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Audience versus Readers: The immediate reader is not the only audience a writer must consider. The recipient of a letter, for example, may be the first reader, but what if that letter gets used as evidence in a legal dispute later? Writers must be aware of all the members of the potential audience and not just the most immediate reader. Though the teacher of the course is most often the immediate reader for student writing, most assignments have an implied audience that is not the teacher. Thus, distinguishing between the audience and the reader is useful to the composing process.

Constructing Meaning: Words are given meaning in a specific context by the way writers and speakers use language to convey the message. “Constructing meaning” emphasizes the creative and intellectual work inherent in composing and can stand in opposition to less engaging activities like “parroting back,” “repeating from memory” or “filling in blanks.” The activities identified with constructing meaning — summary, explanation of data, analysis, evaluation, making an argument using evidence, addressing a real audience, and using the genres and language of a specific discipline — all require higher order thinking skills that are highly valued in the academic world.

Discourse Community: Groups of people bound together by a set of common practices for communicating. The language, genres, and conventions for communicating vary from group to group. Though disciplinary groups are common discourse communities in the academic world, other discourse communities are formed by those who share a common interest, culture, or religion. Knowing the expectations within the group is essential to successful communication and to indicate that you belong in the group.

Engaged Learning: Time on task plus focused attention equal engagement. Students who are more engaged learn at a deeper level, exhibit more critical thinking abilities, report greater satisfaction with their college experience, and are more likely to complete their degree programs.

FSSE: Faculty Survey of Student Engagement. (see NSSE below).

Genre: Categories of literature, art, or forms of discourse. The features of different genres emerge over time, shaped by the discourse communities in which they occur. Genres have an expected form, shape, or organization (the scientific article, sonnet, or business memo). They may utilize different levels of language or stylistic conventions that set them apart (the comic routine, religious sermon, wedding vows). And, they may be meant for specific audiences or cut across diverse discourse communities (academic essays or commencement addresses versus travel narratives or op-ed pieces).
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Global Issues: All the things in a piece of writing outside the sentence that impact meaning and effectiveness. When writers revise, they need to start with the big things first. If the content, organization, or genre is wrong for the intended purpose and audience, there is little sense in fussing with punctuation, grammar, or spelling.

Higher Order Thinking Skills: The hierarchy of thinking abilities required to do application, analysis, synthesis or evaluation. The most common of these hierarchies is Bloom’s taxonomy. Bloom’s work was updated by a group of cognitive psychologists in the 1990s, but in both versions remembering and comprehending are lower levels of thinking than application, analysis, synthesis, or evaluation. Most university-level courses require these higher order thinking skills, often lumped together as “critical thinking.”

Knowledge Domains: What writers need to know in order to be able to successfully complete any writing task. It’s common to think of knowledge as content, or in some cases as skills. But Anne Beaufort’s work on what students need to learn in order to be able to write successfully within a given discourse community has established four overlapping areas -- or domains -- of knowledge: subject matter, genre, writing processes, and rhetorical situation. Teachers usually find it helpful to think about what students know in each of these areas and how the assignment helps students learn more about what is expected within a given field.

Learning to Write: A phrase to emphasize the many skills and forms of knowledge necessary to produce a text appropriate for the rhetorical situation. Learning to write is often contrasted to “writing to learn” (see below). Assignments that aim to help students learn to write often stress specific discourse expectations like genres, style, and conventions.

Local or Sentence-level Issues: The elements within a sentence, or sometimes across a couple of sentences, that can impact meaning and effectiveness. Getting the wrong word, linking ideas together in ways that violate grammatical expectations, or composing sentences that draw attention to themselves rather than to the meaning are examples of local issues. Similarly, all the typos, wrong punctuation, misspellings, or inappropriate language for the rhetorical situation are sentence-level issues that need a writer’s attention, but usually after the content and organization are settled.
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NSSE: National Survey of Student Engagement. Part of a collection of surveys given to students (and, in the case of FSSE, faculty) to provide institutions with data about the experiences of higher education. The NSSE survey is administered to students across the country in the spring semester of their first year and to graduating seniors, also in the spring semester. According to the NSSE website (http://nsse.iub.edu/html/about.cfm), 761 colleges and universities are participating in NSSE 2011 and more than 2.7 million students have participated since 2000.

Practical Competence: The ability to get things done, manage multiple tasks in a timely manner, plan appropriate processes, and deal with real-world problems. College experiences provide students with job or work-related knowledge and skills, teach students to work effectively with others, and foster the ability to use various technologies to analyze data and solve complex problems. Engaging writing assignments provide opportunities for students to develop practical competence.

Process: The way a written product gets done. Typically “process” is divided into three broad categories: pre-writing, composing, and revising/editing. In the pre-writing stage writers might gather information, brainstorm, think through the rhetorical situation, and make decisions about focus and genre. Though it is common to think of composing as beginning at the introduction and writing until the conclusion, many writers compose in chunks that do not reflect the final organization. Likewise revision and/or editing can happen throughout the composing process. Inexperienced writers often assume that good writers just sit down and write, producing a finished piece in a single session; they don’t realize the complicated and time-consuming process involved in producing a polished text. When we use writing as a verb, we’re referring to the process: I’m writing the report this week.

Product: The end result of the writing process. When we talk about “writing” as a noun, we’re talking about the product: Academic writing requires using evidence to draw a conclusion or make an argument. Written texts have all kinds of forms: memos, essays, annotated bibliographies, PowerPoints, multi-media documents, websites, etc. Product is a term that captures all those different forms and is often used to contrast process. Teachers typically give lots of direction for what the finished product should look like. Helping students with the process necessary to get to that finished product is equally important.
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Reflection: Writing that provides the opportunity to think through an experience, revisit and revise prior understanding and/or synthesize knowledge gleaned from different experiences or over time. Reflection builds deeper understanding because it forces us to articulate lived experience and lets us develop meta-cognition -- that is knowledge about knowing, thinking and learning.

Rhetorical Situation: Shorthand for the interplay of message, audience, purpose and form. How you say (or write) what you need to communicate depends on what that message is, who you are addressing, why you are communicating and what medium is available to you. Understanding the rhetorical situation is a key component of composing an effective and meaningful text. Sometimes writers can alter the expected genre, but usually they have to meet readers’ expectations and the genre plays a crucial role in establishing that the writer knows what’s expected. Understanding the rhetorical situation is key to oral communication as well. This is not a new concept; indeed, the ancient Greeks had elaborate ways of thinking about the rhetorical situation.

Rubrics: An evaluation guide that lays out the elements expected and illustrates the range of performance possible for each element. Creating a rubric in advance helps teachers think through their own expectations for the assignment and the places where students may encounter difficulty or need instruction. Giving students a rubric in advance makes expectations clearer and reminds students of those expectations as they work on producing the text.

Subject Matter: The content of a text. In disciplinary courses, writing is often focused on the content, or subject matter, that students are trying to master. Writing assignments can help students learn that content better (writing to learn) or help them convey their learning in ways expected by the discipline (learning to write). Having something to write about is not, however, all that is necessary for a text to be successful.

Writing To Learn: A phrase used to emphasize how the process of writing can promote learning. Writing promotes learning because the activity of writing forces us to think things through, synthesize information, evaluate or analyze data, and use evidence to support a conclusion. Writing to learn assignments focus on developing a deep understanding of the content or the thinking skills that are valued in academic settings.