools to help students learn word processing and desktop publishing.  

Marge currently teaches in the Secondary Education/Foundations of Education Department. She is married and has two children.
A Question and Answer Writing Strategy in Foundations of Education

Margaret Tannenbaum

Every teacher has had the experience of the student who did poorly on the test saying, afterwards, “I didn’t understand the material.” When asked why she didn’t ask questions, the reply is usually, “I dunno.” For years I have been trying different ways to get students to take more responsibility for their own learning—on a daily basis.

This year I have required students to come to class with an index card on which they write at least one question about the assigned reading. I collect the cards at the beginning of each class period. The questions vary widely. Some students are looking for definitions of terms (I remind them of the existence of dictionaries); others want topics explained more fully or two topics explained in relationship to each other. Frequently the questions are requests for information beyond that offered in the text.

Initially, I tried several ways to incorporate their questions into the class periods: I would read the questions over to myself at the beginning of the period while the students were engaged in a short in-class writing exercise and attempt to incorporate the questions into the lecture and discussion period; I would summarize the questions on the board at the beginning of the
class period; or I would read individual questions directly from the cards as class went on. All of these methods resulted in only a few of the students' questions being answered. And, of course, there was another set of questions the next class period.

I was convinced that the question-writing activity was valuable in helping students focus their attention while they were reading, whether I got to answer their questions in class or not. However, I knew it would be even more valuable if I could answer every student's question every class period. The only way I could see to do this was to write my responses.

Knowing it would not be possible—in terms of time—to do this with every class, I selected the graduate course in The Foundations of Educational Policymaking, because the students are mostly teachers and administrators, and the class would prove a fertile laboratory in which to evaluate the results of the project.

I began by arranging the question cards so that similar questions were grouped together, sometimes making it possible to deal with a whole set of questions in a single (usually rather lengthy) response. I typed the questions into the computer, then typed my answers. As I wrote my answers, I rearranged some questions and answers because I discovered connections that at first were not apparent.

I printed the questions and answers and gave a copy of the dialogue to each student in the class.

This process was extremely time-consuming (5 to 6 hours a week), and I doubt if I would have been able to continue it without my laptop computer, which I carry nearly everywhere with me. This enabled me to work at odd moments and in unusual places, such as on the bus to and from Philadelphia for my son's class trip to the Franklin Institute.

This writing project has had some unexpected benefits. In addition to more actively involving the students in the lesson, the project has resulted in their writing longer and better questions, often including an introductory set of comments. Few students are now merely asking for facts they could find themselves. Many are asking my views on topics and asking me
to defend points of view I put forth in class. And that is the other major benefit of this exercise. I find myself, in this informal writing situation, thinking aloud on paper about things that hadn't occurred to me before.

The majority of students seem to be very involved in the activity and appreciate the amount of work it takes to answer their questions. When one set of questions and responses reached five single-spaced typewritten pages and I suggested to them that the activity was getting out of hand, a number of students spoke up and encouraged me to continue.

Here are some sample student questions and my answers:

**QUESTION.** How do you feel about New Jersey's establishing core course proficiencies in areas such as mathematics, science, etc.? How might these conflict with the individual needs of the school (community)?

**ANSWER.** I think I have come to believe that the only way we can hope to achieve anywhere near the goal of equal education for all is to establish proficiencies for all subjects in all geographic areas. There is no reason, it seems to me, why children from New York City should have to know more or less than those from Glassboro or Dayton. The question of how these proficiencies would be met would be a local prerogative.

**QUESTION.** I would like to know more about mediated entry. Is this just supervision during the first few years of teaching such as was student teaching? Is it training, evaluation and assistance from a master or experienced teacher for the intern teacher?

**ANSWER.** Basically, the concept of mediated entry is that a new teacher is not simply "thrown into" the classroom to be on his/her own. Although student teaching can be seen as a form of mediated entry, most
feel it is artificial and of too short duration really to count. The most extended form of mediated entry is probably that of doctors who put in at least two years as interns and residents before they are given full responsibility. As it applies to teaching, mediated entry is now being considered as part of a career ladder program in which new teachers would be considered interns and an internship would take the place of student teaching, but it would be for a longer time and the interns would be given some responsibility and paid (rather than paying to do the internship). Of course, then, master teachers—at the top of the career ladder—would be assigned responsibility for mentoring interns and be paid for it. The most desirable form of mediated entry is one in which the mentor provides continual assistance and feedback to the intern teacher, and a good deal of peer coaching goes on.

**QUESTION 1.** Obviously our educational system has adopted many philosophies, curricula, and principles from the ancient Greeks, through the Reformation to Dewey. In your opinion, who has had the greatest influence on our current educational practices?

**QUESTION 2.** Is there one pioneer in education you feel had the most influence on today’s schools? Are there any other individuals who were not mentioned in this chapter that you think should have been included as educational pioneers?

**ANSWER.** This is really a difficult question to respond to. The individual to whom more “homage” in American education is paid than any other is John Dewey. But in terms of actual impact on educational practices, I would guess that it is more lip service than reality. I would say that few individuals, if any, have had a significant influence on our current educational practice. Rather it has been more a matter of social and economic forces that have
determined the shape of education, such as industry, business, and the federal government. States passed legislation mandating attendance at public schools in the second half of the nineteenth century, along with child labor laws, because of the rise of the factory system and the prevalence of children working long hours in factories. At the beginning of the twentieth century, it was the American Manufacturers Association (business) that issued a major critique of American schools, citing their inefficiency, that coincided with the widespread growth of the testing movement. The Brown case in 1954, mandating desegregation, the Civil Rights Act in 1964, withholding federal money from school districts that refused to desegregate, and the passage of PL 94-142 have done more to affect the daily lives of teachers and students than the views of any individuals.
David R. Applebaum was born in 1947 and grew up in Brooklyn. He was always able to walk to school, first to P.S. 217; then to Midwood High School, and finally to Brooklyn College. In 1967 he moved to Madison, Wisconsin, where he received his M.A. and Ph.D. and studied with Edward T. Gargan. Applebaum was an activist in the civil rights, peace and student movements of the 1960's and 70's. He was among the first to fight for educational planning— the right and responsibility of undergraduate students to shape their educational lives.

In 1973 he joined the History Department of Glassboro State College. He has worked for and written about educational reform at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Applebaum is working on a history of the syndicate de la magistrature, a labor union of French magistrates founded in June of 1968.
Collaborative Course Journals and the Study of History

David R. Applebaum

Required journal writing became a part of the history courses I taught in 1980, after I joined the Columbia Law Project. The assignments were part of an incremental sequence of reading, research and writing skills. Tasks included (a) writing about work with basic bibliographical tools, i.e., printed and computerized library catalogs, (b) citing and defining key words using the Oxford English Dictionary, (c) identifying key phrases from a text and placing them in an analytical sentence, and (d) paraphrasing a paragraph from a primary source text.

During the fall of 1982, I circulated a ditto to students listing seventeen required exercises. They were due before the Thanksgiving break. There was never enough time to read and respond individually to all student writing. I relied increasingly upon peer review. I wrote articles about teaching strategies and learning goals associated with specific journal work. Colleagues at Glassboro State College critiqued these efforts.

My instructions to students evolved over time, as did students’ critical skills to examine the historical subject-matter. Journals were a tool adapted and modified for different groups and multiple purposes. They were useful in teaching historical methods and helpful in enhancing the ability to explore different
levels of understanding of subject-matter.

A turning point in journal work came through my participation on a special All-College Ad-Hoc Committee on Learning Outcomes Assessment. Discussions of the ad-hoc group pushed me beyond national and local pedagogical models. Specifically, I began a search for an alternative to atomized and individualized journal work.

In the fall of 1988, we developed a new requirement for a collaborative course journal. The theoretical origins of the shift were grounded in my research on the syndicat de la magistrature (a labor union of French judges), as well as my readings of Pierre Bourdieu (Homo Academicus), Michel Foucault (Power/Knowledge), and a combination of feminist and critical legal studies.

Descriptions of collaborative work by three-judge panels (équipes–teams) searching for truth in code law justice and twelve-person juries searching for justice in common law courts inspired me to develop ways for our students to nurture collaborative writing skills. I perceived this effort as a pathway to reinvigorating the social dimensions of democratic values, processes and relationships.

In higher education, we face near total reliance upon atomized and individualized measurement of student learning. The CCJ embodied and expressed my desire to search for a mechanism that would both reflect and reinforce a social construction of knowledge and meaning. It was a logical progression from individual journals. At the same time, my aim was to avoid the construction of a false self/other dichotomy in the design of classroom work.

I wished, through the CCJ, to break with a pattern of learning in which power and submission to authority were perceived as truth. Skill work was designed to show, to quote Bourdieu, that "Symbolic domination really begins when the misrecognition implied by recognition leads those who are dominated to apply the dominant criteria of evaluation to their practices." I wanted to escalate the level of critical thinking through critical writing. I hoped to demonstrate the dialogic production of meaning.
The effort also reflected my understanding of what Michel De Certeau called the "secondary production of meaning." A journal entry made in reply to multiple voices would come to be regarded as the work of the group. We would have a product that could illustrate and illuminate collective learning.

That students could help to reconstruct the social relations of learning, especially using writing skill development as the vehicle for change, was particularly appealing. The method responded to a real and regular litany of concerns about lack of time to work with students. Moreover, modified skill work was also intended to improve subject-matter teaching effectiveness. I envisioned a homogeneous acceleration of heterogeneous student learning.

At first, instructions and dialogue for the CCJ were simple and limited (if not always clear). I wrote the first installment. My text included the initials of student speakers, their questions, comments and citations of related readings, and quotations from class discussion. The reduction of material from oral to written form was difficult for me and took a great deal of time. Two days after the session, I distributed copies of the entry, and we had a lively discussion.

Following my effort and with my text as an "optional model," each student "drew a number" and provided a written account for subsequent class sessions. Each class member submitted three journal entries.

Individual assignments were spaced out over a sixteen-week semester. This made it possible to monitor and reflect on the interplay between individual progress and group development.

Each person enrolled in our upper-division course on Europe Since 1945 turned in about ten typewritten pages of text. Each was responsible to distribute the account of the prior class at the start of the next class session. The expense of xerohxing was a part of the regular expense of the course.

Some students offered outlines while others produced verbatim accounts of events. Still others provided the group with synthetic essays on the class sessions. All entries concluded with two or three challenge questions. We held regular and ongoing talks.
about (a) facts to be incorporated into the record of events, (b) criteria for the inclusion of problems, concepts and ideas, and (c) genres and styles to be used for journal entries. In time, Garfield cartoons and reproductions of art works were added to the common text.

The discussions about adding to notes came during the discussions of journal entries. The discussions about criteria for inclusion of subject-matter and appropriate genres/styles came before the individual put pen to paper. Each person who left the course kept a set of edited journal entries.

In time, the CCJ came to supplant the note-taking process, thereby freeing most students to speak, debate or listen while relying upon a peer to write and remember in a different way. Consequently, the daily rhythms and tempos of learning were redistributed.

In our bicentennial course on The French Revolution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, students learned about the requirement at our first class session. Almost half of the group participated in the primitive version of the collaborative work. My written instructions were as follows:

At the beginning of each class one member of the class will provide a written summary of the prior session along with one or more thought questions derived from the subject-matter under discussion. We will proceed to amend the notes—that means making additions, deletions and corrections.

You will have to prepare enough copies of your journal entry for everyone to be able to edit the text together. If you are the “designated” journal writer for the next class session, then you will be able to focus your energy on listening and writing. Any individual author of a journal entry can “check out” a comment or a quote during discussion or after class (prior to distributing copies of the journal entry to the group). Journal entries may include an outline of the discussion and must include a written report in essay form.
One of the reasons that we are using the *collaborative course journals* is to gain a fuller and deeper appreciation of *procès-verbaux*. *Procès-verbaux* are one of the most important *primary sources* of the Age of Revolution, and we need to have a critical understanding of their accuracy, strengths and weaknesses as a resource for the study of people, events, and ideas.\(^5\)

Students knew I would take my turn in submitting a journal entry. They also knew I would not allow our work—including class tapes and journal entries—to be cited outside class without receiving individual and group permission to do so (they have read, criticized and changed this article). Our rules stressed the need for clarity and ethical professional behavior in oral historical research and also challenged the widely accepted notions of “ownership of the image” and “ownership of the idea.”\(^6\)

The individual act of writing from a source with multiple voices negated the artificial individualization of student writing. Our CCJ was recognized as part of a social event that blurred boundaries between personal and collective meaning and understanding. The exercise resulted in new insights into problems and paradoxes of creativity, copyrights and plagiarism. Moreover, requiring social permission prior to changing the intended audience of the written and spoken words generated mutual respect. In our class the speaker and listener, the actor and audience, as well as the writer and reader shared power in both the creation and transmission of meaning and understanding.

The value of focused silence in the classroom was transformed and, over time, reinforced. Individuals who had to write about a specific session redirected their energies to listening to others. Students who habitually were silent found the need to respond orally to questions about their written journal submissions to the class.

The theory as well as the practice of the CCJ provided structured experiential pluralism. There was a transformation of the power of different social roles in learning, along with an alteration of the traditional hierarchical construction of classroom
behaviors. Students accustomed to being penalized because they have a style of learning rooted in introspection and reflection discovered they were as valued as students who almost always felt compelled to speak without necessarily reflecting about what they were saying. This new division of labor stressed mutuality in learning relationships through a multiplication and redistribution of roles. In turn, individuals were able to choose roles rather than have role mind-sets limit their options. That I was a co-participant in the CCJ effort, as I had been in individual journal efforts, reduced some inequalities between “teacher” and “student.” We fashioned a matrix of dialogic production which respected student privacy and personal power.

That journal entry writers could verify quotes, and that journal readers clarify the meaning of comments, established a basis for discussion. We found that dialogues offered more choices than the compulsive power of professional authority in reshaping written texts. There was a conjuncture between the desire for clarity and accuracy in the description of events, identification of key concepts and construction of an analysis on the one hand, and the need for respect for the integrity of the person(s) being cited on the other hand. The work on oral history led to discussion of problems faced by historians who cannot find living subjects and must rely upon partial and limited knowledge of the contexts that produced written primary source texts.

There are still some problems to be worked out in the effort to alter the pattern of teaching and learning. Most of the discussion of CCJ submissions focused upon editing and correcting the three to five typed pages of text generated by the previous class session. The skill component of the joint effort has varied from working on verb tenses to making decisions about paragraph breaks. This skills focus has downgraded the value of historical questions and problems derived from the prior discussion. There has also been a tendency in journal entries to cite faculty more often than students, even when the latter have been the original source of a creative question or a powerful analytical insight.

I rediscovered from the CCJ that most students believe that
differences in meaning are best understood in terms of conflict. Alternative models and constellations of fact are almost always to be understood in contradictory and adversarial ways. The CCJ makes it possible to note that "differences" in the links between memory and meaning do not have to be understood in terms of "conflict" and "truth." We have moved beyond the issues of one "correct" or "incorrect" understanding of the prior class session to understand perspectivism (not relativism). It is both possible and desirable for students and faculty to derive plural (and even opposed) readings of the meaning of classes. This in turn allows us all to experience the doubt that forces us to strengthen skeptical facilities that push the research enterprise forward and also enhance democratic tolerance.

The ultimate goal is for the skill work to help us break away from hierarchical dichotomies in disciplinary knowledges. The emphasis of the CCJ is upon refining the process of critical thinking to replace power with truth in the construction of meanings. The possibility that speech and citation have a chilling effect on individual comments has surfaced. On two occasions I suggested that we go "off the record" and found there was a burst of energy and a general opening up of discussion (multiple and simultaneous). As the person with ultimate control of the discussions, I have to devise ways to improve the "on the record" and "off the record" interplay so that the elements of creativity and spontaneity in the collaborative effort are not lost.

Because the CCJ provided a minimum level of security within the group, students willingly risked peer review of their writing. The procedures and rules are an imperfect yet necessary step if students are to take chances in their writing.

Our criteria for inclusion of material included the social processes of verification rather than an isolated, indeterminate and autonomous fabrication of truth. Needless to say, the substitution of contingent communication of meaning for absolute presentation of truth is disconcerting. Students are accustomed to a history focused upon the memorization of mountains of chronologically sequenced and "determined as significant" facts. Rather than "taking sides" in the debate over what we include
or exclude from our lexicon of cultural literacy, the CCJ provides a tool for social construction of meaningful memories. This is done without paralyzing critical analysis. The memory rooted in the power of the grade (forgotten when the coercion of the classroom is disengaged) is replaced by a thinking skill that is self-reinforcing.

The requirement of writing beyond the classroom has broken artificial temporal barriers of learning. Students have reflected upon the advantages and disadvantages of writing journal entries immediately after the session or five days later. Students discovered that disparate time frames between reflection and writing create differences rather than "pure" advantages for one or another interpretation. The strengths of primary versus secondary source materials are realized in implicit and explicit ways.

We use our new understanding of time and the criteria for inclusion or silence to critically examine our texts and the authors of primary source documents. Writing skill is, thereby, nurturing critical reading skills. The combination of skills, moreover, provides the basis for the construction of designs for term papers.

**Conclusions**

The pedagogy of collaborative course journals is consistent with the development of post-structuralist history. It offers us a way to "study processes by which meaning is constructed." As a written text, Roger Chartier establishes three rules essential for the CCJ:

There are three ineluctable demands on anyone who sets out to decipher the symbolic system that underlies a text...first, to take the text as a text and try to determine its intentions, its strategies and the effects produced by its discourse [the plural purposes of the CCJ cannot be overlooked or underestimated]...next, to avoid supposing a stable, full value in its lexical choices, but to take into account the semantic investment or disinvestment of its terms;...finally, to define the instance of behavior and the rituals present in the text on the basis of the specific
way in which they are assembled or produced by original invention, rather than to categorize them on the basis of remote resembleds to codified forms among the repertoire of Western folk-culture.

These rules help reveal the humor and larger meaning of “All My Bourgeois Children,” the journal within the journal of the Age of Revolution. They make it possible to accept the arrival and departure of illustrations in the notes that range from Garfield cartoons to David’s homage to Marat.

The CCJ is not bounded by the texts or controlled by someone in a narrowly constructed professional role. The CCJ breaks with the idea that endowed texts and discourses have either an intrinsic or finite value and unique meaning. It is no longer the sole task of the critic to live with a flat meaning of the representation of the author.

Collaborative course journals are consistent with a new “history...that gives meaning to the world in plural and even contradictory ways.” The image and vision are consistent with views about tools and methods advanced by Lucien Febvre in 1942:

Every civilization has its own mental tools. Even more, every era of the same civilization, every advance in technology of science that gives it its character, has a revised set of tools, a little more refined for certain purposes, a little less so for others. A civilization or an era has no assurance that it will be able to transmit these mental tools in their entirety to succeeding civilizations and eras. The tools may undergo significant deterioration, regression and distortion; or on the contrary, more improvement, enrichment, and complexity. They are valuable for the civilization that succeeds in forging them, and they are valuable for the era that uses them; they are not valuable for eternity or for all humanity, nor for the whole narrow course of development within one civilization.
Notes

1 The Project for the Study and Application of Humanistic Education in Law was funded by the National Science Foundation and the National Institute for Mental Health. Jack Himmelstein directed the project, which was dedicated to transforming legal education and lawyering.

2 Two years of almost daily discussion with Howard Cell of the Department of Philosophy and Religion and one year of daily discussion and team teaching with Susan Gotsch-Thomson of the Department of Sociology provided me with fundamental and critical questions that shaped this work. My work with Howard was in the team-taught introductory humanities course at Rutgers-Camden where we were both humanities fellows. My work with Susan came about through our collaboration on a New Jersey Department of Higher Education Humanities Grant: “Workplace Democracy in Social-Historical Perspective.”


4 I am indebted to Gene Elliot of our Psychology Department for this idea. I hope that my “inversion” of the process—wherein students rather than faculty are charged with the task of constructing the questions—does not suggest that only one group or another should carry responsibility for the task of generating questions.

5 The procès-verbaux of the Provisional Government of 1848 in France, edited by Charles Pouthas for the centennial of the Revolution of 1848, lack detail about discussions. These silences were the model that regularly inspired my thinking about our CCJ.


About the Author

As a junior at Georgetown, Terence McGuire started on his path as a writer by reading F. Scott Fitzgerald. Terence wrote for the Army Times while he was stationed in Panama during the Korean War. Later, after graduate study at Georgetown, Terence began doing creative writing and radio broadcasting in New Jersey.

His M.A. in Drama and Speech from Catholic University spurred his interest in directing plays and writing drama reviews. Over one hundred reviews have been printed in newspapers such as the Philadelphia Bulletin and the Camden Courier-Post, and some have been aired on the radio.

Terence left full-time teaching some years ago in favor of part-time teaching at Glassboro, radio broadcasting, and devoting much more time to his creative writing.
Peer Evaluation of Writing

Terence McGuire

My use of peer evaluation evolved from two main sources. One was from a speech course in graduate school. The professor rarely made any comments herself, but instead elicited remarks from students, focusing on a strength and weakness pattern. By the time she had finished, members of the class had made most of the points she wished to cover. It goes without saying, students are more ready to accept peer comments than a teacher’s critique.

Also, in one of my first creative writing classes, I saw that many students, perhaps because this was an elective course, would hand in almost anything and call it creative writing. Rather than use grades as a cudgel, I began a process whereby the students would read and evaluate each other’s work.

Here is an example of the process: If sixteen students have turned in their short stories or essays, I divide them into groups of four. The names are taken off the papers so that some degree of anonymity exists. Groups A and B exchange papers, as do Groups C and D.

Using critique sheets, each group of students decides which is the best paper read by the group. The instructor must clearly define the criteria for evaluating each set of papers. For instance, students may be asked to cite the major strengths of each paper.
and suggest ways in which the paper could be improved. In both cases, students must give specific examples.

Critiquing the papers usually takes about one class period. At the next meeting, the group presents the best work to the class. When delivering the papers orally, if the assignment is an expository essay, students may focus on the paper’s unity or coherence in their presentation and provide supporting examples. They may read excerpts from the paper. If the assignment is a short story, they may stress plot, character, and setting in the presentation.

As far as paperwork is concerned, while peer editing is going on, I keep the papers and critique sheets for each of the four groups in separate folders. At the end of the exercise, I clip the critique sheets to the back of the papers and return them.

With term papers, of course, considerably more time is necessary. Pairs of students review each other’s papers prior to handing them in. After the peer review, more revision may be necessary. Here is a sample sheet that may be used for peer evaluation of research papers:

**Research Paper Evaluation Form**

Evaluator’s Name: ___________________________________  Paper Title: ____________________________

Key: P=Poor; F=Fair; G=Good

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vision of Subject</th>
<th>Validity of Thesis</th>
<th>Organization of Whole</th>
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<td>Use of Sources</td>
<td>Clarity</td>
<td>Support</td>
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<td>Paragraphs</td>
<td>Unity</td>
<td>Transitions</td>
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<td>Language &amp; Mechanics</td>
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<td>Diction</td>
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<td>Footnotes</td>
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<td>Overall Appearance</td>
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There are some problems with peer review. At times a particular student's work is selected for presentation too often. Some students do not read all the papers in their group. And still others never have papers in on time.

The teacher can avoid some of these problems by starting the critique process the day after the papers are due. Teachers may also mark down a late paper but include the student writer in the group activity.

Despite problems, there are real benefits in using peer editing: 1. Each student's writing receives multiple readings; 2. Good student writing receives peer recognition; 3. Students practice decision-making; 4. Group discussions reinforce writing principles; and 5. Students practice speaking to a group.

I tell the students at the beginning of the exercise that I will not be unduly influenced by their comments in grading the papers, which I read very carefully on my own. However, I do consider the comments on their critique sheets. Often there is a remark that is right on the money, and I'll add a Joycean, Yes! Yes! Also, I weed out any judo chops, such as "lousy paper." As we know, students can, on occasion, be quite callous.

In my experience, students enjoy reading and judging the writing of others. Invariably students tell one another how much they appreciate a particular paper. And weaker students have a chance to read the work of better students and see models of good writing to help them improve their own writing.
About the Author

Denis Mercier, whose Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania is in the area of Folklore, Folklife, and Popular Culture, is an Associate Professor of Communications at Glassboro State College. He currently teaches courses in Mass Media and Popular Culture, but through the years, he has taught courses ranging from remedial English to graduate writing.

He is widely published, and his reworked doctoral dissertation, Representations of Blacks in American Popular Culture: An Analytical Sourcebook of Artifacts and Memorabilia, will soon be released by Greenwood Press.
God: “I’m not Merely Using Journals, I’m Saving Society”

Denis Mercier

The Glassboro State College 1989 Summer Faculty Workshops—especially the capstone lecture on critical thinking by University of Indiana’s Craig Nelson—really fired and inspired. The workshops revealed a way to resolve one of my major pedagogical dilemmas: though successfully encouraging students to discover and use their “voices” in written assignments, my “voice” boomed in classroom discussions. To put it kindly, I dominated. Students, used to spoonfeeding and regurgitation, passively accepted “the word,” and I, never known for restraint or subtlety, warmed to the god role. This god, tempted by the demon “Dualism,” allowed the schizophrenic role-switching between written and spoken discourse to poison classroom interaction. Could God have made a mistake? Yes, He could. But first—background.

The course I teach, Mass Media and Their Influences, deals with issues that are as controversial as they are dynamic. It’s a core curriculum course for Communications majors, a related elective for others, and an oft-chosen free elective for still others. The mix of students with different perspectives guarantees a multiplicity of viewpoints on the influence of sanitized violence on children, corporation-induced self-censorship of media
content, and literally hundreds of such issues. Most Communications courses teach techniques, but Mass Media does not. Never do we explain how to write the perfect press release, the perfect ad campaign, the perfect yuppie-oriented primetime TV show. We concentrate on the structure and priorities of the American mass media and then attempt to gauge their effects or impact on us individually and culturally. It's not exactly a math course—two and two are not always four. Reality in this class is almost never black or white: everyone must pick a shade of gray. If I could only let them choose their favorite shade before I blurt out mine!

Certainly this course is ideal for encouraging student “voices.” I'd been proud of the regular assignments I'd created. They had encouraged “critical thinking” before it became an education buzzword. My “Fingerpointer” asks students to find and evaluate an article or statement that derogates some aspect of media influence. A major assignment, the Reaction Paper, asks for honest, personal, informed feedback on a body of material that is by turns factual and propagandistic. The final exam, a single question, requires students to state an opinion and to construct (from personal experience, class material, and knowledge of other fields) an airtight defense of the opinion.

Students' written “voices” spoke clearly in this course—with one exception. To lure students into at least the pretense of reading their texts, I gave almost-daily quizzes with “objective” answers in black and white. The students called them inconvenient. I called them “grade-school” and blamed the need for them on the students. The workshop leaders had called them the ultimate dirty word: dualistic. They reinforced the authority of the texts and teacher and reduced the role of the students to passive receivers. It was clear that God had to step down from His throne and suffer the children to come unto Him. But how?

Journal writing. No quizzes with fill-in-the-blanks, true/false, and multiple-choice questions. I would ask open-ended questions based on the readings. If there were no “one right answers,” they would move beyond recall and think—critically. And there’d be other benefits: they'd read for a holistic understanding of the
material and know their journal entries would be a "test" of their logical thinking and powers of persuasion. (When I collected them I'd be looking for arguments that indicated at least a passing familiarity with the texts and clear evidence of thought about the subject.) Because they'd be using their journal entries initially as "prompts" for classroom discussion on the day they wrote them, they would read the texts for understanding. They would be focused and serious learners because their commitment to the material would be made public on a regular and predictable basis.

I had a chance to try it almost immediately. A section of Mass Media I'd been assigned for the first Summer Session was the perfect opportunity. I would choose the questions, require the students to buy separate notebooks, and devote fifteen to twenty minutes of each class to journal entries. In addition, I determined to start every class discussion with their unique answers to the question of the day. They'd paint their shades of gray before I tipped my palette.

It worked marvelously. The students didn't need to memorize footnotes anymore and gladly expressed opinions that were treated with even-more-than-usual respect as they voiced them in class. They were surprised to discover that, once they'd thought these opinions through enough to develop them and write them down, they really were valuable. I became more of a moderator than a Godlike authority. Class discussions were relaxed and lively. I reveled in them—probably because I wasn't trying to fill every second of silence with my erudite views on the discussion subject. I enjoyed the students' "voices," literal and figurative. They enjoyed having legitimate ones.

Here are three examples of good entries that combine text reading with personal feelings and opinion. (Incisive, informed pieces like these keep both quality and morale of classes high. The entries exemplify the more spontaneous and informal writing style characteristic of journals.)
Topic:
Choose a media content issue (pornography, free press, fair trial, privacy, censorship, etc.) and express your views about it. (Remember: you must live in the world you define!)

Student Journal Response
An Argument against Censorship
First, censorship violates the First Amendment. Censorship, in any way, shape or form opposes the basic principle of freedom of speech. Therefore, it is unconstitutional and should not be tolerated.

Second, our government could become too powerful if it is given censorship rights. As it is, we sometimes question the validity of the information the government provides. With the power to censor, the government could neglect to inform the public or mislead them by not representing all of the facts. As a result, the media would lose their “watchdog” power over the government and consequently, the government may try not to serve the interests of the people.

Third, censorship should not exist because ultimately the viewer, the reader or the listener chooses who to give attention to. Something shouldn’t be censored because some find it vulgar or distasteful, because others may view it as artistic or beautiful. Who should be given the authority to determine what is obscene? As Hollis Alpert says, “Yesterday’s obscenity isn’t necessarily today’s.” This was evident in our reaction to the prudishness of the Victorian period when the mere sight of the legs of furniture was regarded as vulgar.

Censorship could also repress artistic expression. Think about the librarian who wanted to take classics off the shelves because they contained certain words which she considered indecent. This attitude could stifle creative expression and deny us many of the invaluable works of literature and art.
Topic:
List and discuss some of the major "bottom-line considerations" (guarantees of boxoffice/Arbitron ratings) that seem to be driving the film and radio industries.

Student Journal Response
The bottom-line consideration in radio or film is making a profit. Hence, Arbitron ratings and boxoffice sales have become themselves the major concerns of the radio and film industries respectively.

For example, in the radio industry, stations are run by businesspeople and not broadcasters. The stations are interested in numbers, formats and consultants more than innovation. As a result, programs have become boring and predictable. Programs are designed not to upset, challenge, or startle anyone or anything. Therefore, new music and variety are limited. Stations also limit themselves in breaking new artists because they are more concerned with track records of artists than potential. As a whole, the bottom line in the radio industry is generating advertising revenue, and originality is the expense....

Topic: Media Schizophrenia and Pop Music
SOME say popular music is obscene/sextist/racist/a tool of Satan. OTHERS say popular music is a tool of big corporations—a “sellout.” What do YOU think?

Student Journal Response
As is the case with any issue, there are usually not any clear-cut right or wrong answers. What drives me crazy is when people try to group everyone into one category. I believe this is the case with pop music. Oftentimes avant garde theatrics are misinterpreted as evil. This is the case with such groups as Ozzy Osbourne and Alice Cooper. People misjudge their antics and say they are devil worshipers or deviants. In my opinion they are no more so than a writer like Stephen King. The common
ground here is that all of these people use shock as part of their schtick; it’s all part of the show.

Racism is another big issue in the record “biz” today. Groups such as “Guns’n’Roses” have come under fire for using racial remarks. The first thing we must consider here is the use of music as a form of artistic expression which reflects certain attitudes. If one can understand that when Archie Bunker uses racist remarks as a form of satire, then why can’t he understand the use of racist remarks to express a point in a song? One must be able to separate the thrust of a song from the writer of a song. In other words one can’t say for sure that the lyrics reflect the personal view of the writer, much less the performer. It is my view that the lyrics are simply a form of social commentary.

Obscenity is often an artful tool. True, it can be taken to extremes, but who is to decide the boundaries to be set? I would hate to see censorship take place just because someone “doesn’t get it” or misses the point of a song.

Even though, as I will reveal in a moment, all is not perfect in the world I’ve created, I am convinced that—with a little fine-tuning—daily student journals can improve any course whose content has room for interpretation. It is a very easy and direct way to encourage and ensure the multiplicity of viewpoints (race, class, gender and more) we consider essential in today’s curriculum.

Some problems have surfaced since those idyllic summer days—at least with some students. Despite the journals’ weight as 30% of their final grade, some students still don’t take them seriously. They shun reading any of the texts and try to bluff their way through the questions. Some are such bad writers that they rewrite every entry at home—and presumably with their heads in the appropriate places in the texts. I am considering collecting the entries daily, but then they’ll become more like essay quizzes than journals. Pity. The major problem, however, is My own: I spend far too much time reading and reacting to the journals. I
simply cannot resist the opportunity for witty, sarcastic—or, Me forbid, encouraging—comments in the margins. God’s reluctance to relinquish power, I presume. But I’m working on it. For inspiration I ponder Craig Nelson’s opening remarks about critical thinking:

Information is doubling every two-and-a-half years. There is constant turnover as new and better ideas replace unworkable, obsolete ones. The world we grew up in is no more. The survival of society depends upon our willingness to invite students into our conversation!

OK. If you put it that way, I guess I’ll read the journals holistically and mutter my remarks into my beard. A God should be secure enough to sacrifice some things to ensure society’s survival. And I have a confession to make: I rather enjoy transferring power to the students. Many even seem to enjoy having it. When more do, society will survive.
Jo Cohen recently received her Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology from the University of Georgia. She has published and conducted seminars in the fields of marriage and family, and dream interpretation. Additional interests include helping with the adjustment of international students to the United States, and personality theory.

Jo, who has been teaching at GSC since September 1988, will begin a Fellowship in Clinical Neuropsychology at the Philadelphia Geriatric Center in September 1990.
A Case for "Rewrites"

Jo Cohen

Although many do not take advantage of the opportunity, some students do appreciate the chance to rewrite their work for additional credit. I initially tried this procedure without establishing a deadline for rewrites, and found myself inundated with a constant barrage of rewrites.

This semester, I am permitting rewrites for students who are ambitious enough to turn in their papers one week in advance. This benefits me by distributing my workload more evenly, while still allowing a rewrite option. I set a deadline for the rewrite—two weeks after the first draft is handed back. I have also been permitting rewrites for students whose work signifies comprehension and integration well beyond their writing ability. For example, some students show considerable research ability and advanced conceptualization, but have difficulty with conciseness.

Although based on a small sample, my findings thus far suggest that students’ writing does improve through rewriting.
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Although based on a small sample, my findings thus far suggest that students' writing does improve through rewriting.
About the Author

Dr. Linda A. Packman challenged Thomas (You-can’t-go-home-again) Wolfe by returning to Glassboro State College after a twenty-year leave. Originally from the Bronx, she came to the College in 1969 as an Assistant Professor in the Reading Department. She received her bachelor’s degree from City College of New York and her master’s degree and doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania. Linda has also taught at Rutgers in Camden and the University of Pennsylvania.
Using Worksheets to Understand Concepts in Foundations of Reading

Linda Packman

For spring semester 1990 I prepared a sixty-seven-page booklet to accompany Foundations of Reading, an undergraduate required course for future teachers. The supplement contains worksheets to guide my students in understanding some key concepts discussed in the course. For each concept, students have before, during and after activities.

Before
Students have to brainstorm. They write down what comes to mind when they think of this area of reading. They are asked to draw on their experience and write these ideas for class sharing.

During
In class, students are exposed to hands-on activities to develop the concepts. They read about the topics and complete required projects. Then students have to write what ideas were confirmed and what questions they still have about these concepts.

After
Students have to think like teachers and write down how they can apply these concepts in their future classrooms.
Writing can help reinforce learning about reading, and this supplement, with its writing activities, is an attempt to make the connection.

Here are some worksheets from the booklet:

1. Reading in Our Society/ Definition of Reading/ Cultural Literacy

Jet down briefly how you feel about the following issues before we discuss them in class. What comes to mind from your experience and understanding when you think about these issues? How has your understanding of these terms been confirmed or changed by our readings and class involvement? After we have developed our thinking about these issues, how can you apply the results in your classroom?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>During</th>
<th>After</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How do you use reading in your life?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. What is functional literacy?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Why do we fail in teaching some children to read?</td>
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<td>4. What are your expectations of your students' reading?</td>
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<td>5. What are your goals for teaching reading in your classroom?</td>
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<td>6. Define reading.</td>
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2. Developing and Evaluating Reading Readiness/ Emerging Literacy

Now you're experts at using my worksheets. Brainstorm and fill in the chart below. Write down what comes to mind Before, During, and After our reading and class activities.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>During</th>
<th>After</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Reading Readiness</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Emerging literacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Holistic approach</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Evaluation</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Goals for your future classroom in Kindergarten/First Grade</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Word Recognition skills are like the skills involved in driving a car. You know how to drive a car, but how would you explain what you do to a novice? Let’s see how well you can do by taking the multiple choice test in your text. Don’t panic. Remember, you’re taking it before our discussion. You’ll do much better after.

Now fill in the chart below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Before</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Skills involved in word recognition</td>
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<td>2. How would you teach: phonics context structural analysis sight words</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Phoneme</td>
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<td>4. Morpheme</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Goals in teaching word recognition skills</td>
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About
the
Author

Lynn Nelson received her B.A. in Philosophy from Rutgers and her Ph.D. in Philosophy from Temple.

Her husband, Jack Nelson, is a member of the Philosophy Department at Temple, and she has a sixteen-year-old daughter, Rebecca Watson. The Nelsons enjoy sailing and cooking.

Writing Assignments in Philosophy and Religion: Writing About Processes

Lynn Nelson

The Department of Philosophy and Religion offers a range of courses with different focuses: introductory and special topic courses in philosophy and religion involve both the learning of content and the development of analytical and critical skills; the courses in symbolic logic involve learning the techniques of formal logic; and Logic of Everyday Reasoning focuses on the recognition and evaluation of reasoning patterns in natural language and practical contexts. Despite the variety in focuses, many of the writing assignments developed by the faculty share the goal of encouraging students to focus on and write about processes: those incorporated into the critical skills they are learning and those involved in the learning of these skills, as well as the evolutionary process of developing their own views and skills during a semester.

Dianne Ashton

In Introduction to Religion, Dianne Ashton requires that students undertake a research project and write a formal paper. A typical research assignment is one in which students are asked to focus on a specific religious rite and are instructed to use questions like the following when organizing their material:
1. What is the rite you have examined, and in what religion?
2. What are the main points of the religion?
3. According to this religion, how important is this rite? What functions does it serve?
4. Describe the rite.
5. What new moral rules are those who are undergoing the rite expected to maintain in their new stage? What ethical justifications are given?

Dr. Ashton’s guidelines are designed to shape a coherent and substantive research project, and they provide general research techniques and ways of organizing material and introduce specific theoretical tools of the discipline. The questions also require that students view the rite within the larger context of the religion of which it is a part and that they become familiar with the justifications for it.

But Dr. Ashton also requires that, in addition to doing the research, students must also consciously attend to the research process, and must provide an account of the research process as an integral part of the final report.

*Howard Cell*

In Introduction to Philosophy, and Philosophy and Society, Dr. Cell requires that students keep journals in addition to other writing assignments. His “Journaling Guidelines” provide the rationale for keeping a journal and general guidelines for the kinds of thinking and writing involved in doing so. Students are asked to focus on their own responses to the claims and points of view they are considering and on the implications of these for their own beliefs and practices. The guidelines invite students to engage in the kinds of critical thinking that will preserve the integrity of the views they are considering and their own views:

The journal, then, provides an opportunity to meditate on what we read, but in such a way that the following possibilities are fully examined:
1. Reach—To what extent do the author’s claims apply to your experience, to your concerns and interests, to the beliefs you have about yourself and the world? To what extent do the issues raised by the author remain pertinent issues for you and/or for present American society?

2. Force—Are the author’s claims true? Are they significant? What difference would accepting a given claim make to you, to the way you live your life, to your aspirations and goals?

3. Coherence—Do the author’s various claims and positions fit together? Are they consistent? Do they correspond with what you already know about yourself and the world?

4. Connection—Do the author’s claims or ideas reinforce, or undermine, the ideas of other authors? Do they support, or conflict with, your own ideas?

In Philosophy and Society, Dr. Cell requires that students also write short papers. Here are some of the guidelines:

I shall offer comments and suggestions at each stage of the process: selection of a topic, outline, and first draft. Only the final version will be evaluated/graded....

Perhaps [these] specific recommendations will be useful at the outset:

1. That the more carefully, and narrowly, you focus the issue to be explored in your paper, the less risk there is that you will ramble.

2. That the formulation of a clear, specific thesis about the issue you intend to explore can guide/frame the research you may need to do, the way in which you read pertinent texts, and the process of writing the paper itself.

3. That I am considerably more interested in your thoughts about/reactions to the issues you explore than in the views of professor x or scholar y, as presented in an article in a learned journal. (To be sure, it may be useful to read this or that article which is immediately
pertinent; but the important thing is to formulate your own reactions to a given issue.)

As with the “Journaling Guidelines,” Dr. Cell’s instructions for writing short papers provide students with a clear sense of what is expected, the point of the assignment, and some tools for undertaking the project.

David Clowney

In Introduction to Philosophy, Dr. Clowney assigns three short papers, and in Introduction to Ethics, he assigns a term paper. The writing assignments have a two-fold purpose: to have students wrestle with specific issues and to foster the development of critical thinking skills. Students are introduced to the “how to’s” of doing philosophy and the writing of a philosophy paper through a two-page guide which outlines different approaches one might take to a particular author or issue.

The guide is designed to engage students in the process of “thinking about thinking” by providing general techniques for writing different kinds of philosophical papers: an analytic paper, an interpretive paper, an exploratory paper, a comparative paper, and a dialogue.

Dr. Clowney’s guidelines for writing an analytic paper direct students to focus specifically on the assumptions, arguments, claims, and/or reasoning of an author and to attend to these analytically and critically:

1. Pick a phrase, sentence, or paragraph from one of the essays, one that expresses one of the author’s main points or key assumptions, or that indicates a reason why the author thinks one of the key points must be right.

2. Restate the point in your own words. If you are not sure what the author is saying, and you can’t find out just by using a dictionary, then give two or three possible interpretations of what the author says. Tell which interpretation you think is most likely correct, and why.

3. Say why the author thinks this point must be correct.
Be careful to identify the author's actual reasons; sometimes they are not totally obvious, and you must read between the lines.

4. Evaluate these reasons. Are they sufficient to prove the point? Can you think of other reasons, not mentioned by the author, that tend to support the point? Can you think of reasons not developed by the author that would count against it? When you have weighed the reasons you can think of for and against the point, say what conclusion you come to.

The guidelines Dr. Clowney provides for the writing of "an exploratory paper" are quite different, underscoring that understanding a particular topic, a pattern of reasoning, or a point of view can be approached in a variety of ways. Students who choose to explore a question without consulting sources—students who "fly solo"—are encouraged to do so and are given general guidelines for undertaking that kind of thinking and writing.

1. Pick a topic suggested to you by your reading of one of the essays, or by one of the questions at the end of the essays.
2. Pose a question and try to answer it in the paper you write. E.g., "Is it possible to know for sure whether there is a God?" Or, "Is there anything else in the universe except matter and energy?"
3. Make use of essays in the text as they seem relevant. But this is a more original sort of paper; you are free to write it on your own without referring to other sources.... Again, be careful to identify lines of reasoning that you find persuasive.

The different kinds of thinking and writing assignments are designed to make students aware of the different kinds of thinking and questioning they can undertake. Each assignment encourages students to explore their own views and to use these, as well as
an understanding of other positions, to evaluate arguments and points of view.

*Faith Gielow*

Logic of Everyday Reasoning courses focus on fostering or developing students' critical thinking skills by enabling them to recognize and evaluate reasoning patterns. To encourage students "to think about some subject both critically and in depth" and "to think about what is involved in the critical process," Faith Gielow assigns a research paper that students work on all semester. The goal is to reach a conclusion, which, depending on the topic, may "attempt to resolve a debate," or "may be a discovery" about the topic. The assignment also requires keeping a journal.

Professor Gielow emphasizes that the purpose of the assignment is not just the production of a "final product" (in this case, a five-page essay). Equally important, she stresses, is learning what one needs "to do in the critical process if the final product is to be both knowledgeable and well supported."

She asks students to suggest topics very carefully and provides these general guidelines:

*Selecting a Topic*

1. Choose a topic you do not know much about, whether you are opinionated about it or not.
2. Choose a topic you are interested in, something you would like to know more about—perhaps from within your major or for which you are sure research material is available.
3. Choose a topic which is frequently discussed in the media.
4. Be as specific as you can. Have a project in mind if at all possible.

*Possible Topics*

1. An analysis of the reasoning used in advertising.
2. An historical and critical survey of the research done on cholesterol and the conclusions accepted and rejected.
3. An analysis of the issues surrounding the data banks which offer information on individuals and their finances.
4. An analysis of something which is very commonplace, something you take for granted. It could be your religious beliefs, your beliefs in the American public, etc.

The Journal Paper
A. Your journal will be collected several times throughout the semester to check your progress and allow for some feedback.
B. Materials to be included:
1. A description of your topic and initial impressions.
2. Collected materials: relevant newspaper, journal, or magazine articles; summaries of interviews; representative examples; summaries of your own or others’ experience; etc.
3. Dated journal entries—reflections and updates.
4. A final essay—five pages on your experience.

Lynn Nelson
In Introduction to Symbolic Logic, I have found that asking students to write short essays about the techniques they are using, the process of learning these techniques, the rationale behind them, and ways these techniques can be applied to other contexts go a long way to further students’ mastery of the techniques, their confidence in working in formal contexts, and their ability to recognize connections between reasoning in formal and informal contexts. As they learn to describe the process, they begin to master it—not simply as a mechanical procedure, but in terms of its appropriateness.

In introducing derivations, for example, I stress a goal analysis approach and provide a handout which outlines the process of constructing derivations using that approach:

Goal analysis is a technique that enables one to generate a connected series of subgoals that guide the construction of derivations. When using this kind of analysis to solve
derivations, one works backwards from the goal sentence of the derivation to its assumptions. Goal analysis involves a three-step cycle:

1. Analyze the goal sentence. What kind of sentence is it? If it is not an atomic sentence, what is its main connective? What kinds of sentences are its components? What rule allows you to introduce the main connective—should that be the way to proceed?

2. Analyze the sentences that are accessible to you (primary assumptions or sentences already derived), asking the kinds of questions in step one. Do they have components that are similar to those of the goal sentence? Is there a rule that would allow you to eliminate a connective so as to derive the goal sentence immediately? If you can derive the goal sentence immediately by eliminating a connective in one of these sentences, do so. Otherwise select a subgoal that will help you to get it.

3. Enter the subgoal sentence. Select either an introduction subgoal or an elimination rule subgoal. Enter this subgoal into the derivation, and regard that subgoal sentence as the new goal sentence. Return to step one and repeat the process.

These instructions are adapted from the text used in the course: Bergmann, et al., *The Logic Book*, 2nd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Through class work and discussion, students are encouraged to see that this process is as necessary to constructing a derivation as the correct application of the derivation rules. On quizzes or tests that require derivations, students are also required to write a short essay describing the process, any difficulties they found in solving a particular derivation, ways that the strategy helped them, and any connections they see between the strategy they have used and problem solving in other contexts. I use a similar approach in introducing truth-table techniques to check for validity, consistency, and other logical properties, and for introducing truth trees. That is, in addition to solving problems
using these techniques, students are also required to write about the processes involved and why these processes achieve their intended goals.

As with all of our disciplines, Philosophy and Religion incorporate tools and approaches that are discipline specific, the teaching of which is an integral part of introducing students to the significant questions in our disciplines. We must also make students aware of appropriate approaches to theories and issues within the field. The attention to process I have described is a way of achieving these goals.

But having students write about the processes they are learning to recognize and use has further benefits. Studying processes builds the critical thinking skills and confidence students will need to face issues relevant to the larger community.
About this Book

We composed the pages of this book on a Macintosh II with a PMMU and Connectix's Virtual, a Mac SE with a Dove accelerator, and a Mac Plus.

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