



The Complexity of Simplicity: Invention Potentials for Writing Students

by Colin Charlton

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The Complexity of Simplicity: Invention Potentials for Writing Students

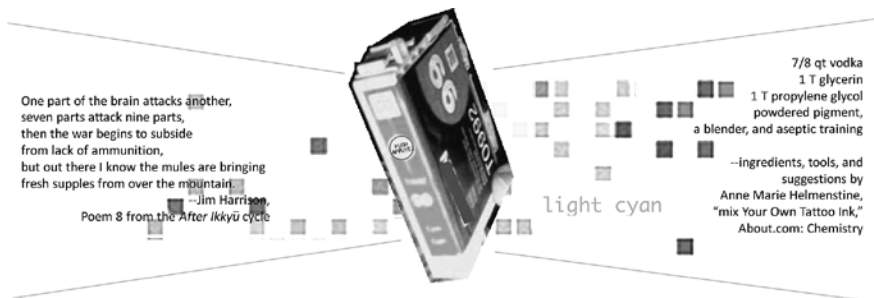
Colin Charlton

[T]he “format” of this piece—it goes against what I’ve been taught: to keep things orderly and clump ideas together. This piece is my way of taking everything that has been fumbling around in my mind and putting it on paper. Essentially, this is my brain splattered in ink and words on the paper before you. This is my baby-step attempt at experimentation. I am “painting a picture with words,” . . . as cliché as that may sound.

—Brittany Ramirez, “My Written Mess,” *Reflective Portfolio Cover Letter, English 1301-Rhetoric & Composition I*

This is a chapter for you if you’re in a first year writing class right now and this thought has recently crossed your mind: *What am I going to write?** I hope it helps you do two things: (1) realize everyday potentials you have to write something unexpected, and (2) realize that, rather than one strategy, you can and should develop many writing strategies that work during the course of a writing class. When we face a new writing situation, regardless of its origin, we want direction. We crave instruction. “Just tell me what you want!” is not a cry owned solely by

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freshmen writers, but one felt and repeated by anyone who struggles with a fresh scene. In the unfamiliar territory of a research project that begins with a question instead of an already known answer, we still hope for a light at the end of the research and writing tunnel. The trick is to find ways to keep the struggle going, to make manageable the hard work of writing, reading, and re-seeing what we've created in light of new questions we cannot foresee.

I'm talking about invention, or how we bring a variety of ideas and/or objects together to make a meaning that is more than the sum of its parts. If you find a confident writer in a room full of doubt, chances are you've found someone who has figured out through trial and error how to invent as a writer. In the following pages, then, you will find a variety of strategies for coming up with ideas based on real students and their writing. These won't be plug-and-play strategies. Instead, they enact philosophies for invention that you can adapt to your writing situations. You will also find a critical look at the writing classroom and how you can bring ideas of invention into it. This blend of reflection and action, of theory and practice, of thinking and doing, is the *praxis*, or practice, of writing. This essay is, simply put, a demonstration and an invitation to transform the uncertainty of *What am I going to write?* into an opportunity to make new connections between texts, people, and ideas. Throughout the essay and the visual essay that is embedded in the following pages, you'll get to hear from students who experimented with invention, both in terms of their major writing projects and their reflections on our work together. Erika, Adbe, Ozzy, and Brittany's work and ideas, I think, illustrate the challenge and the reward of a writing class that emphasizes potentials over outcomes.

... COLLEGE

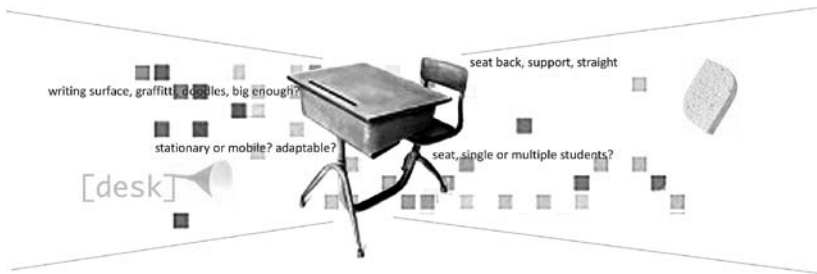
The first year of college is about making stuff up.

Maybe that's a brash way to describe a time that is hyped by universities, held sacred by the extended families of first-generation college students, and analyzed by faculty whose bread and butter is in teaching *required* classes. Still, I'm willing to bet that it's part of a larger truth about how new college students learn to survive higher education initiations. I remember doing it myself in the early '90s, and I see my students doing it every year. You develop new ways to resist what you don't like or don't think you can handle. You find quasi-ritualistic ways to handle too much studying mixed with too little sleep. If you're ever in the market for memory aids and survival advice, don't consult the teachers you see a few times a week—they haven't been in the college trenches for a while. Go visit a dorm hall full of new engineering students, and you'll soon be exposed to a hotbed of coping and studying strategies that will leave you dizzy.

Gerald Graff, a well known English professor and author, borrowed a concept from social psychology, cognitive dissonance, to describe what new students experience at a university as they move from class to class, teacher to teacher, worldview to worldview, and theory to theory, with no one doing a very good job helping them see any connective tissue among the competing ideas. Such a dissonant environment breeds a divide-and-conquer strategy—find out what one teacher wants, deliver the goods, move on to the next teacher. To be fair, there is an intelligent type of adaptation that emerges from doing this, but also a practical one that works at keeping ideas segregated by class and subject area. Even in that setting, students are constantly “making stuff up,” socially as well as intellectually. You have found, or will find, supportive peer groups; you'll create reasons to keep reading an article or book when you're struggling to see its personal relevance; you'll mark out favorite places on campus for study, for talk, for pause. Perhaps the one universalizing constant at every college campus I've seen is that students inject their identity into the surroundings—in the tinny music we catch from passing headphones, on organizational flyers, through fashion, in questions, even during the occasional foray into the teacher-space of a classroom or office. These moves—*your* moves—like any moves in an unfamiliar place, are full of stutters, dodges, successes, and hopeful repetitions; but through them, critical social and intellectual patterns emerge. And if invention happens

everywhere at college, why not make it work for us in the writing classroom?

One way of engaging your inventiveness rather than choosing to sit back, modeling passivity by invoking that tried and tired excuse of apathy is to consciously imagine a different kind of writing class, one we can better understand if we think of it in terms of three questions being negotiated from the point of view of the teacher, the project, and you, the student. At minimum, you have a teacher who is trying to strike an odd balance between guiding you and prescribing to you.



TEACHER: How can I best help students without doing the work for them?

You have a project your teacher has assigned, full of potential, that exists between the teacher and you. Even though its voice is a quiet one, it is still asking a question of both teacher and student.

PROJECT: How do I reflect what the teacher values and make a space where students, as writers, can creatively resist, enact, adapt, and experiment with those values?

And there's you, the student, who needs to figure out the answer to the following question before you can take on any project with confidence and creativity.

STUDENT: How do I make this writing matter for me?

... COLLEGE → FIRST YEAR WRITING

These three questions mark the productive dissonance of the first year writing class you're in right now. It is a complicated, transitional space for you as you experiment with new networks of places, people, and

identity. If you surveyed your class about their attitudes towards reading and writing—and I do every semester, every class—I bet the majority would describe in great detail how they aren't good writers, how they're easily bored by readings they don't choose, and how they struggle with writing intensive classes because of the pressure *and* the lack of control they promise. Do you see yourself in one or more of those answers? We all know this writing and reading stuff is important, but it's rare to find many students who can articulate that importance in their own terms, in the contexts of their lives. My guess is that, over the years, you've heard more people preaching the abstract importance of writing in your life than fostering invention.

Perfect example: you're in a class and find out over half the class hasn't read an assigned reading or prepared a complete draft of a writing project. Does your teacher get mad and reprimand your class, and make a case for why the work should've been done? Do disengaged students hide while prepared students silently seethe? I don't find these situations, and the assumptions about student intent that underly them, very helpful. Instead, imagine if the students and teacher could figure out how to make the situation work, how to invent a moment for learning with what is readily available, how to bang two rocks together and try to make a spark.

Invention Potential 1: Less Can Be More

Let's try that, banging two rocks together, first with reading. You didn't read and prepare for class today. Whether it was too many hours at work or too many other things due in your other classes, something just had to give, and you let the reading go for your writing class. But you have a few minutes before class to pull something together. You have the reading, you have some paper and a pen or a laptop, and you have the course syllabus. Take five minutes, and make them count. Quickly answer these questions.

- What is the title of the reading? In general, what is the abstract (the summary paragraph that may precede the article) or the first paragraph talking about?
- What is the title and subtitle of your class? What goals has the teacher identified for you and the class (now often found in lists called Goals for Instruction or Student Learning Outcomes)?

- What is one idea or question you can think of that connects the assigned reading to at least one of the goals you found in the syllabus?

Even if you don't feel like sharing your idea or posing your question in class, it's an opening connection that you've made in your own words. It's a start at writing your way into the class as opposed to letting the class always be written for you. This is writing and invention potentials helping you make sense of a class meeting, and we haven't even begun to work with a formal writing assignment.

Let's consider a situation where you were thinking about writing—there will be a day when something is due and either you're not happy with what you've brought to class, or your teacher sees your work as incomplete, or both. But since writing is a process filled with successes and failures, those days when drafts are due or some kind of writing deadline has arrived, I try to make space for a workshop that can help everyone in the room, from those with nothing to show to those with too much. We circle up, one circle inside another, a set of ten to fifteen workshop partners. You get five minutes to explain what you wrote, what you were trying to do, and how this meets the demands of the assignment. And you need to prompt some feedback from your partner—*What do you think? Does it make sense? What's your favorite part of my writing? What would you like to see developed in my next revision? What question do I make you think of with my writing?* Ten minutes and an exchange later, we switch partners and repeat until class time is over. Very simple setup, and it doesn't matter if you have confusion, an unwritten idea, or something of a draft. After one of these speed-back sessions (where feedback meets speed-dating), and regardless of whether you started with less or more, you will have likely clarified your goals and learned about how your peers are trying to meet theirs.

I make room for these sessions on a regular basis, but you can do the same outside of class. Speedbacking requires a place, a timer, any



work/ideas you have prepared for class, and some time set aside before a class when a piece of writing is due. You can organize this type of feedback in small groups of students, meet in a comfortable environment, and push each other to listen and respond to each other's writing quickly. It will be less stressful than sitting blank in front of a monitor for hours.

Feedback activities depend on your desire to connect—ideas, people, pieces of writing. They do not depend on imposed trips to writing centers, complicated workshop setups, reading quizzes, or any number of things writers find themselves doing to make sure work is getting done. And when you can find feedback strategies you enjoy, you will find ways to make invention part of the real writing you experience every day instead of relegating it to solitary places outside of class where we often think preliminary and catch-up work has to be done.

The trick here is that in college, especially in writing- and reading-intensive classes, you can take control of getting started and getting feedback by creating a student network willing to talk to each other about their ideas, their potentials, for a writing assignment. You may feel blocked, but maybe you just need several other perspectives on what you're thinking. And if you can create a speedback situation, or some other feedback strategy that happens while you're writing and not just after a deadline, you're more likely to feel like you're responding to real questions and not just an assignment.

... COLLEGE → FIRST YEAR WRITING → OBJECTS OF STUDY

Increasing opportunities for feedback helps you tap into your emerging networks and invent compelling writing projects—ones that blend your interests with what your teacher wants from you according to your assignment, ones that create intriguing experiences and arguments for public audiences, and often look like. . . . Well, over the years, I've seen T-shirts, board games, bracelets, student-designed care packages, photo essays, house blueprints, even a letter to college students, divided into seven paragraphs and hung from trees all over campus. All very original, these student projects were created in first semester college writing classes, their authors' ages ranging from sixteen to fifty-six, with experiences from Central Mexico to Northern Indiana. With that in mind, I want to turn to some course documents, while bringing in some student voices, and a couple of extended ex-

amples so that, with this rich context, you can see the potential for re-thinking how you can generate ideas in a first year writing class.

Invention Potential 2: Displacing Focus with Rhetorical Drift

As I think through the types of projects I've made room for over the years, it strikes me that even if we just think about the ones I listed above, they seem to be a pretty loose group. Not much holding them together. So far this essay of philosophizing mixed with examples might make you think that I let my students write anything they want and that I'm encouraging you, as well, to write anything you want; in other words, trading rules for freedom. I don't think writers have to choose one over the other. I don't think you can. If I try to convince you to write whatever you want, I'm using a traditional strategy for engaging students: your choice, your interests, your whatever. But any writing choice is a *choice*. At the end of a semester, Adbe Guerrero, a former student, taught me about the positions that expertise and choice occupied in relation to his experiences, my teaching, and one of our later readings:

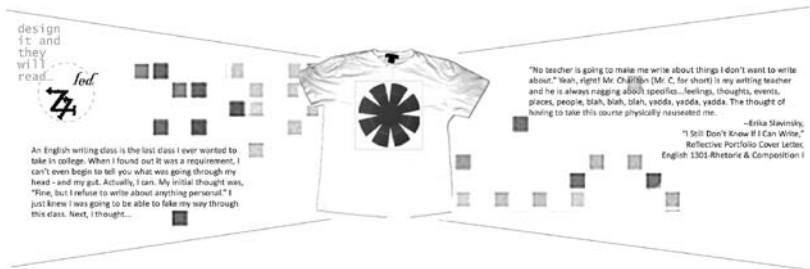
I have begun to notice that all of my [question and response papers] are negative. Ha, well, I don't plan on stopping. Throughout our last reading, the authors talk about "nurturing creativity" and I suppose this isn't something I'm used to since most of my teachers didn't give a rat's ass about what the students had to say. It was always what they wanted. . . . In your class I had so much more freedom to write the way I wanted and made my voice be heard the way I wanted it to be (rude and realistic). Personally, I can't stand being polite in my papers because, if there is something that irritates me, I want to be able to express it the way I would when I'm speaking to an individual in person. But in high school they wouldn't allow anything close to that.

In class, I do talk about and privilege rhetorical choices rather than impose top-down requirements. Adbe frames our class in terms of voice and choice (and he's quite aware of the choices he's making for his preferred written voice and the limits they have in other situations), but his comments and the range of work students might complete in first year writing courses is a challenge to that most misunderstood of misunderstood writing-teacher-terms: focus. You can't easily find the

focus of what my students are writing while I'm busy pushing invention.

That's by design.

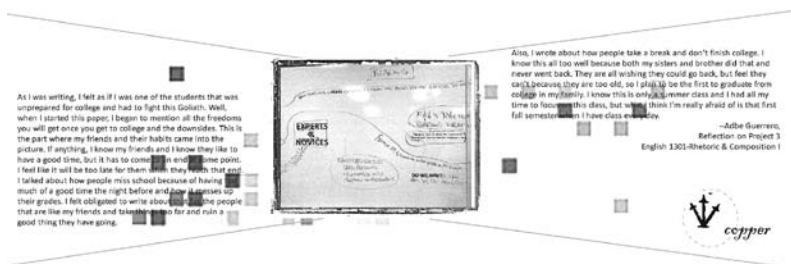
Regardless of how traditional your experience with writing instruction has been, the idea of focus is inescapable. Even though I shy away from talk of focus at the beginning of a project, it's natural to crave it. We often see the amount of focus as a corollary to the quality of the writing. Both students and teachers want goals, and we should have them. They inspire, direct, and demarcate. But when our goals be-



come expressed by questions like *How many words? How many pages? How many sources?*, we've let the goals displace writing as learning and invention. We have to balance our need to know with our desire to understand. Then we can offset the obstacle of focus and try to generate cohesion in writing through experimentation and drift. So why not ask: *How many new ideas should we come up with for this writing project?*

I'm introducing words here like *experiment*, *invention*, and *drift*, so I should explain what they mean in this context. I want writers who leave me behind early in their college careers to be able to analyze and adapt to the writing situations they will face after my class. If we believe that there is one type of academic discourse that college authorities value and that we should try to use as a model, you end up learning a long list of rhetorical moves, sentence types, written tones, etc. It may be quite a long list, but it's still defined by an ideal type of writing. There are a lot of reasons not to believe in an ideal type of writing. We're not sure if, and to what extent, writing skills transfer from one class to another. You may have teachers from multiple generations who may have very different ideas about how people should write at a university. And your ideas about good writing need an invitation to the party because, otherwise, teachers risk stagnation in their own ideas as writing experts and writing teachers.

Faced with these realities, you can make room to test the effects of different ways of writing (experiment), combine seemingly disconnected forms of writing (invention), and even try to be open to that which you can't predict or control as writers (drift). In the context of the project sequence I use, I want to share an example from Brittany Ramirez, the student quoted in the epigraph for this chapter, as she works with what Adbe calls *freedom* of my projects, what I think of as *inventive potential*. While Erika, Adbe, and Ozzy will chime in about the class and their work in the images I bring in throughout the essay, I want to discuss a sequence of three projects by Brittany to highlight how you can work with experimentation and drift as alternatives to a more focused writing sequence. I think Brittany's work is a compelling example of how subtle and measured the shifts can be as a writing project develops. And you'll see how what begins for her as a default essay becomes a mock-up of an ACT exam reading passage with questions.



Invention Potential 3: If You Can Ask WHY?, You're a Theorist

The first part of a writing sequence that revolves around invention begins with one of three projects. In Project 1-Breaking Ice, I explain our goals this way:

To start a conversation with each of you about this project, I would start with some questions: *How did you get here? What do you want? How do you think you're going to get it?* Then, after we talked for a long time, I would say, *So what does all that have to do with writing and/or learning?*

See, I'm not sure how you think writing happens or how learning works, and I want to know about your theories even while we are reading other people's ideas. I also don't think that "writing" and "learning" are easily defined, or that they

happen only in classrooms, or that we always have control over what we write and what we learn. . . . **For this project, then, I want you to create a *text* in which you explain a theory you have about writing and learning.** You'll have to come up with (1) a real question you have about your experiences with writing and learning, (2) an idea of what a project about that question could look like, and (3) a way to answer (1) and create (2). To begin the project and get the gears turning, I already asked everyone to write in class about the strangest piece of writing they ever did (see the blog notes on day one). After you write about and we discuss your ideas for Project 1 as a whole class, we'll also discuss potential audiences and purposes based on who you think is invested in the question driving your project.

Beginning with Project 1, I ask students to explain the forms they chose for their theory of how writing and learning work. A student could, for instance, write a manifesto to their high school writing teachers calling for an end to test-teaching. We can imagine a letter to parents about how they taught you to learn and how you're working with strategies at college. Maybe we can even imagine writing a profile to a teacher explaining how a particular type of student works best. I don't get much of that, regardless of how many examples I throw out. I get "essays" and student explanations that the essays do what essays do. Totally normal, especially when I get a summary of the essay rather than an explanation of how a student crafted it and wanted it to work. Here are excerpts from an early draft of Brittany's Project 1 that emerged from her response writing. She decided to test the connections between her experiences in high school and in our class. Worth noting is that, without my direct prompting, she and several students began to blend characteristics from their question and response papers into their longer projects, a good sign that they were testing how the familiar meshed with the strange.

Brittany Ramirez
English 1301.02s1-09
6.14.09
Project 1

Q: If you can comprehend difficult material (i.e. Downs & Wardle Article), does that affect your writing capability?

MERELY A MISCONCEPTION

From the elementary level to secondary schooling, educators are consistent upon the insistence that their students read more because it will help improve their vocabulary, writing, etc. School districts have even gone as far as instituting incentive programs in order to encourage reading (i.e. Accelerated Reader or A.R.) or otherwise force it on students. However, the question here is, does reading more really help; and if so, does reading more difficult material play a role in one's writing level?

. . . I believe that one's writing can be improved through reading and that in some part, your reading level does affect your writing capability, but it is not always the case. Different people learn differently. Writing requires practice all on its own in order to better oneself at it and requires the reading of not just more difficult pieces but a multitude of pieces. In order to improve one's writing one needs to be exposed to different varieties of writing in order to hone the ability of comprehension. Everyone has their own method and style of writing, however no one style of writing is original. It is just like art, an artist can no longer claim their work to be original because everything has been done before. What can be done is to take what others have given us and use it to our advantage; learn from it.

As Brittany tries to work out the relationship between reading and writing, the tension that strikes me is between her idea of how art blends original work with old work and how that might contribute to "universal characteristics." She talked in her blog and in-group workshops about how reading about writing studies challenged her to think more about what happened to us in class on a daily basis. She was hyper-reflective, and as a result, she turned to look more closely at pre-college testing, the place where reading and writing ability get measured without an explanation for how they link or work together.



What she's concerned with are values. She's asking *Why?* I would argue that this is a writer's job, this is your job as a first year writing student, almost in any context. Whether you come out and try to answer that question in a piece of writing, or deep down it's the reason you started a writing project at all, a writer who has a question tugging away at the gray areas, memories, and experiences is a writer who is inventing possible solutions. What makes Brittany a good example here is that she doesn't stop from expressing her belief. She's not backing away from engaging me and her peers with her value system, even though it will certainly mean more discussion, negotiation, and revision.

Invention Potential 4: Finding a Question before an Answer

For Project 2-Questioning Writing (Studies), I asked students to build out of their Project 1:

Think about how your interests connect to the field of writing studies we've been reading, blogging, talking, and thinking about. What I want you to do for Project 2 is to develop a question you have related to writing studies as we are coming to understand it through our work so far in English 1301. Once we've discussed that question in several ways—class discussion, peer review, blog postings and comments—you'll investigate that question, and then write a report of your investigation in which you will:

- Explain how you came to the question, why it is important, and what it involves;
- Describe how you investigated it, both in terms of the strengths of your design and its limitations;
- Discuss your findings and their significance for one or more invested stakeholders, and brainstorm about possible

ways to adapt what you've learned by investigating Project 2 to a public Project 3 that puts your findings and your theories about reading, writing, and/or learning to work.

Brittany looked at a specific test she had experience with so that: 1) she could draw from her experience; 2) she could quickly work through relevant testing information and materials; 3) and she could manage a small amount of materials while trying to explore her questions further. At this point in her process, I even suggested she focus on one type of testing question rather than risk generalizing about all tests and measurements of student ability. At this point, I felt comfortable that she had roamed widely in our class readings and her own research to understand how deep the rabbit hole of writing studies went. Her title: "Extreme Makeover: ACT Edition." Here is a taste of her essay's introduction and conclusion:

In the educational universe there is a perpetual cycle: High school, the dawn of junior/senior year, then the counselors and their persistent hounding "Have you signed up for your ACT/SAT . . . make sure to sign up!" College Entrance Exams: what exactly do these three words entail? To some, they are the factor that will basically determine the rest of their lives. The question I pose, however, is: Does the ACT accurately determine (i.e. my) readiness for college level courses, in this case, in terms of English?

. . . These tests assume "writing is writing," as stated in the Downs and Wardle article "Teaching about Writing, Righting Misconceptions: (Re)Envisioning 'First Year Composition' as 'Introduction to Writing Studies.'" Downs and Wardle point out that "The content-versus-form misconception—as old as FYC itself—appears in standardized testing, with the SAT 'writing' test giving better scores to longer essays and completely discounting factual errors" (555). This serves as further testament to my belief that these tests are inadequate in determining one's readiness for college. In college, it is not about length, it is about content. While some instances may require you to write an essay of a limited word count, it is still what you are writing about that is the most important factor. . . . It's time for a full-scale renovation.

Brittany is doing a lot of what I want to see in this early draft—making connections between the position in a text and her experiences, tweaking a found challenge to suit her own beliefs, values, and interests, and explaining evidence. She’s doing all this as a concurrently enrolled student living in both worlds of “readiness,” but she was not an exception in her class. In a mixed class of high school and college students, one thing they learned immediately from the required blog interactions was that their assumed likenesses—as students, as people from the same geographic area, as a class made entirely of students with Hispanic backgrounds—were much less interesting than the differences in how they had experienced public education, writing, and learning.

Reading about Brittany’s writing, I don’t know how connected you feel to your first year writing class and your writing in it. I do know that you are an expert in experiencing and surviving pre-college education, that you are a reader, that you are a writer, even if you don’t like how academics describe those identities. And I know you have questions about your learning, about writing, about reading, and about why you think the way you do about all three. When you find a way to articulate those questions, to make them bridges to how you write or what you have to write about, you are no longer writing and reading because you have to. I think you start writing and reading because you need to.

Invention Potential 5: Adapting Forms as Public Invention

Because the blog helped us re-invent their diversity, Brittany was able to springboard from her Project 2 argument to an application of it in Project 3. In Project 3-Going Public, I asked that students take their ideas from Project 2 and adapt them to a new format that requires them to consider a public audience’s desires, needs, limitations, expectations, etc., while experimenting with new forms for their ideas in a public context.

I have to stress here that Brittany was not a closet document designer, a trained graphic artist, or an expert in testing beyond her role as testing subject before our class. For Project 3, she produced a mock-up of an ACT exam reading and question set (which I’ve abbreviated).

DIRECTIONS: The passage in this test is followed by several questions. After reading the passage, choose the best an-

swer to each question and fill in the corresponding oval on your answer document. You may refer to the passage as often as necessary.

Rhetoric & Composition: This passage is adapted from the article “Teaching about Writing, Righting Misconceptions: (Re)Envisioning ‘First-Year Composition’ as ‘Introduction to Writing Studies’ by Douglas Downs & Elizabeth Wardle (©2007 by Douglas Downs & Elizabeth Wardle). *This article was part of the required reading curriculum in a first-semester university class (1301: Rhetoric & Composition).

SYSTEMATIC MISCONCEPTION AND MISDIRECTION OF MAINSTREAM FYC

A number of assumptions inform the premise that academic writing is somehow universal: writing can be considered independent of content; writing consists primarily of syntactic and mechanical concerns; and academic writing skills can be taught in a one or two introductory general writing skills courses and transferred easily to other courses. . . . Despite research demonstrating the complexity of writing, misconceptions persist and inform FYC courses around the country that attempt to teach “academic discourse.”

1. What “assumptions,” as stated by Downs & Wardle have become common misconceptions of writing?
 - a. That writing mainly deals with grammatical concerns and has nothing to do with content.
 - b. Writing is merely to do with content.
 - c. Writing varies between focusing on content and syntactics.
 - d. That writing is both content and mechanics.
- . . .
2. Write a short explanation (about 4–5 sentences) in which you discuss the significance of Downs & Wardle’s argument to a first-year college student.

Study Guide

Students will be given a passage with a set of questions in which they will decipher the answer. The main difference in this adaptation is the alteration in passage material being tested on. The testing procedures are the same, but the questions being asked are ones that will test on whether or not the test-taker comprehends the material.

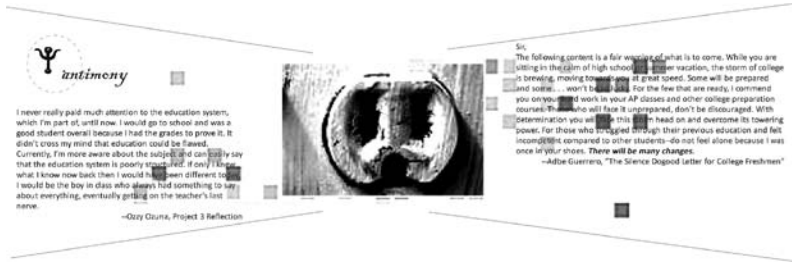
In #5 for example, the reader is asked to put pen to paper and answer the question that will be graded on a scale of 1–4 purely on content. The resulting score will determine if the student fully comprehends this piece and can incorporate it into a situation that they will possibly face going into first-year English in college.

If students are tested over material that they will witness in an actual college class, such as the Downs & Wardle article, not only are they exposed to it, but it gives them a view into what an actual college course and its professor is going to want to see from them as students.

The exam allows students to “get their feet wet” in writing, well, about *writing*. In FYC, the focus is mainly that, so this gives them an idea as to what to expect and what will be expected of them in terms of writing. This being a writing exam, having actual questions that require written responses makes more sense. Scores will more accurately reflect the college-capability of the test-taker.

Brittany questioned the form and function of a test, so it made sense for her to try and create one that met her goals. In the end, she created what we might now call an example of high school and college alignment—an exam in high school that might have prepared her for our college writing class. It is wishful thinking, but classmates were prompted to talk about how to approach tests that they needed to take but didn’t agree with, and my colleagues and I learned that alignment discussions can be had among all stakeholders, rather than among teachers and administrators alone.

Looking back at where Brittany started, I hope you can see that what matters here is not *only* having a defined audience as a writer. Depending on your project, your audience may occur to you or develop at any time of your writing process. What matters here is that



Brittany went through real re-vision in terms of her audience. Writing about her ideas several times, in a variety of situations, and with a lot of feedback, she found a form that made sense for what she had to say. And she thought about saying it to different people along the way. If you want to create a document that can engage people who care about your issue/idea/question, you should experiment writing for different audiences so that you develop a sense of adaptation.

... COLLEGE → FIRST YEAR WRITING → OBJECTS OF STUDY → REFLECTION

Is Brittany's version of an ACT passage and questions "college writing?" Did she invent something useful, creative, and challenging? I would suggest here that the thinking and experimentation that go into adapting an argumentative essay to a mock ACT test require not that you think outside the box. Rather, you will need to re-draw the lines of the box itself by recognizing a potential for writing and then negotiating that potential with your writing teachers. There are still issues Brittany can address in her reasoning, in surface choices, in organization, changes that matter to her because she is trying to make an unforeseen form work for a variety of interested parties—herself as writer, me as her writing teacher, her peers in high school and college who face testing situations that seriously affect their lives and outlooks. The unforeseen form in this example makes those issues negotiable for both of us. We are able to write ourselves and our values into the project, and I think we are both better off for the experience.

I hope that Erika, Adbe, Ozzy, Brittany, and I have helped you see that you have something insightful to say, that you can now find interesting ways to share these insights quickly and meaningfully in university settings, and that first year writing is a rich beginning and not a mysterious necessity. And these insights depend on considering

a variety of forms during all stages of a project rather than letting one formula or a desire for focus overcome the openness of an initiating question.

The ease of familiarity and the intrinsic value of focus, in the end, may be two of the most damaging myths we need to re-invent in a writing classroom. As my students, my colleagues, and I continue to think about and create new types of hybrid texts, we invite you to see where our curiosity leads us. Coming in Spring 2011, you can find more projects and contexts online at <http://redrawingthelines.blogspot.com/>.

DISCUSSION

1. What are the three questions the author says are negotiated that you need to be aware of when engaging in invention activities? How do these questions move you to consider unusual perspectives? Do these questions work for you? Could you rewrite them so they work more efficiently for your circumstances, for a particular assignment?
2. What are the six potentials the author talks about in the title? How would you define these potentials in terms practical to your own writing? Which of these would you be moved to try/consider first?
3. The author uses sequence connectors throughout, such as this final one: . . . College → First Year Writing → Objects of Study → Reflection. What does this mean to you in the context of this essay? How would you juxtapose these sequences to the rest of the sections of the essay (the potentials for invention)? How could you use this sequence to inform how you approach writing in courses other than first year writing or freshman English?
4. Which of the student authors do you most relate to? Why? What, if anything, specifically moved you to inspiration, perhaps to try a similar process or seek a similar epiphany?
5. Does the author talk about college writing that you know—something that is familiar to you? Are you uncomfortable with the methods the author talks about? Why? Are you intrigued by the author's ideas about invention? What do you want to try first in your own project—which invention strategy do you

think will move you forward toward creativity and perhaps, eventually, focus?

NOTE

1. I created the images for *inSights*, the visual essay throughout the essay, but I have to give special thanks to Jacqueline Casas, a student in the same English 1301 as Brittany and Adbe, who made sure we had readable images of all our whiteboard work. Her skills with a cell phone camera at the end of several classes meant that we could spend class time making connections rather than taking notes.

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