



Teaching *The New Humanities Reader*  
An Instructors Resource Manual, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition

Written and edited by Tisha Bender and Michael Goeller

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by Richard E. Miller and Kurt Spellmeyer



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## I. Introduction

Welcome to Teaching *The New Humanities Reader*, the Instructor's Resource Manual designed to accompany *The New Humanities Reader*, edited by Richard E. Miller and Kurt Spellmeyer. This manual focus on the six core components of the pedagogy implicit in this reader, which are:

- Reading as conversation
- Active learning
- Writing as creative thinking
- Revision as process
- Controlling error in context
- Institutionalized assessment

Among the topics discussed are:

- Planning reading sequences that put difficult texts in conversation to explore, test, build and complicate students' ideas.
- Staging group activities that put the onus on students, engaging them in making meaning through active learning and collaboration.
- Writing assignment questions that require original connections and creative analysis, pushing students beyond shallow summary, personal response, or simple comparison.
- Guiding revision through a process that begins with creative discovery and only then hones organization and presentation, supported by effective peer review.
- Teaching grammar as the active process of controlling error practiced within the context of writing itself.
- Assessing according to common grading standards that establish high expectations yet free teachers from the burden of justifying grades.

The material that follows has mostly emerged through a collaborative effort over many generations of teachers at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, NJ. We hope that our dialogue with you will help to improve it for the future and we invite your feedback, sample assignments, and questions, which you can send to [tisha.bender@rutgers.edu](mailto:tisha.bender@rutgers.edu) or [michael.goeller@rutgers.edu](mailto:michael.goeller@rutgers.edu).





## II. Course Description and Pedagogy

Students who take writing courses supported by *The New Humanities Reader* should be able to compose an expository essay that reflects their own informed point of view and demonstrates thoughtful engagement with complex readings of some length. The word “expository” means exploratory, and the process of reaching beyond what is known to discover new ideas is at the core of *The New Humanities* pedagogy.

Our reader encourages students to see themselves as participants in an ongoing written “conversation” about some of the most important issues of our time: globalization, biotechnology, environmental decline, the encounter between different regions and cultures, the changing nature of identity, and the search for enduring values beyond the prospect of seemingly random change. This conversational model of writing assumes the notion of a community that includes the authors of the assigned texts, the teacher, and all other students in the class. In other words, as the students read, they can imagine being in conversation with the author in terms of what the author is saying; when the students participate in class discussion, they are in conversation with their peers and the teacher about the reading; when the students write an assignment concerning two or more texts, they can assume that the authors are in conversation with them and each other as they lead them in discussion; when the students write, they show their work to a group of their peers to converse with them about the merit and meaningfulness of their work; when teachers grade the final draft, they are in conversation with the students through their written marginal and end comments. In all ways, therefore, the Writing Program’s pedagogy is a collaborative one. It assumes also that in the absence of definitive “answers,” the writer’s most important task is the understanding of complex issues and the communication of this understanding to others.

*The New Humanities Reader* presupposes that the context for writing is always prior reading and critical thinking, and in this spirit it is an anthology rather than a textbook or rhetorical text. The point of this anthology is to elicit writing that closely approximates the work students are likely to do in many of their college classes and, later, in their professional lives. To encourage complex thought, teachers should construct “sequences” of readings and assignments that will lead incrementally toward essays that synthesize multiple sources while making an independent argument.

Reading, interpretation, connective synthesis, and the use of textual evidence should receive highest priority during the first half of the course, but at the same time, teachers should work with students to address grammar and sentence-level error. Strong academic writing incorporates cycles of reading, pre-writing, drafting, peer review, rereading, and revision. To this end, the ultimate goal is for

students to produce presentable final drafts, which become more and more polished over the course of a semester. It is recommended that students should be taught grammar, clarity, and structural coherence in the context of revision. The principle setting for the discussion of these matters should be rough and then final drafts written for the course, as opposed to workbook-style exercises or lectures on correctness and style. It is advantageous to help students recognize the patterns of error in their own writing, and to see problems of organization as a consequence of conceptual confusion.

### ***Becoming Acquainted with Your Students***

Incoming college students often have widely varied backgrounds and levels of preparation, so you may want to survey them informally to find out what kinds of reading and writing they have done in the past. The idea that knowledge comes into existence through conversations among informed reader/writers, which can be thought of as a social process involving a “co-construction of meaning,” contradicts several of the assumptions underlying the curriculum in many high schools. Typically students have learned how to summarize or repeat information, or to offer “personal responses” to literary works or to themes assigned by the teacher. Few first-year students have read prose texts as lengthy and complex as Pietra Rivoli’s “Dogs Snarling Together: How Politics Came to Rule the Global Apparel Trade”, or Tanya M. Luhrmann’s “Metakinesis: How God Becomes Intimate in Contemporary U.S. Christianity”. In the presence of extended arguments that challenge and, at times, even threaten to defeat their best efforts at understanding, students need to be reminded that most good readings begin as misreadings, and that re-reading, writing, and revising initial interpretations are fundamental to the discovery of knowledge in every field.

### ***Reading and Critical Thinking***

From the start of the first year composition course, we should teach students that reading involves a range of interpretive practices rather than simple recognition and memorization. These practices include:

- isolating, discussing, and writing about difficult, interesting, enlightening, or infuriating passages;
- identifying key terms, claims, and examples;
- drawing on general information, or on insights from other texts and from class discussions, in order to make sense of moments in an essay or excerpt that may initially seem opaque;
- using drafts, rereading, and continued discussion to test various interpretations of the assigned material.

### ***Writing***

Students will come into your classroom with a great deal of practice in writing to demonstrate their prior knowledge (a skill that will continue to have value for them in many other courses). They may have had less practice in using writing



to discover a position of their own in relation to other writers, and then to communicate that position to others in a cogent way. The practices required for writing of this kind include the following:

- exploring the implications of a single text
- placing two texts “in conversation” on the level of shared content and, more crucially, on the level of shared implications
- using texts “in conversation” as a starting point for thinking that builds on the authors’ work but poses new issues or explores questions left unanswered by the authors themselves
- citing and explaining textual evidence
- revising to clarify and develop ideas
- rewriting for the purpose of public presentation, acknowledging the conventions of expository prose (thesis or argument, unified paragraphs, transitional sentences and phrases, credible uses of supporting evidence)

Especially during the first quarter or so of the term, teachers should be less concerned with seeing a fully developed argument and more concerned with deepening the students’ understanding of the texts and encouraging the making of sustained and pertinent connections. Asking content-specific questions, as opposed to focusing primarily on rhetorical form, can help students develop richer, more complex perspectives of the readings. We want our students to use the texts in *The New Humanities Reader* to support, stimulate, and complicate their own thinking.

At the same time, we want students to recognize that thinking, speaking, and writing are fundamentally social acts. Understanding by itself is never adequate; the point, finally, is to be understood. As the semester progresses, we can help students see that open reflection and risky engagement with texts are only the first steps in a process that ends with the convincing presentation of a new way of seeing. Without risk, the writer learns nothing; without coherence, the same fate awaits the reader. Particularly during the last seven weeks of the semester, students should be required, either in peer groups or individually, to evaluate their papers for interpretive accuracy, organizational effectiveness, and general clarity. Peer Review is thus seen as a very important ingredient to the writing process.

## Course Structure and Pacing

The following 14-week class plan is based on the one we use at Rutgers University and is intended to help you structure a course that supports student writing over time. You will likely have to adjust the schedule to fit your local requirements.

<p><b>Week 1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First-day writing sample</li> <li>• First reading assignment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check weak writing samples with campus directors</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paper #1 due (rough draft)</li> <li>• Peer Review drafts</li> <li>• Workshop samples (thesis/work with text/organization/patterns of error)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage students to visit your Sakai site</li> <li>• Define goals for peer-revision workshops</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 3</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paper #1 due (final draft)</li> <li>• Second reading assignment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing Centers open for appointments—refer students who need tutoring</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 4</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paper #2 due (rough draft)</li> <li>• Peer Review drafts</li> <li>• Workshop samples (project/work with text/organization/ patterns of error)</li> <li>• Referrals to writing center</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define goals for second peer-revision workshop</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 5</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paper #2 due (final draft)</li> <li>• Third reading assignment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Photocopy selected rough and/or final drafts to illustrate problems in mechanics</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 6</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paper #3 due (rough draft)</li> <li>• Peer Review drafts</li> <li>• Workshop samples (project/work with text/organization/ patterns of error)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define goals for third peer-revision workshop</li> </ul>



<b>Week 7</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Paper #3 due (final draft)</li><li>• Fourth reading assignment</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Photocopy selected rough and/or final drafts to illustrate problems in mechanics</li></ul>
<b>Week 8</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Paper #4 due (rough draft)</li><li>• Peer Review drafts</li><li>• Workshop samples (project/work with text/organization/ patterns of error)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Define goals for fourth peer-revision workshop</li></ul>
<b>Week 9</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Paper #4 due (final draft)</li><li>• Fifth reading assignment</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Photocopy selected rough and/or final drafts to illustrate effective thesis statements and paragraph strategies</li></ul>
<b>Week 10</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Paper #5 due (rough draft)</li><li>• Peer Review drafts</li><li>• Workshop samples (project/work with text/organization/ patterns of error)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Define goals for fifth peer-revision workshop</li></ul>
<b>Week 11</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Paper #5 due (final draft)</li><li>• Sixth reading assignment</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Photocopy selected rough and/or final drafts to illustrate problems in and strategies for the organization of arguments</li></ul>
<b>Week 12</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Paper #6 due (rough draft)</li><li>• Peer Review drafts</li><li>• Workshop samples (project/work with text/organization/ patterns of error)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Define goals for sixth peer-revision workshop</li></ul>
<b>Week 13</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Paper #6 due (final draft)</li><li>• Student Evaluations</li><li>• Reading assignments for final exams</li><li>• Final exam preparation session.</li></ul>	
<b>Week 14</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Final Exam</li></ul>	

## Sample Syllabus

Mary Doe

ENGLISH 101: Section ZZ

Office Hours: M3

MTH2, MU-101

E-mail address: doe@deere.com

### Course Description and Goals

In this course you will read and write about a variety of texts concerning a range of fascinating, relevant, contemporary issues. Course goals include helping you to read deeply, think critically, and write interpretively and effectively, creating your own independent argument that synthesizes multiple sources.

### Required Texts

Miller and Spellmeyer, *The New Humanities Reader, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*

Your College choice of grammar book

### Course Requirements

- ❑ Read seven selections from *The New Humanities Reader*.
- ❑ Write 6 out-of-class essays, minimum of 5 typed pages each.
- ❑ Write a typed Rough and Final draft for each assignment.
- ❑ Give three brief oral presentations in class, including one on grammar.
- ❑ Take one in-class Final Exam (essay format, graded pass or fail). You must pass the final exam to pass the course.
- ❑ Keep all Rough and Final drafts in a Folder, for two Folder Reviews.

### Grading

- ❑ The grades on the first three papers will offer an accurate assessment of your writing skills at the university level, and will enable you to measure your progress in the first half of the course.
- ❑ The final grade for the course is determined by the level you are able to sustain over two of the last three papers.
- ❑ One half of a letter grade will be deducted for late Rough drafts per class that it is late, one full letter grade per class for late Final drafts.
- ❑ The lowest passing grade for a paper and for the course is C.
- ❑ **All grades are subject to Departmental Review**

### Policies

- ❑ Papers that exhibit significant errors of punctuation, grammar, spelling, or syntax (generally, three or more errors per page) risk failing.
- ❑ Attendance at all classes is expected. After four absences you *risk failing the course*.
- ❑ Punctuality is important. Lateness of twenty minutes or more counts as half an absence.
- ❑ You must submit all six papers to pass. If you are two assignments behind, for any reason, you automatically fail the course.
- ❑ Students must review and abide by the University's code on plagiarism.



### **First Day Writing Sample**

The following is an example of a standardized writing sample used at Rutgers University to help check student placement and to give teachers an idea of their students' skills.

Please provide the following information. If there is any question about your placement, we will need to contact you so that you can be moved to the appropriate level right away.

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Local Telephone #:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Student number:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Email Address:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Instructor:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Section:** \_\_\_\_\_

*In asking you to produce a first-day writing sample, we want to make certain that you have been correctly placed in Expository Writing (101). We are interested in getting an initial sense of your strengths and weaknesses as a reader and a writer. Therefore it is crucial that you do your best work on this writing sample. Use all of the time allowed and produce your best version of what you understand an essay to be. If you finish early, please check your spelling, grammar, and syntax.*

*The following excerpt from "Why Heather Can Write," by Henry Jenkins, is about a home-schooled student named Heather, who started her own Harry Potter fan fiction website, which she named The Daily Prophet. This site has attracted Harry Potter enthusiasts across the globe, all of whom have a keen interest in writing about this series. Please read this passage and then answer the question, in bold font, on the next page:*

In their profiles [on *The Daily Prophet* fan fiction website], kids often combined mundane details of their everyday experiences with fantastical stories about their place within J.K Rowling's world. The image of the special child being raised in a mundane (in this case, muggle) family and discovering their identities as they enter school age is a classic theme of fantasy novels and fairy tales, yet here there are often references to divorce or cancer, real world difficulties so many kids face. From the profiles themselves, we can't be sure whether these are problems they have confronted personally or if they are anxious possibilities they are exploring through their fantasies. Heather has suggested that many kids come to *The Daily Prophet* because their schools and families have failed them in some way; they use the new school community to work through their feelings about some traumatic event or to compensate for their estrangement from kids in their neighborhoods. Some children are drawn toward some of the fantasy races – elves, goblins, giants, and the like –

while other kids have trouble imagining themselves to be anything other than muggle-born, even in their fantasy play. Children use stories to escape from or reaffirm aspects of their real lives.

Fan fiction [is] a useful resource for surviving high school. *Harry Potter* fan fiction yields countless narratives of youth empowerment as characters fight back against the injustices their writers encounter every day at school. Often, the young writers show a fascination with getting inside the heads of the adult characters. Many of the best stories are told from teachers' perspectives or depict Harry's parents and mentors when they were school age. Some of the stories are sweetly romantic or bitter-sweet coming-of-age stories. Others are charged with anger or budding sexual feelings, themes the authors say they would have been reluctant to discuss in a school assignment. When they discuss such stories, teen and adult fans talk openly about their life experiences, offering each other advice on more than just issues of plot or characterization.

Through online discussions of fan writing, the teen writers develop a vocabulary for talking about writing and learn strategies for rewriting and improving their own work. When they talk about the books themselves, they make comparisons with other literary works or draw connections with philosophical and theological traditions; they debate gender stereotyping in the female characters; they cite interviews with the writer or read critical analyses of the works; they use analytical concepts they probably wouldn't encounter until they reached the advanced undergraduate classroom.

***Question for writing:***

**Based on the above passage and your own experiences, would you say that writing on a fan fiction website is a valid educational experience? What makes something educational, and if writing on the web is a form of education, what exactly are people learning to do? Explain your answer, drawing on the passage above as much as possible.**



## **Assignments**

So as to avoid student confusion about our assignment questions, here are a few words of advice to help make your assignments clear.

### **Name the Reading or Readings**

You should name the readings you expect students to discuss at the outset of each assignment. This becomes especially important as the semester progresses and you expect students to return to readings they had discussed previously. Some students will not immediately understand that this means they should discuss all of these readings in conversation with each other. Be explicit about which readings need to be discussed. Some teachers set the list of readings for the assignment apart somewhat by giving it a label (“Readings:”) and listing author, title, and page numbers.

### **Give Due Dates**

Either at the top or at the bottom of the page, you should have clear due dates for both the Rough Draft and the Final Draft. And be sure to remind them to bring three copies of their Rough Draft for peer review. That way they have no excuse for forgetting copies on draft day!

### **Provide Specific Instructions in Preparing the Paper**

If your school or program does not post specific format requirements for papers, you should design your own and distribute them to students with the first assignment. Be sure to repeat the minimum page requirement (most teachers at Rutgers say “at least four pages for the Rough Draft” and “at least five full pages for the Final Draft” on all assignments). And specify all of the basic rules that will help to stave off chaos. A list might include the following: “one-inch margins, typed, double-spaced, no large point sizes, name and date in the upper left or right hand corner, a staple in the upper left hand corner, page numbers at the bottom of every page, and an original title centered on the first page.”

### **Use the Visual Elements of the Page for Emphasis**

With computers, we can all now be good page designers, able to use white space, lists, boldface, and other visual cues to help students understand our assignments. A good assignment will use boldface especially to highlight the specific question that is being asked. You should also set each separate part of the assignment into its own paragraph or its own part of the page.

### **Ask a Question**

Some assignments, including even those by very experienced teachers, never really ask a question of students. Without a question to answer, students have no clear instigation for writing. Not only should your assignment ask a question, but it should also highlight that question (perhaps with boldface or by putting the question into its own paragraph, or both). This way, students can focus on what

you are really asking. And be sure your question has more than one possible answer!

### **Ask Follow-up Questions or Give Advice**

After you have written your question, try to think about the ways your weakest students might struggle to answer it. What advice can you give them? What additional questions (clearly segregated from the main question) might help them to understand what you are asking and how it applies to the texts under consideration? Avoid a “shopping list” of questions, but give a few helpful hints of interesting lines of pursuit.

### **State the Learning Objectives (or, “What I’m Looking For”)**

With each paper you likely will be looking for different skills, which you might call the “learning objectives” of that assignment. With Assignment #1, you will usually be most concerned about getting students beyond summary and making sure they are using textual evidence to support their points. In Assignment #2, you might be looking for more connective work, patterns of error, and signs of a thesis or project. It’s a good idea to set these forth at the bottom of the assignment so that students can pay attention to them. The learning objectives can then inform your comments.

## ***Sequences***

We recommend that teachers construct sequences of readings and assignment questions. In this way, students revisit a reading one or two more times in the context of seeking connections between it and a new reading, and are therefore looking at it from a fresh new perspective and within a new context. This helps to deepen students’ understanding and build up their skills of reading deeply, thinking critically and writing effectively. Strong sequences are therefore important, since in building upon their prior conceptions of the texts, students are widening the conversation between them and developing more complex understandings of issues.

During the 14-week semester students will complete two sequences, with a rough draft or final draft due each week. This establishes quite a rigorous pace, which also means that it is important for teachers to return work to students promptly and certainly before the next final draft is due so that students can benefit from the teacher’s comments. This suggested pace will start to take on a rhythm of its own, and has the added advantage that most students’ writing will start to exhibit marked improvement by about the fourth paper.

The first assignment of the course should address a single text (e.g. Jenkins) with an emphasis on exploring the implications of the author’s argument rather than on summary or on “personal response.” The second assignment should provide an opportunity to examine the relations between two texts (the first



reading and a new text, e.g. Jenkins and Sacks) placed in “conversation” with one another. The third assignment of the semester—and the final assignment of the first sequence—should require students to develop an argument that draws on all three texts (e.g. Jenkins, Sacks and Twenge) for its conceptual “frame” and for supporting evidence and illustrations.

The second sequence, which is comprised of the fourth, fifth and sixth assignments of the semester, should repeat more or less the same stages with new texts. The only difference is that Assignment Four, in contrast to Assignment One, requires students to work with *two* texts rather than one. Think of this as the ‘Janus’ reading, as it relates to the last reading of the previous sequence as well as then moving the second sequence in a fresh direction.

The assignment sequences that you create will define a problem or shape a thesis for your students. In the last two essays of the course, however, you might also help students advance and articulate their own theses. You could begin this process by listening to the questions that students raise in their discussions of the readings, and then you might foreground these questions in successive assignments.

Here are some tips to keep in mind when forming your sequence:

### **Context and Theme**

In choosing the essays to use in your sequence, don’t be concerned about the specific textual connections you see between the essays. Instead, think about what larger contexts or themes might draw them together in conversation about such issues as aesthetics, human psychology, the effects of technology or modernization, globalization, perception and so on.

### **Development and Complexity**

Once you have a context or theme that draws your essays together, create each assignment with a view towards developing that context/theme and adding layers of complexity to it. The sequence should help students identify topics as points of connection, in which students might not only connect authors in terms of saying “and” or “furthermore”, but “but” or “however” as they acknowledge the complexity of issues.

### **Frame and Case**

New college students have been previously trained in high school to think in terms of “compare and contrast” as their chief mode for working with more than one text. We prefer to have students build connections among texts, often by using ideas from one (or two in conversation) to frame examples from another. If you’re stuck on how to phrase an assignment, remember the classic formula: “What is the role of idea X in example Y?” or “How would writer X interpret writer Y?”

## Sequence Table

This table summarizes the essays and corresponding assignments in the two sequences:

<b>First Sequence</b>	
Assignment One	Essay One (and, optionally, a webpage or the introduction to the reader)
Assignment Two	Essays One and Two
Assignment Three	Essays One, Two, and Three
<b>Second Sequence, Separate Model</b>	
Assignment Four	Essays Three and Four
Assignment Five	Essays Four and Five
Assignment Six	Essays Four, Five, and Six OR Essay Six and two others selected from Essays One, Two, Three, Four, and Five



## **Sample Assignments and Assignment Sequences**

We encourage those teaching *The New Humanities Reader* to develop their assignments in sequences of three, building one upon the other. The following are sample sequences used in the Rutgers Writing Program.

### **Sequence #1 (Jenkins, Tannen, and Twenge)**

By Tisha Bender

#### **Assignment One (Jenkins)**

Readings: Henry Jenkins, "Why Heather Can Write"

E.M. Forster once said, "How can I know what I think until I see what I write" and Jenkins tells us that "children use stories to escape from or reaffirm aspects of their real lives" (277). Examine the truth of both of these statements in terms of the reading and writing that occurs in the fan fiction websites which Jenkins discusses. If reading and writing have typically been thought of as solitary pursuits, does the collaborative "affinity space" in which reading and writing take place alter these activities, and if so, how?

#### **Assignment Two (Tannen and Jenkins)**

Reading: Deborah Tannen, "The Roots to Debate in Education and the Hope of Dialogue" and Henry Jenkins, "Why Heather Can Write"

Jenkins quotes editors at *The Sugar Quill* website as saying, "We want this to be a place where fanfiction can be read and enjoyed, but where writers who want more than just raves can come for actual (gentle - think Lupin, not McGonagall) constructive criticism and technical editing", and Jenkins goes on to explain that "Lupin and McGonagall are two of the teachers Rowling depicts in the novels, Lupin a gentle pedagogue, McGonagall practicing a more tough love approach" (282). How does this learning style complicate, reinforce, or contradict the approach mentioned by Tannen, when she talks of "...the culture of critique [in the West], with its inclination to regard criticism and attack as the best if not the only type of rigorous thinking..." (677)? Please explain your answer in terms of the new opportunities for participatory learning opened up by the Internet.

#### **Assignment Three (Tannen, Jenkins, and Twenge)**

Reading: Deborah Tannen, "The Roots to Debate in Education and the Hope of Dialogue," Henry Jenkins, "Why Heather Can Write" and Jean Twenge, "Generation Me"

In what important ways might the discussion mode of education that Tannen advocates and Jenkins describes (albeit on the Internet) be hampered or enhanced by the sense of entitlement students have, as described by Twenge?

## **Sequence #2 (Jenkins, Sacks, and Gilbert)**

By Michael Goeller

### **Assignment One (Jenkins)**

Reading: Henry Jenkins, "Why Heather Can Write"

Based on your reading of Henry Jenkins, and using specific evidence from the text, address the following questions: Why do people tell stories and what role (or roles) does fiction play in their lives? In other words, what is the use and value of fictional stories?

In developing your essay, you may find the following questions helpful to think about (but please don't feel obliged to address any in your essay): How can fiction enlighten people? How can it keep people in the dark? Are there differences in the benefits derived from writing original fiction, writing fan fiction, reading fiction, reading non-fiction, and reading fan fiction? How might fiction aid self-determination, adaptation, freedom, democracy, community, or human values?

### **Assignment Two (Jenkins and Sacks)**

Reading: Henry Jenkins, "Why Heather Can Write" and Oliver Sacks, "The Mind's Eye"

Based on your reading of Jenkins and Sacks in conversation, address the following questions: Why are some people better able than others to adapt to difficult circumstances, to overcome obstacles, or to take charge of shaping their beliefs and identities? How do they do it? What lessons are made available to us from reading Sacks and Jenkins about how people can use the power of the mind to adapt to their circumstances?

### **Assignment Three (Jenkins, Sacks, and Gilbert)**

Reading: Henry Jenkins, "Why Heather Can Write," Oliver Sacks, "The Mind's Eye," and Daniel Gilbert, "Immune to Reality"

For this essay, I want you to try to use Gilbert's argument as a frame to re-examine cases discussed by Jenkins and Sacks, paying attention to the ways that Gilbert's views might complicate some of your earlier conclusions – and to the way that Jenkins and Sacks may challenge or complicate Gilbert's argument. How do we achieve happiness, and why are some people happier than others? What might Jenkins and Sacks – or the people they discuss – suggest? Do you think that Gilbert is right that we are "strangers to ourselves" because of the fictions we invent to explain and adapt to our circumstances? Or is all happiness ultimately a fiction or an illusion, and therefore there is no more authentic self than the fictional one we invent? Or is there another way of seeing it?



## Sequence #3 (Jenkins, Twenge, and Gladwell)

By William Magrino

### Assignment One (Jenkins)

Readings: Henry Jenkins, “Why Heather Can Write”

In his critique of conventional paradigms of education, Henry Jenkins laments that “Schools are still locked into a model of autonomous learning that contrasts sharply with the kinds of learning that are needed as students enter the new knowledge cultures.” As opposed to the traditional “scaffolding” approach, centered upon the teacher, Jenkins observes a more egalitarian dynamic taking place on the Internet in which writers of fan fiction learn and produce as a cohesive unit.

To what extent can schools foster convergence by advocating the participant culture currently populated by amateurs? Should schools be more concerned with producing “amateurs” as opposed to “future professionals”? Does the anonymity of the Internet lend itself to a more egalitarian approach to learning than the traditional classroom?

### Assignment Two (Jenkins and Twenge)

Readings: Henry Jenkins, “Why Heather Can Write” and Jean Twenge, “An Army of One: Me”

Jean Twenge, evaluating the integration of self-esteem building programs into the schools, warns that “Building up the self-esteem and importance of kids who are already egocentric can bring trouble, as it can lead to narcissism – and maybe it already has.” Examining the altering perceptions of authorship in light of the proliferation of new media culture, Henry Jenkins offers the following: “As we expand access to mass distribution via the Web, our understanding of what it means to be an author – and what kinds of authority should be ascribed to authors – necessarily shifts”.

Can the self-esteem issues apparent in contemporary culture be addressed through the “convergence culture” model of learning? To what extent could new notions of authorship in the classroom influence the self-esteem of students and what effect could the resulting perception of “the self” have upon learning?

### Assignment Three: (Jenkins, Twenge, and Gladwell)

Readings: Henry Jenkins, “Why Heather Can Write,” Jean Twenge, “An Army of One: Me,” and Malcolm Gladwell, “The Power of Context”

“When we are trying to make an idea or attitude or product tip,” according to Malcolm Gladwell, “we’re trying to change our audience in some small yet critical respect: we’re trying to infect them, sweep them up in our epidemic, convert them from hostility to acceptance”. Evidenced by the propagation of new media

literacy via “the Potter wars,” Jenkins acknowledges that “kids are passionate about writing because they are passionate about what they are writing about”. Twenge, in support of teaching self-control among children, argues that “Kids who don’t excel in a certain area should be encouraged to keep trying.”

To what extent could the “affinity spaces” created by the advent of Harry Potter represent “the tipping point” for writing among children? How could young writers such as Heather Lawler be considered representatives of “the Law of the Few”? What does the “Power of Context” tell us about the future of the roles of the amateur and the professional in media culture and, reciprocally, in education?

## **Sequence #4 (Jenkins, Sacks, Nafisi, and Gilbert)**

By Ani Gjika

### **Assignment Four (Jenkins and Sacks)**

Readings

"Why Heather Can Write" by Henry Jenkins and "The Mind's Eye" by Oliver Sacks

It is difficult to step outside of ourselves in order to see the world through someone else's eyes. But the adolescents Henry Jenkins discusses in his article, "Why Heather Can Write," do precisely that through fan fiction. Jenkins claims that, in our digital culture today, fan fiction – the medium through which adolescents today are teaching themselves how to write – makes it possible for them to get "some critical distance" from their own experiences and this, in turn, allows them to see their own lives from a new perspective. In "The Mind's Eye," the experiences of the blind people, whom Oliver Sacks studied, show that different individuals learned, independently, new ways of reconstructing and adapting to a "visual world" and began to see in ways they never had before.

Considering the process of imaginative, independent learning the blind in Sacks' essay and the adolescents in Jenkins' essay go through, answer the following question:

To what extent is the process of self-learning for the blind close to adopting a new culture for themselves, just like the adolescents in the online forums are doing today, where culture could possibly mean attitude toward yourself and the world at large? Given these two distinct examples would it be presumptuous to say that imagination is perhaps not only a more profound and practiced sixth sense, but probably the first one? Elaborate your answers by commenting on how the imaginative worlds Heather et al., construct through fan fiction complicate, compliment and contradict the imaginative worlds blind people construct to envision and adapt to their surroundings.

**Assignment Five (Nafisi and Jenkins)**

Readings: Azar Nafisi “Selections from *Reading Lolita in Tehran*” and Henry Jenkins, “Why Heather Can Write”

At the end of the introduction to Azar Nafisi's “Selections from *Reading Lolita in Tehran*,” the editors of *The New Humanities Reader* state: “For Nafisi, our freedom to talk and think together in small groups, in a context where the ideas raised and the topics covered are not determined in advance, is the litmus test for a true democracy; to engage in this act, she believes, is to embrace a humanity that transcends national and religious differences.” In his essay, “Why Heather Can Write,” Henry Jenkins describes how through participatory culture adolescents of “many different ethnic, racial and national backgrounds (some real, some imagined) formed a community where individual differences were accepted and where learning was celebrated.”

Drawing on the works of Nafisi and Jenkins, write an essay where you consider how the experience of censorship and the desire for individual freedom may be similar in both totalitarian and democratic societies. Furthermore, discuss how the black and white thinking which both Jenkins' and Nafisi's texts remind us of, illustrates the importance of the study of humanities in general, and expository writing (“writing to see”) in particular.

**Assignment Six (Gilbert, Nafisi, and Jenkins)**

Readings: Daniel Gilbert “Immune to Reality,” Azar Nafisi “Selections from *Reading Lolita in Tehran*” and Henry Jenkins, “Why Heather Can Write”

Henry Jenkins and Azar Nafisi describe two different situations where people from various backgrounds are able to transcend their own differences and remain loyal to the goals and ideals of the communities they participate in. They are eager to pursue and celebrate learning and individual freedom despite the limitations which their respective societies create. In his essay, “Immune to Reality,” Daniel Gilbert argues that, as human beings, we are equipped with a psychological immune system which allows us to view the world more positively, so that we can feel better about the unhappy situations in which we find ourselves.

In light of Daniel Gilbert's studies, how would you apply his ideas or terminology to explain the kind of happiness one can experience through a pursuit of learning and individual freedom? When answering this question, consider how Gilbert might interpret Azar Nafisi's and Heather Lawver's motives for creating their respective communities. Furthermore, how does Jenkins' and Nafisi's evidence of active participation complicate, complement, or contradict Gilbert's concept of the inescapability trigger?

Please remember to rely on evidence from the texts in order to support and further explore the claims you make.

## Sequence #5 (Jenkins, Nafisi, Tannen and Twenge)

By Shannon Dunlap

### Assignment Four (Jenkins and Nafisi)

Readings: Henry Jenkins, "Why Heather Can Write" and Azar Nafisi, "Selections from *Reading Lolita in Tehran*"

When you look at a book, it's easy to think of it as an unchangeable object (like a brick or a pencil or a toaster), but both Nafisi and Jenkins reference some peculiarly chameleon-like qualities of written texts. Nafisi says that the situation of reading *Lolita* just out of sight of the watchful Islamic Republic government "helped redefine Nabokov's novel, turning it into this *Lolita*, our *Lolita*". Jenkins discusses some of the vastly different ways in which people have described the Harry Potter books, including pathways to "a friendly utopian society," pieces of "intellectual property," and "doorways to deeper involvement with the occult".

How are written texts affected by the circumstances in which they are read? You might consider what social factors impact readers the most, what needs texts fulfill for readers, or why and how some people (the authors or others) might try to control your reading of certain texts. These are only a few possibilities—you might find your own framework for narrowing this broad topic into a specific thesis.

### Assignment Five (Tannen and Jenkins)

Readings: Deborah Tannen, "The Roots of Debate in Education and the Hope of Dialogue" and Henry Jenkins, "Why Heather Can Write"

At first glance, Tannen and Jenkins seem to be talking about very different educational processes. Jenkins focuses on the phenomenon of children finding their own informal ways of learning from the Harry Potter books and warns that "pulling such activities into school is apt to deaden them" (Jenkins 185). Tannen, meanwhile, explores more traditional educational settings and how the methods in schools and universities might encourage an "adversarial culture" (Tannen 601). Despite the different approaches of the two authors, might there be some overlap in their thinking?

What is the relationship between Tannen's suggestion of dialogue in the classroom and Jenkin's praise of interactive fan fiction sites? You might consider how educational methods, setting, age, gender, peer interaction, etc. influence the way people learn. Remember to craft a thesis statement that will give you a chance to explore this broad topic in an original and specific way.



### **Assignment Six (Twenge, Tannen, and Jenkins)**

Readings: Jean Twenge, “An Army of One: Me,” Deborah Tannen, “The Roots of Debate in Education and the Hope of Dialogue,” and Henry Jenkins, “Why Heather Can Write”

Jean Twenge does not only describe the trend of “teaching” self-esteem, but also pauses to ask the question, “What kind of young people does this produce?” Indeed, one of the reasons that education is such an intriguing topic is that it serves as a foundation for so many other aspects of a person’s life. Twenge, Tannen and Jenkins all seem concerned with the way education can influence the culture at large.

How do the effects of our education system become disseminated through our society? Think about whether the authors complement, complicate, or contradict each other’s ideas about this subject. Remember to find a way to explore this broad topic in a specific and original way.

### **The Final Exam Question**

On the last day of our first year composition course at Rutgers, we have students take an in-class final exam. The final exam asks students to write about a newly assigned seventh reading in the context of readings already assigned. Thus the exam continues the practice of sequencing, and requires of students the usual attention to essay form, and the usual exercise of critical thinking, though on a smaller scale. However, the exam is not meant to “trip up” the students. In thinking about which essay to use for the final, aim for a “soft pitch” which clearly relates to the other readings of the class versus one in which the larger context or textual connections are obscure. You might want to select, in particular, an exam reading that clearly sequences with the sixth essay, which will be fresh in student’s minds, or which relates to several other readings (which allows students to choose the one most familiar to them).

In writing the final exam question, some instructors use a directed question, which asks students to work with the new essay and one of the previous essays selected by the instructor. However, a more generous exam question will be phrased in such a way that students can select which of the previous essays they would like to use in conjunction with the new reading. Whatever approach you take, students must engage at least two texts in the final exam.

As a preparation for the final, we typically have students come to class having read the exam essay and allow them to discuss the essay in small groups with relatively little direction. This way we can be sure that students truly carry with them the skills of 101 and have not been simply feeding off of the teacher’s interpretations.

The main purpose of the final exam is to check that students embody the lessons of our class and that they are the authors of the papers they submitted during the term. Therefore it is essential that the exam be administered in class and that students take it in your presence or in the presence of a proctor (if they miss the original exam session). They are allowed to use dictionaries and should refer to *The New Humanities Reader* (especially to quote passages). No notes, other than those they have written in the margins of their texts, can be used.

## **Samples of Final Exam Assignments**

By Tisha Bender

1. Was Abram's experience in the cave near Bali an example of unpredicted and therefore unplanned happiness, or did Abram, through his immersion in life with the shamans, accurately predict a means of finding pure joy, and thereby disprove Gilbert's views when he said that happiness could not be deliberately predicted or pursued?

2. Postrel discusses Western consumer society, and the desires of most of its citizens to purchase as lavishly as they are able. She even gives the example of Liz Twitchell, who has to make a rapid exit from Tiffany's as she desired the beautiful clothes so much. In what ways, according to Postrel and Gilbert, is consumerism expected to bring about happiness, and can that happiness be sustained?

3. In what ways might Gilbert's work on predictions be applicable to either Tannen's views on predicting one's opponent's argument during a debate, or Nafisi's information about trying to make predictions under a seemingly absurd and randomly oppressive regime?



### III. Grammar and Proofreading

Teachers are encouraged to supplement *The New Humanities Reader* with a grammar handbook. The following materials, however, may be useful supplements to whatever a handbook might offer.

#### ***Grammar and Proofreading Guide for Students***

Common errors are shown below as underlined words, and the correct words are in [brackets].

- **Subject-verb agreement errors**  
The thoughts a reader generates is [are] only considered “great” when others know those thoughts.
- **Incorrect Word Use:** eg. This book is larger then [than] the other book. Hurricane Katrina effected [affected] a lot of people because of the powerful affects [effects] of wind and rain. Its' [It's] a shame how many people were in it's [its] path. Its [It's] lovely weather today.
- **Apostrophe to Show Possession errors:** eg. One boys' [boy's] book is on the childrens' [children's] table, but lots of girl's [girls'] books are on the chair.
- **Confusion of plurals with possessives (apostrophe errors)**  
The dorm rooms belong to the new student's [students], not to senior's [seniors] and sophomore's [sophomores].
- **Pronoun errors**  
Each *reader* must struggle with the text. They decide [He or she decides] what it will mean.  
  
Every university has it's [its] problems. Their's is [Their problems are] especially troubling.
- **Sentence fragments and comma splices**  
We see morality through a new point of view. One that comes from nature, not the human world. [We see morality through a new point of view; one that comes from nature, not the human world.]
- **Run-on sentences or comma splices**  
There is no separation between the private and the public in American life, violation of privacy can happen at any time. There is no separation between the private and the public in American life, as violation of privacy can happen at any time.

**Use commas correctly in the following areas:**

- ***Between items in a series of words, phrases, or clauses:***  
We all know that biotechnology is uncertain, dangerous, mind-boggling in its potential ramifications, and also wildly profitable.
- **Between two independent clauses:**  
We judge people by their economic status, and in doing so we build a scale called the “social hierarchy.”
- **On either side of a nonrestrictive clause (a clause that often begins with who, whose, which, when, or where):**  
The school, which they call “The Citadel,” is like a fortress against change.
- **After an introductory phrase or dependent clause:**  
After reading Stout and Sacks, I have become more aware of the role the brain plays in adapting to difficult circumstances.



## **Citation Guide for Students: A Class Handout**

*The New Humanities Reader* invites you to enter into a conversation with the writers you read. The words of others are always yours to use as you build your responses to the course readings, but the writing you produce must explain why the quotations you have chosen are important and it must clearly mark (with quotation marks) the boundaries between your voice and the voices of other writers. This guide shows how to make a place for the words of others within your essays and how to make those words consistent with the grammar of your own sentences.

### **Explanations: Who Are You Quoting, and Why?**

Most of the examples in this guide identify the writer or the speaker of each quotation. In addition to providing this basic information, you should make an effort to embed your quotations within your own explanation. When you quote another writer, you create an opportunity to say something about that writer's words. What problem does the quotation raise for discussion? What idea or issue does it open up, extend, complicate, or contradict? Your words and the way they surround a quotation will give that quotation something to do. Your words will tell readers how the quotation fits into or complicates the line of thought that your paper is exploring. Here are a few examples of the explanatory atmosphere that your words can create around the act of quotation.

#### **Sample:**

Events are always interpreted within a context. When Bernard Goetz shot four black teens on a subway, New York City was “in the grip of one of the worst crime epidemics in its history” (Gladwell 236). In this context, Gladwell argues, Goetz’s actions seemed by many New Yorkers to be heroic, and many residents of his neighborhood joined a “raucous, impromptu street party” after his acquittal (235). Still, the recognition that context is important should not become an excuse for behavior.

The writer has made a significant place for the words of others within his sentences. He has identified the source of those words (Gladwell), and has tried to address some problem that those words have opened up. Quotations are not actively present in an essay if they are only used to “verify” a thought. They are most effective when they help you create, complicate, and move your thoughts forward or turn them in a new direction.

### **Attributions: Who Said It and Where is It From?**

You should use MLA-style parenthetical notation in your papers; generally speaking, a bibliography isn’t needed because everyone is using the same text, *The New Humanities Reader*. The goal of citation is to allow your reader to

locate the quotation in the original text—that’s why your notation should include both the author and the page number. The rules of parenthetical notation can be very complex for special cases; however, here are the basic guidelines:

1. To form a parenthetical notation, close the quotation marks to signal the end of the quotation, and then place the author’s last name and the page number in parentheses, and then end the sentence as a whole with a period. NOTE: do not place a comma between the author and the page number and do not use “p.” or any other additions before the page number. The sample above provides an example:

When Bernard Goetz shot four black teens on a subway, New York City was “in the grip of one of the worst crime epidemics in its history” (Gladwell 236).

2. If you use the name of the author elsewhere in the sentence, thereby making the source of the quotation clear, you may omit the author’s name from the parenthetical notation, as in this example from the sample:

In this context, Gladwell argues, Goetz’s actions seemed by many New Yorkers to be heroic, and many residents of his neighborhood joined a “raucous, impromptu street party” after his acquittal (235).

3. *If a quotation is longer than four typed lines*, it should be set off from the paper and indented on both sides to form a block quote. Block quotes reverse the typical citation pattern—rather than having the parenthetical notation before the period ending the sentence, it comes after the final period.

Refer to your handbook for more help with parenthetical notation.

## **Boundaries: Your Words and the Writer's**

*Quotation Marks and Page Numbers:* The boundary between your words and another writer's words must always be clear. Quotation marks establish this boundary, and page numbers (placed in parentheses at the end of your sentence) announce where the quotation can be found:

One of Gilbert’s important insights is that “the psychological immune system is a defensive system, and it obeys this same principle” (221).

## **Other Marks of Punctuation**

1. If you write a short introductory clause to introduce a quotation, use a comma after that clause:



As Rivoli states, “[T]he effects of political barriers to Chinese apparel into the United States are readily apparent” (481).

2. If you compose a longer and complete sentence to introduce the quotation, then use a colon:

Stout says that while dissociation is a natural function of the brain to protect against harm, it can become a problem when dissociation becomes habit forming in the absence of the trauma: “In reaction to relatively trivial stresses, the person traumatized long ago may truly *feel* that danger is imminent again, be assailed full force by the emotions, bodily sensations, and perhaps even the images, sounds, smells that once accompanied great threat” (657).

3. If your sentence surrounds the quotation, commas at either end may be necessary. Read the sentence as if it did not contain quotation marks to determine if it needs commas at either end:

Stout’s claim, “In reaction to relatively trivial stresses, the person traumatized long ago may truly *feel* that danger is imminent again,” well exemplifies the difficulty that trauma patients face in everyday life (657).

4. Sometimes no punctuation at all is needed. The words and phrases that you quote “fit” very easily, without any stop, into the structure of your own sentences.

One of Stout’s important insights is that “[i]n reaction to relatively trivial stresses, the person traumatized long ago may truly *feel* that danger is imminent again, be assailed full force by the emotions, bodily sensations, and perhaps even the images, sounds, smells that once accompanied great threat” (657).

## Coherence: Your Grammar and the Writer's

In the last example, the words that are quoted fit into and complete the grammar of the writer's sentence. In the shift into a quotation, however, writers often create a confused grammar and syntax. They create errors that they would rarely make in sentences that are entirely their own. One way to check for this kind of error is to remove the quotation marks from a sentence while you read it aloud to yourself. If the sentence reads smoothly, then you have probably embedded the quotation correctly. Common errors are discussed below.

### The Problem: Pronoun disagreement (in number).

In the following example, the singular pronoun “he” in the quote is meant to refer to two criminologists cited by Gladwell.

Gladwell says, “Broken Windows was the brainchild of the criminologists James Q. Wilson and George Kelling” (237). He says **he** thought crime originated because of a disorderly environment.

**The Fix:** Change “he” to “they” to include both criminologists.

Gladwell says, “Broken Windows was the brainchild of the criminologists James Q. Wilson and George Kelling” (237). He says **they** thought crime originated because of a disorderly environment.

**The Problem: Pronoun disagreement (in person).**

In the example that follows, the first-person pronoun “I” refers back to a third-person noun, Greider.

Greider is sure of his insight since, after asking a random sampling of workers, bosses, and owners, “I have yet to encounter anyone who thinks the premise is wrong” (253).

**The Fix:** Move the quotation, or modify it.

**Fix by Moving Quotation:** Begin the quotation at a later point, at “yet to encounter,” for example.

Greider is sure of his insight since, after asking a random sampling of workers, bosses, and owners, he has “yet to encounter anyone who thinks the premise is wrong” (253).

**Fix by Modifying Quotation:** Quote a full sentence in the first person using the “Grieder writes (or says, etc.)” construction:

After asking a random sampling of workers, bosses, and owners, Greider is sure of his insight. He writes, “I have yet to encounter anyone who thinks the premise is wrong” (253).

**Sentence Integrity**

**The Problem:** A quotation must either be a complete sentence or become an integrated part of your complete sentence. The following example is not a complete sentence.

At the end, claiming, “in that [the cadets] may be right” (Faludi 211).

**The Fix:** Rewrite the sentence with a main verb.

At the end, Faludi claims, “in that [the cadets] may be right” (211).



## IV. Active Learning and Group Work

One goal of *The New Humanities Reader* is to foster student writing that goes beyond the staid formulae of personal response or book report. The pedagogy of *The New Humanities* encourages students to actively engage in connective thinking not just in the context of the composition classroom but in their other courses and in the world in which they live. To encourage student engagement, we recommend an active learning approach that creates a collaborative classroom environment that places students in conversation with each other and with the authors of our readings. All of these activities are conceived of as working in the context of the students' own writing: theirs are ultimately the primary texts with which we deal. With this in mind, the activities described here take the instructor through the full arc of a single paper assignment. In the course of a 14-week semester, with six papers to be completed, an instructor can expect to spend about five class periods on a paper cycle. The cycle would look something like this (for any paper other than the first).

- Day 1—Introduce a new reading, and perhaps hand in the final draft of the previous assignment
- Day 2—Discuss the reading, and give the new assignment (if you did not on Day 1)
- Day 3—Rough draft due—peer review
- Day 4—Work on revision and the mechanics of writing
- Day 5—Final draft due, proof-reading, next reading assignment

Each of the steps in this cycle lends itself to different kinds of in-class work; an activity that works well on a new reading assignment will not necessarily be appropriate for working on rough drafts (though there can be very useful moments of overlap). The activities collected below have been divided into sections based on the stage in the paper-writing process at which they have been best used, and/or in terms of which part of *The New Humanities Reader* pedagogy they are relevant to. It is essential to revisit the different parts of the writing process at various points in the cycle.

The most productive learning environments typically feature a number of different but related tasks. A class might begin, for example, with individual “freewriting,” then move to work in small groups, and then return students to a discussion with the entire class. Tasks for the individual student can be used either to prepare them for a discussion in a larger group or to help them absorb the ideas that come up in general class discussion. Small group activities make students accountable for their ideas but relieve the pressure of both individual work and whole class work, fostering collective knowledge in a context which allows every student's voice to be heard in a less threatening context than the full-class discussion. And whole-class activities are essential for exploring the different

interpretations of a text that are available, and providing a forum for the teacher to approach the issues a class is having globally, without singling any student out for particular attention. Each kind of activity reinforces a different part of the writing process, and ultimately fosters our goal of teaching exploratory and connective thinking.

### ***Pre-Reading***

The pre-reading part of the paper arc, occurring when the instructor presents a new reading to the class, is a crucial point in the entire process. At this stage, we want students to be able to engage with the concepts introduced by a new essay both as a discrete entity and in the context of prior readings. Both reading comprehension and contextualization are critical—a student needs to start to understand the concepts introduced by the new essay, and needs to connect those ideas with other texts.

This stage focuses students' attention on particular parts of the new text, without the expectation that the students have read the whole text. This requires preparation on the part of the teacher, in order to focus students' attention, and to help them to comprehend the new, possibly intimidating, prose that they see before them. Typically students are asked to work from part to whole and back again, puzzling through sections of the text or working with quotations, then trying to synthesize the overall argument and connect it with prior readings.

### ***Reading Questions***

In order to reinforce the idea that reading and writing go hand-in-hand, as well as to give students concrete points of access to the text, instructors usually assign some reading questions for students to consider as they begin a new selection from the textbook. Early in the semester, these questions may take the form of review questions, intended to test and encourage reading comprehension. But questions should ultimately call for as much interpretation as summary. The “Questions for Making Connections within the Reading” at the end of each essay are intended as reading and pre-writing exercises. If students address these questions as they read, they will be prepared to participate productively in class discussion and to enter into the writing process with confidence. Even if you only ask students to write a list of their own questions as they read, they will come to class more ready to make sense of the text than if they were to read it with no guidance.

Throughout this reading and re-reading process, students will often find that as one question is answered or one problem resolved, another question or problem—often a more complex one—emerges. This trial-and-error or exploratory method of conducting class discussion is messier than lecturing to the students, or simply answering their questions as they arise, but it has several advantages over lecturing. Not only does the exploratory method usually cover the same textual issues that a lecture would, but it also raises important issues that you yourself might not have thought to raise. The exploratory method also



models—and gives students practice in—learning as discovery, rather than as delivery of understanding from teacher to student. Finally, the exploratory method gets all students (not just those who are already comfortable talking in class) involved in the text’s understanding, especially when small-group work precedes full-class discussion.

### ***Getting Started on an Assignment***

On the day you give out the assignment for writing, it is a good idea to have an activity that will help students plan their writing strategies and work together to make sense of any difficult challenges the assignment might pose. Getting the students to engage with your assignment in class also has the advantage of bringing out any difficulties or problems with the assignment question which you might choose to address yourself once they have finished grappling with it as a group.

Have students read the assignment together and write for a few minutes on how they might try to address the question. Once they have written for five to ten minutes, put them into groups of three or four with the following prompt: “Mission Possible: Your job is to work together as a team to unlock the mystery of this assignment. The fate of the free world (or at least of your GPA) hangs in the balance! In your own words, what is the question asking? What process will you use to answer the question and write the essay? What answers do you think you might find?” If you create a fun and involving activity on the day you hand out the assignment, students will more likely begin work right away on it rather than waiting until the last minute to get started.

### ***Collaborative Interpretation or Composing***

Probably the most standard exercise in Expository Writing classes is to put students into small groups of three to four students and give them a reading or writing task. At the end of the task, an elected group leader will report the results back to the rest of the class. For example, you can ask them to find two quotes from Sacks’s “The Mind’s Eye” that they would use to construct a paragraph that begins to address the question that Sacks asks in his essay: “But to what extent are we - our experiences, our reactions - shaped, predetermined, by our brains, and to what extent do we shape our own brains?” Each group’s leader would then be responsible for presenting their paragraph to the rest of the class.

### ***Working with Quotes***

The classic group activity is to put students into groups where they are directed to choose two quotes from the text or from two different texts that they then connect in a paragraph with a strong topic sentence. Each small group then elects a group leader to present their paragraph to the class. On the first

occasion you do this activity, you might actually type out five quotes from the reading onto a piece of paper, with instructions that each group should choose two quotes that they think can be connected in a paragraph. This way you have a chance to model for them which quotes would be most fruitful for discussion. On subsequent occasions, make students responsible for locating and choosing the quotes they will use.

### ***Writing Paragraphs***

Especially as a way to aid class activities, it is useful to give students a basic guide for writing paragraphs. Some teachers have called this “the secret formula” or “the quotation sandwich.” With a basic formula for constructing an analytic paragraph, students will have an easier time approaching the writing task. Their early work may be formulaic, but as they advance and improve you will begin to see them break free of the formulae and discover their own voices.

### ***Sample Paragraph Formula***

- Start by stating your claim, or what you are trying to prove in this paragraph. This is usually called your “topic sentence.”
- Introduce the first quotation. The most basic introduction would be “Name of author’ writes” etc. but a better introduction would give a sense of how the passage relates to your topic.
- Give the first quotation, being sure to indicate the page on which it occurs in parentheses, following MLA guidelines.
- Explain the quote in your own words, focusing on how it connects to your topic.
- Give some sort of transition to the next quotation, providing a clue to the connection you are developing. Typical connections are:
  - Similarity or Agreement
  - Difference or Contrast
  - Frame and Case (idea and example of that idea)
  - Alternative Explanation
- Give the second quote, with page reference.
- Explain how the second quote connects to the first one in a sentence or two. This last part is crucial. You need to explain the connection in order to really prove it.
- Try to draw some conclusion from the connection that relates back to your topic sentence.

### ***Drawing Pictures to Aid Interpretation or Revision***

Many writing teachers have experimented with drawing in their courses, because they find that switching to the visual provides a register that can unearth new



language and interpretations that students can then test against the text. Visual images can help students paraphrase complex ideas using their own words, enhance classroom presentations (by giving each student a visual aid), serve as part of a game (such as “Group Pictionary”), and create mental maps of complex relationships that help students grasp “the big picture.” Drawing pictures works best when combined with close reading so that the picture brings students back to the text rather than drawing their attention away from it. By combining close reading (left brain) and drawing pictures (right brain) students develop insights and construct connections that they might not achieve through writing alone.

Here are some drawing activities that have been used with our reader:

- Have students construct as homework a “mental map” of the various groups and individuals involved in the story of Matt Shephard’s murder, as discussed by Beth Loffreda. Students should bring in their maps and present them in small groups, and then either vote on which in their group they find most complete or try to create an improved drawing by combining elements of two or more. Students should then present their group’s chosen or synthesized drawing to the rest of the class, pointing to at least one passage from the text that informed the map or that the map helps explain.
- Ask students to draw two pictures, using whatever medium they like, to represent the two different rituals of “becoming a man” represented in the essays by Susan Faludi and Jon Krakauer. Students could use crayons, collage, computer graphics, or just pencil and paper.
- Ask each student to draw a picture, make a collage, or find art online (perhaps using Google Image Search) to represent how various blind people discussed by Oliver Sacks might “visually imagine” the real world. What can make this activity even more fun is to have students guess which of the blind people discussed in Sacks’s essay is being represented by each picture.
- When Annie Dillard’s essay “The Wreck of Time” appeared in *Harper’s Magazine*, a series of images were interspersed throughout the text. You can try to locate these images to show students, but a better exercise might be to have students compose their own images to accompany the text. You could even present the assignment that way, by getting them to imagine that they have been assigned the job of illustrating the reading. What would they draw and why?

## **Debates**

Many of the readings in our book are about controversial situations or issues. If this is the case for a reading you are doing, you could create two debating teams,

and ask for about five volunteers on each side. You might even ask students to position themselves on the side that they initially do not think they believe in, as often, by playing 'devil's advocate', they are forced to expand their understanding of opposing viewpoints or to complicate their own views. The advantages of holding a debate are that students learn not only to articulate clearly, which will help them in their writing, but also to anticipate and evaluate clearly what others are saying. Those students not on the debating teams can ask questions when the presentations and rebuttals are complete, and then a vote can be taken to see which team had the most convincing position.

### ***Mock TV Shows***

Since looking for connections between authors is of fundamental importance in Expository Writing, one effective and fun way of doing this is to set up a Mock TV show, in which you ask students to volunteer to be each author under discussion. You, as teacher, can host the program, and then you ask the "authors" a question and see how each responds. Students playing the part of each author should be encouraged to refer to "their" writing, in an effort to help students to identify key and relevant quotations. This role playing ensures that students meaningfully discover connections between the authors, and the questions asked of the panel could even help point them towards topic paragraphs that they might want to write about in their essays. To broaden this activity, you could make this "interactive TV", whereby all the other students in the class are members of the audience and can also ask questions of the "author panelists".

### ***Mock Trials***

Holding a Mock Trial can help students to better understand controversial issues. For example, if reading Loffreda's report of the trial over the Matt Shepard murder, students could actually simulate this trial in the classroom. This is an activity that could involve all the students in the class, as students volunteer for all the parts of the players in the trial, including the judge, attorneys, jury, witnesses, and the media. This kind of deep immersion not only helps students to better understand the case from a number of view points, but is generally a fun way of learning, too.

### ***Locating Contexts***

Divide the class into small groups and ask them to generate a list of the larger contexts for this essay, locating quotations from the piece that point to that context or larger conversation. At the start of the semester, it might help students if you choose quotations for them, but later in the semester they should try to identify good quotations themselves. For example, with Sacks, we might list the different methods of adaptation for someone recently blinded, the role of the visual imagination, the way the brain works, and so on. Not only does this generate the themes of the essay, but it also helps students to see that these



texts are not isolated writings but participate in larger conversations when considered alongside one or two other readings. It additionally gives them practice in locating these larger conversations. When working in groups in this way, there should be a group leader who then comes forward in front of the whole class, and who tells the chosen quotations and the connections between them from the different readings, to the whole class.

### **Conducting Online Research**

Either schedule a class in a computer classroom when beginning a new reading, or ask your students to do some online research of their own to learn about the background of the author of an essay they are about to read. There is fascinating information found on Google, for example, about the rich life of Oliver Sacks. In the case of students having researched this as homework, one or two students could give an oral presentation to the rest of the class about their research discoveries, and this could then turn into a larger conversation as knowledge is pooled amongst the class members.

### **Revision**

Once students have put together their rough drafts, they will embark on the process of revision. Our focus on revision reinforces the claim, central to *The New Humanities Reader* pedagogy, that writing is a process, and the conversation between authors—students and others—should be developed in an open-ended process of revision that may actually lead to a change in perspective. Just as we encourage students to think that their first readings of the essays in *The New Humanities Reader* cannot be the final one, so the first writing of their paper is not the final one. Also, from a practical perspective, students usually write themselves into a viable project. While they start to answer the assignment question at the beginning of their rough draft, it is often the case that an authentic project (which connects the assigned readings with the students own idea) only emerges towards the end of the process. Revision gives students a chance to step back and see this for themselves, to build on those moments, and potentially even discard the writing that helped them get to that emerging project in favor of new writing that develops an authentic thesis with which they can structure their papers.

### **Peer Review**

In order to focus students on the idea that it is up to them to make meaning out of the material in front of them, rather than having wisdom handed down to them from on high, instructors do not provide specific comments for revision on students' rough drafts. Rather, we provide worksheets that guide the students to offer suggestions for revision on each other's work. Peer review can be used to focus on new parts of the writing process that we want students to gain control over, or it can be used to reinforce lessons taught earlier in the semester. Most teachers use a sequence of peer review activities that address different concerns

at different parts of the semester. Instructors often factor a student's peer review responses into the grade on the paper—a lazy peer reviewer will have the final grade reduced. This helps motivate students who don't take peer review seriously, as well as to encourage them to practice the skills that will ultimately help them be more successful in reviewing their own work.

It is not easy to make peer review work. Students are often resistant to accepting comments on their papers from people who they see as being “just as bad” at writing as they are. The peer review questions and sheets included below have worked not only as exercises for students to review each others' work, but they also provide questions that students should be encouraged to ask of their own writing. This technique of specific questioning helps students give feedback that their peers see as a useful alternative to instructor comments.

Peer review sheets should provide questions that focus on both the mechanical and the conceptual parts of student writing—not only what the author wants to say, but how they might say it most effectively. Peer reviews focus on different aspects of paper writing throughout the course of the semester; they should reflect the points of emphasis that are new, or that students are not doing very well, though repeating fundamental things (analysis not summary etc.) is important.

## Sample Peer Review Sheet

The following might be called a “generic peer review” sheet. There are lots of questions here for illustration—a typical peer review sheet will be shorter and more focused on the issues at hand. For example, I would only ask about summary versus interpretation on the first two papers. After that, I would assume that everyone is going to move beyond summary.

**Writer's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Today's Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Peer Editor's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

*Generic Instructions to the Peer Editor.* Please do your best to give helpful feedback to the writer whose paper you review. Wherever possible, provide specific examples. Write as much as possible on this sheet, and be sure to write on your peer's paper as well. [Editor's Note: For space reasons we have left out the blank areas in this peer review sheet in which students can answer the questions].

*Generic Instructions to the Writer.* Please save all of the peer evaluations you receive and hand them in with the final drafts. This will help me to evaluate the



effectiveness of peer revision, and it will give me a chance to engage with the comments of your peers in my own comments on your final draft.

1. Go through your partner's paper and mark with a star all the places where you think the writer is interpreting and thinking rather than supplying information directly from the readings in the form of summary. Also mark places with a large S where you feel the writer is providing unnecessary summary that does not seem to help her or him develop an argument.
2. Which of the starred moments in the draft seem especially interesting or promising? That is, what place in the essay does the writer say something that seems most original or interesting? What is so good about this moment to you?
3. Could the idea you discussed in #2 help to unify the paper in some way? That is, do you see a moment of argument here? What would that argument be?
4. What is the writer's argument, in your own words? That is, how does she or he respond to the main essay question? What answer does the essay suggest? Do you agree with the writer's argument, as you see it? Why or why not?
5. Play devil's advocate for a moment, and try to imagine the most contrary point of view that someone could take on your peer's argument. What criticism would the devil's advocate level against this paper?
6. How does the writer think that [Generic Author Name #1] differs from [Generic Author Name #2] in responding to the essay question?
7. Does the writer directly deal with the readings in most paragraphs of the essay? Where should the writer do more to incorporate or quote from the readings? What passages or ideas from the readings should she or he especially consider?
8. Locate at least one place where the writer can strengthen connections between essays. Explain what connection you are working with: Is the connection between the essays clear? Does this connection relate back to the main argument? How might he or she explain this connection more carefully?
9. What are some of the things that the writer should work on in revision? For example: Has the writer begun to address the basic elements of the assignment? Does she or he try to form an argument that addresses the essay question? Does the writer generally work to present interpretation rather than summary? Has he or she incorporated the other readings into

the essay well enough? Does she or he use quotes or discuss these writers' arguments directly? Does the writer use specific references to the text to illustrate points? Does the writer try to engage the texts in conversation rather than just using them to back up her or his narrow argument? Does the writer acknowledge the arguments of these writers and work to separate her or his own voice from that of the writers (not repeating things said by the writers as though it were her or his own opinion)?

10. Come up with an original title for your peer's paper. The title should try to capture what you think the writer is saying in the essay.
11. Look at two quotations that the writer uses, and talk about how accurately and how well the writer deals with those quotes. First, pick a quote that you think the writer could definitely talk about more or talk about more accurately. Second, look at the longest quote that the writer has used. Is this quote too long? Is it being used in place of writing or in place of some sort of directed summary? If you think the quote is good—or if you think it should be shortened—what is the most important part of the quote? What part should the writer discuss most? What might the writer say about the quote?
12. Respond to a second student's paper when you are finished with the first.

## **Student Created Peer Review**

*To the Writer:* Put your name at the top of this sheet. Look over the questions below and select four you want your reviewer to address. Circle the numbers of those four questions. OR, circle only three. On the lines immediately below, write one additional (\*very specific) question you have about your paper that you would like your reviewer to answer (\*you cannot ask "What should I fix?") Avoid choosing or writing questions that all deal with the same aspect of your paper.

*To the Reviewer:* Answer your author's four questions. Spend 35 minutes on the first paper.

Write your comments directly on the draft; preferably in the margins, but if they won't fit, use the end of the paper, or the backs of pages. Remember: Only specifics help your writer. If you honestly don't know what to say, or don't know how to do something yourself, it is better (and more fair) to say "I do not know" rather than writing down something in desperation that will mislead the writer. Responding that "Everything is great" shows that you are not reading carefully. On the other hand, "I don't know" isn't very helpful either; it is a last resort. Please try to give the kind of help you want to receive.



### **Project**

- Can you find and understand the author's project and identify two or three main supporting ideas? Can you restate the project in your own words? Do it here, if you can. Can you mark the places in the paper where the project and the ideas emerge? Write 'project' in the margins where you see this happening.
- Does the project really respond to the assignment? Why or why not?
- Is the project sufficiently developed? Is there enough detailed, relevant, supporting evidence? If not, what ideas need support?

### **Organization**

- Does each paragraph's topic sentence relate directly to the project? If not, write a suggestion to help the writer make that relationship stronger.
- Are there any places where the author needs better transitions between paragraphs? Within paragraphs?
- Are there any places where the author seems to get off track? Is there any evidence that is not really relevant?
- Are there any places where the essay breaks "unity"? (A different way of phrasing question 6, so don't pick both.)
- Are there any problems with unity within paragraphs?
- Is the essay coherent? Can the reader follow the author's ideas? Indicate places where the coherence breaks down.

### **Use of Text**

- Look at the author's quotations. Has the author selected "idea" quotes rather than "fact" or "summary" quotes, and used those quotes to strengthen, launch, or complicate her/his own argument?
- Are there quotes that are not smoothly integrated or embedded? (Do not rewrite the paper for your author, but suggest what she or he might want to accomplish).
- Are all quotations and paraphrases properly cited? If not, show specifically where and tell what the problem is.

- Is the author using unnecessary summary? Where?
- Are all three texts used, in reasonable balance? If not, what's the problem?
- Are all three texts interpreted fairly? If not, what is the author misreading?

### **Presentation**

- Normally, peer reviewers stay away from commenting on presentation. No peer reviewer should become another student's editor, and many students are not necessarily skilled enough in grammar, mechanics and syntax to avoid giving bad advice. However, many of you requested feedback on presentation, so . . .
- Are there one or two kinds of error that you see the author repeating over and over again? Mark the places and identify the kinds of errors the author needs to address.

### **Teaching Revision**

Making peer review primary in a student's revision process raises the question of how to teach revision without commenting directly on student papers. That is, how can an instructor make sure that the students in his class are recognizing points in each other's papers, as well as their own, that need revision? Apart from the peer review sheet, we encourage the use of parts of sample student papers to focus on revision strategies. Doing this not only encourages students to see all writing as work in process, not "safe" from revision, but also helps them to be able to apply an abstract revision idea to their own paper. Making them do this is arguably more effective than commenting directly on a student's rough draft about a particular moment, as it gives the student a template that can be applied over and over again in the production of the final draft. The student is encouraged to look for moments in their papers where a particular revision strategy applies, and by doing so hopefully moves them a little further towards being an independent writer with an inventory of writing strategies up her sleeve. Global instructor-driven revision complements the peer review described above, in that the latter gives the student practice in applying the former, but allowing them the distance that is sometimes necessary to be an effective reviewer. They are both steps in the ultimate goal to have students have an objective awareness of their own writing, and of the steps that writing a good paper requires.

### **Activities for Drafts and Peer Revision**

Students will want to know what you think, but rather than provide detailed commentary for each draft (and so foster an unproductive student dependence upon your input), you should try any of these strategies:



- Use photocopied passages: You may photocopy representative passages from several student essays and ask the class as a whole to consider their successes and the opportunities for revision they present. (This revision work may also be done in small groups.)
- Try group revision of selected passages: You may photocopy and distribute one page where a student writer has introduced but not really engaged with a quotation. Each student might redraft that paragraph, and some students might share their revisions with the class.
- Make global comments: You may write a composite set of comments in response to the drafts as a group for distribution to the students, identifying (and perhaps providing brief examples of) the most common or important areas for revision. You should use these strategies and peer review sessions alike to make clear the need for re-reading as well as revision. You may be surprised to find how many students attempt to revise without re-reading the assigned texts, even when the primary need for revision is misunderstanding (or too simplistic an understanding) of the texts.
- Count peer review: Students often do not initially value peer comments. Two strategies can alter this perception. First, some teachers “grade” the peer comments to motivate students to write effective comments. Second, you can reference peer comments in your end comments on a graded draft. Adding briefly a comment such as “I’m glad you followed X’s comment on your draft” or “Please note that Y made the same comment on your rough draft” demonstrates to students that peer comments are an effective tool for revision.

Some students don’t do well in writing classes because they are not involved enough in the processes of the class. When they go home to write their papers, they have nothing to draw on, because they have been only passive observers, rather than active participants in the class. Here are some suggestions for getting students more involved in class:

- Ask students to write on the board. If you are having a full-class discussion, ask students, several at a time, to take ten-minute shifts at the board, writing down important ideas. Tell them it’s acceptable if they duplicate each other’s work. The point (in terms of their responsibility) is to get as much as possible on the board; simultaneously, these students will be obliged to pay closer attention to the discussion, and will be actively contributing to the success of the class.
- Alternatively, if you are having small group discussions, you can include a step that involves writing on the board. (Incidentally, this also helps to get “slow” groups up to speed, because they see that other groups are ahead of them.) You might ask students to establish a list of important terms and

write it on the board, to define a term and write the definition on the board, or to choose a significant passage from the text and write the passage on the board.

- In full-class discussion, ask each student who speaks to choose the next speaker. Students often feel more comfortable participating in response to another student's request, than answering the teacher's question.
- When small groups report, assign several students in advance to ask questions of each group after they report. If students know in advance that they are "on call" to ask questions, they will be more engaged with the class.
- When small groups report, arrange a "panel" of chairs at the front of the room. You could start rearranging the furniture while the groups are still working, so that they see that they will be on the panel, addressing an audience. The panel format can produce some superior classroom moments.
- Tell students in advance that, when their small groups report, every member of the group must say something. About five minutes before you ask the groups to report, remind them that they need to make decisions about who will say what.
- Always recognize every serious effort to participate as beneficial to class discussion. Find ways to reward students when they make a clear effort to be involved in class discussion. Even if a student is "wrong," we can find ways to make use of every student comment. (For example, "Pat has pointed to an important passage. Let's all spend some time working with this passage to see if we can extend Pat's idea.")

### ***Public Speaking***

We require each English 101 student to make three brief oral presentations in class. The Public Speaking exercises used by most teachers can be arranged in four categories: Grammar, Reading, Writing, and Context. Any of these kinds of Public Speaking exercises can be presented by a single student within a small group, by a single student before the whole class, or by a group of students before the whole class. Teachers typically vary the format and the type of presentation so as to give students the opportunity to find the ones that work best for them, as well as to expose students to the range of ways that public speaking might function.



## Grammar Presentations

Students must do at least one oral presentation on a grammatical issue, based on the handbook and examples they come up with themselves. As an instructor, you can facilitate the class working out how to identify grammatical errors, and how to understand and apply grammatical rules. To be effective, the emphasis needs to fall on the students taking responsibility for instruction in a setting of peer review. As a minimum these topics need to be covered within the semester: “MLA Citation Guidelines,” “Plagiarism and Boundaries: Your Words and the Writer’s,” “Sentence Integrity When Using a Quote,” “Subject-Verb Agreement,” “Verb Tense Shift,” “Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement,” “Vague Pronoun Reference,” “Sentence Fragments,” “Run-on or Fused Sentences,” “Comma Splices,” “Other Comma Usage,” and “Apostrophe to Show Possession.” It is up to each instructor when these presentations are made and in what order. We would recommend fitting them into the revision day when samples from the rough drafts are discussed, that is, after the peer reviews are done and before the final draft is due. You could then go over the topic again on the day the final draft is due. You might assign two students to each type of error, and have them present at different times so that the material is covered at least twice using different examples.

## Reading Exercises

The reading exercises typically require students to make brief presentations on some aspect of the currently assigned reading. Some teachers find it more useful to have students present on a question asked ahead of time, while others require students themselves to pose questions for the class to explore. In either case, the point is to make students the initiators of discussion. This works especially well when several students present on the same question or topic: inevitably there are significant and interesting differences in their presentations, and the teacher then needs to do little more than point to these for good discussion to ensue.

## Writing Exercises

The writing exercises tend to be less aimed at starting discussion about the assigned reading (though they often do so) than at providing occasions for students to help one another produce better drafts. For instance, some teachers ask small groups of students to identify weak and strong areas in one another’s rough drafts, and then to present these to the class along with suggested revisions that they have arrived at together. On the days when final drafts are due, some teachers have students present their “finished” arguments to the class, and then have chosen respondents evaluate these. When this works, students both make excellent defenses of their work and also discover ways in which their papers might be revised even further.

## **Context Exercises**

Finally, the context exercises require students to present the results of research they have undertaken on some aspect of the assigned reading. But in addition to presenting such information simply as a way of explaining something in the text that had been unclear, students are also encouraged to present their research so as to “open up” the assigned reading.

In every case, although public speaking exercises always involve monologue—the single speaker making a sustained point before his or her peers—they should also, often, lead to dialogue of some sort. That is, we want students to treat speaking in public not just as the presentation of finished thought, but also as thinking in public: making one’s thought public, and so inviting (and expecting) response from others.

## **Rough Drafts Presented to Peer Revision Groups**

For the first (and possibly second) rough draft of the semester, have students work in peer groups of three members. Students should bring three copies of their draft—two for peers, one for you. Students give their two peer readers their drafts. However, before the student-reviewers read the draft, the student writer delivers an oral account of:

- her approach to the assignment
- the issues she considers
- the textual passages she uses.

The peer review group then reads the draft, gauging the differences between her oral account and her written draft. Peers assess the paper as a draft and use the oral delivery to help in organizing their response to the draft. This practice is designed to begin the speaking in class process with a minimum of distress, but it should not be the only approach taken throughout the term.

## **Rough Drafts and Final Drafts as Works in Progress**

For papers two through six, each student can present either a rough or a final draft as a work in progress. While a rough draft offers the most room for revision and intervention, a final draft, especially one in the middle of the semester, offers revision in the subsequent papers of the sequence. Each student has five minutes to present to the class how s/he has interpreted the assignment, which parts of text s/he is using, which points s/he wants to make. Having student presenters prepare a handout for the class and identifying respondents might help to focus these presentations for the audience. In the presentations, students should test out their claims. They should offer a working thesis, a focus that is entirely under construction, and they should point out their interest in it, anticipating objections and articulating some worries. The presentation should include some discussion of the parts of the text they will discuss. The student



should offer a focus and then should ask for help with that focus. You can have three students present and then have the class respond, or have all six present and have students prepare questions.

On days where you photocopy sample student papers for discussion, you might have groups work on identifying particular strengths and weaknesses or a particular pattern of error and then having group spokespersons present the group's findings to the class.

Alternatively, on the class day after rough drafts are due for each of the essays 2 through 6, four students will present and four other students will respond, leaving about twenty minutes of class time for each essay. Their rough drafts will have been photocopied to distribute to the entire class. Students will be given a few minutes to read the rough draft; then the author will talk about the rough draft, about what argument she was trying to make, where she wants to go with the final draft, why she chose to connect the texts the way she did; then the respondent will talk about the essay's strong and weak points, offering specific suggestions for revision; then discussion will be opened up to the class as a whole. Each student in the class does both of these tasks. Each, then, is a presenter and a respondent. These should take five minutes each. (This particular teacher used a group panel project for the third speaking activity.)

### **Rough Drafts, Final Drafts and Responses Done Collectively**

This approach to presenting rough drafts sequences both the level of critique and the amount of time the student speaks to the class.

- In Phase One, which is to say on the day when the first final draft is due, each student addresses the class after handing in her/his first final draft. Each student speaks to the class, from his/her seat, addressing three issues: initial framing of rough draft, insight gained from peer review process, changes in framing made for final draft.
- Phase Two covers papers two through five and works by having students maintain consistent peer groups of four or five people. In the first session scheduled for peer review of drafts, all the students in the group read and discuss the draft of one of the group members. The students reviewing will collectively identify at least one, perhaps two weaknesses of the rough draft. One student will be designated as the spokesperson for the group's review process.

In the second session scheduled for peer review on that draft, the student who drafted the paper will stand at his or her desk and report to the class on the issues he or she determined were necessary to address in that paper, and how he or she framed those issues in the draft. This student will speak for five minutes. The student designated to represent the group's review process will

then report to the class the strengths and weaknesses the process identified, and the suggestions for revision that emerged.

With ten minutes allotted to each group to address the class, the reporting process should take no more than one hour. The remaining time in that session will be used to discuss what kind of insights the class gleaned from the group reports.

These responsibilities will rotate for each paper. Each student will have the benefit of the group's attention on a draft and the responsibility to speak to the class about that draft. Each student will also have the responsibility to serve at least once as the group's spokesperson.

### **Students Presenting Readings to the Class**

If you already have students work in groups to identify key passages and terms or to unpack quotations, have the spokesperson of each group present their group's findings to the class.

Group presentations, scheduled for the first class meeting after students read a new essay, may also serve as a way of starting class discussions. Group members will each be responsible for a five minute talk that addresses any aspect of the new essay which they find interesting and which can relate in some way to one or more of the essays previously read in the course. Examples might include a look at how two authors approach a similar theme differently, or an examination of how two authors use personal anecdote or textual evidence.

### **Group Presentations to the Class**

After working on papers throughout the term, students will be organized into four groups, and each group will choose the issue and format of their presentation. Students need not present their own ideas. They could, for example, each take part of one of the authors we've read throughout the term and give short presentations on a single topic. They could weave together their own work with a writer we have read. The emphasis, no matter what format they imagine, is on bringing together a number of different perspectives on a single issue and exploring the ways in which those perspectives support, challenge or undermine one another. Each panel should appoint a moderator and should be prepared to field questions from the class. This exercise might work particularly well as preparation for the final exam, where any discussion of the exam reading should be student-run.

### **Final Reports to the Class**

After having their drafts reviewed by peers and discussed before the entire class, one teacher saved two classes at the end of the term for final reports. Each



student addresses the entire class from the front of the room, speaking for five minutes. The student's presentation will be a description of their achievement in the course. The student will identify at least one issue with which he or she struggled all semester. The student will discuss the work he or she did in reading and writing to work on this problem or issue, and they will identify the methods and techniques which seemed to be helpful. Finally, students will take questions from the class.

### **Presentation Exercise: A Handout to Students**

These will give you a chance to talk through your papers and to get more feedback and more ideas from other people than you otherwise would. You're not trying to present a polished final product here; rather, you're sharing work in progress with us so that we can help you with it. You need to present very specific and limited concerns.

Here's what the presentation will involve:

- Pick one paper to be the presentation's focus.
- Prepare to speak for a total of four minutes: the reviewers for a minute each, then the writer for two. (Then you'll field questions and lead discussion for five minutes.)
- Emphasize a small set of concerns that your audience will be able to grasp and respond to. That is, don't try to cover the whole paper, but instead just a few key things that might benefit from some feedback. You have very little time, so don't waste any.

Here are some suggestions about what and how to present, but feel free to use your own ideas: Make arguments rather than summaries (about the sources and about your ideas for successful writing); analyze the difficult parts of the sources; analyze your own positions; construct a thesis that shows the active relations between different issues and leads to further arguments; complicate your arguments by trying different perspectives and different combinations of materials; identify your own specific questions that your essay responds to.

- Divide tasks: e.g., first reviewer might present the thesis or the question(s) the essay answers, or some other key factor(s). Then the second reviewer might present what needs work. Then the writer might present what changes are being made and what still needs work, or ask if a change works. You might also have the different sides debate, or give competing ideas which we can help the writer to evaluate. Just make sure you present something specific to which we can respond.
- Use a prop: e.g., a handout or something on the board. That way we'll be able to see and analyze your specific concerns and help you with possible revision. (I can make copies for you if you leave what you want copied in my box by 4 P.M. the day before class.)

- Tell us exactly how you want us to respond: e.g., to whether the thesis works, or a complicating possibility is left out, or difficult passages are sufficiently engaged, or whatever.
- Rehearse to be on time and to see what works. I'll give you the first five minutes of class to prep.
- Each person in the class must participate in the discussion part.
- Grading. The presentation is part of the workshop. Remember that failure to perform these presentations can result in failing this course.

### ***Self-Assessment and Reflection***

There are a number of ways to ask students to reflect on their progress, but one of the easiest is a “midterm self-assessment” assignment. Ask them to go through their work thus far and to write you a note or an e-mail message about how they have improved and what they need to do in the coming papers. You can also use this as an opportunity to assess student response to the activities you have done so far in the course. It’s best if you ask them to do this in response to a set of guiding questions that you hand out or e-mail to the listserv.

Here is a sample self-assessment exercise that has been successfully used in class:

#### **Midterm Self-Assessment**

Reread your first three papers, along with my comments. Once you’re done, write a short “report” to me via e-mail evaluating your portfolio and thinking about things you can do to improve. I will respond before the next paper is due. Try to give a thoughtful and honest assessment. To do this well should probably take from thirty minutes to an hour of your time.

Consider the following questions in making your self-evaluation:

- What have you learned in this class about college writing that differs from what you had thought or learned before?
- What do you consider to be your greatest strength(s) as a writer? What things are you doing well?
- What are your weaknesses? What do you need to work on in future papers?
- Compare your weakest paper with your best paper so far. What things are you doing in your best paper that you were not doing in the weakest paper? What improvements have you made that can help you in future papers?
- What concrete steps do you think you can take to improve your performance in the class?



- What class activities or exercises have been the most helpful in improving your writing? Can you suggest any activities you'd like us to engage in, or things you'd like us to do or cover in class?
- Is there anything you feel a bit confused about and wish I'd explain again? Are there any remarks I've made in class or on your papers that you have not understood? Is there anything you're concerned about as relates to the class?

The questions you ask can go beyond self-assessment to invite assessment of the class, of your comments on papers, and of class activities.

### ***Computer Activities***

Computer technologies have created new teaching methods, and writing instructors have often been among the first to put these technologies to work in the classroom. Though students only need a basic word processor—which could be as simple as pencil and paper, after all—to accomplish the most essential goals of any writing course, technology can add important dimensions to their experience. Computers can facilitate the writing process, create virtual spaces for dialogue and exploration, increase time on task, and make participation more meaningful.

Many in the humanities rightly approach technology with a combination of concern and skepticism. They recognize, after all, that technology too often mediates between people and can introduce as many negative as positive effects. The best way to express these concerns, however, is to engage directly with technology and to teach students what Cindy Selfe calls “critical technological literacy,” which involves not only skill in using technology to write, but also the ability to reflect actively in writing on the ways that technology impacts people’s lives. We want students to notice the technology around them and to read it as much as they use it. Teachers in the humanities may be best equipped to teach that level of critical engagement.

Technology has become more central to what we do as both writers and instructors of writing, and its importance will only increase. This section of the Instructor’s Resource Manual is an introduction to the most widely available instructional technologies, and an argument for making them a part of your everyday teaching practice.

### **Types of Technology for Teaching Writing**

The most useful technologies for teaching writing are those that make students read and write. Though instructors might have occasion to make use of DVDs, CDs, videos, or PowerPoint slides in their classes, these technologies are not central to the main object of a writing course. Technologies that directly

contribute to writing are computer classrooms, the Internet, asynchronous discussion, synchronous discussion, interactive software, web logs, course websites, student websites, and e-mail.

### **Computer Classrooms**

Even if your department does not have its own dedicated room(s) for computer instruction, your institution likely does. Writing instructors have been taking advantage of these spaces for at least twenty years as a way of getting students writing and collaborating during class time and for making it possible to instruct students in using other writing technologies.

### **The Internet**

Our students bring with them certain skills in “surfing the web” for entertainment and information, but they have a surprisingly specialized set of Internet-research skills. I’ve met students, for example, who could locate, download, and start playing their favorite song in seconds but who were incapable of locating and evaluating information on issues related to our classroom reading. As educators, we need to aid students in learning the skills they will need to make sense of the ever-growing world of information available at their fingertips.

### **Asynchronous Threaded Discussion**

There is no more useful or widely available tool for sharing ideas and information than an online forum (also called a “bulletin board,” “message board,” or “computer conference”), where ideas and responses can be posted asynchronously (over a period of time) to create a conversation on class topics. These asynchronous environments allow students to post their initial ideas before class discussion, to participate in collaborative activities during meetings in a computer classroom, or to continue and extend discussions begun in the classroom. Forums can even be used for purposes of peer review and file sharing, although there are dedicated technologies for those purposes (see below). Teachers at Rutgers are encouraged to use the Sakai system (<http://sakai.rutgers.edu>) to organize online discussions. But a variety of freeware and shareware applications are also available on the web. You can also use an e-mail list (or “listserv”) to create a useful asynchronous discussion among the members of your class through e-mail, but e-mail gives the instructor less control over the messages that can get broadcast to the group.

### **Synchronous Discussion**

Students are probably more familiar with communicating synchronously (at the same time) through “chat” rooms and instant messaging than their instructors are, since they have grown up as these technologies have become more widespread. Instructors who have been experimenting with technology for teaching writing have probably come across MUDs (multi-user domains) and



MOOs (MUDs with object-orientation), which were among the first systems developed to create live discussion among a number of people not in the same place. Such environments are increasingly being incorporated into courseware technologies. Though most commonly used at Universities for purposes of online instruction, synchronous communication environments can sometimes be useful to take the place of a regular class session or to create a space for communication in a computer lab setting. Especially when the dialogues that result can be captured and reflected upon, they can themselves make for interesting discussion and analysis (especially if the topic of discussion is how we communicate or how technology affects communication).

### **Interactive Software**

There are an increasing variety of technologies that make it possible for students to share drafts and give each other feedback on their writing. Your school may have a contract with WebCT, e-College, or an ever-growing list of courseware suppliers whose systems feature this function. Your department can also contract with publishers who are increasingly developing online applications to accompany their writing handbooks. Students often find peer review more effective when it is done at a keyboard rather than with pencil and paper in the regular classroom. Online interactive spaces can also allow teachers to extend peer review beyond the classroom to increase time on task.

### **Blogs**

Even the first writing instructors relied upon journals to help their students integrate writing practices into their everyday lives. The Internet makes journaling a more public affair, so that students can develop a more public voice in writing—one not intended solely for themselves (or for themselves and their instructor only) but also for a much wider public. There are a number of places where students can create a free “blog” (short for web log) with only a minimum of computer knowledge (and a minimum of advertising content to pay for it). The instructor can then create links to each student’s blog from a class homepage for easy access to each other’s thoughts and ideas.

### **Course Websites**

Instructors increasingly use class homepages to post course information (including syllabi and assignments) and to create a sense of community in their classrooms that extends beyond the brief time of their meeting. Instructor websites can also become a useful vehicle for sharing assignments with colleagues or developing communal standards for grading.

### **Student Websites**

Universities are increasingly interested in building on students’ technological literacy. Some even require all of their students to post an online portfolio of their work (along with their resumes) before they graduate, and some writing programs have agreed to participate in the project of technological literacy by teaching basic web-publishing skills. After all, publishing to the world wide web

has become as easy as typing a paper, and even most word processing programs can now convert files to HTML for easy web-viewing. Also, if we want to impart critical technological literacy to our students, then we should not pass up opportunities for doing so.

### **E-mail**

Some instructors find it useful to create a class e-mail list or listserv that allows them to communicate information to all students simultaneously and allows students to post queries or ideas to the group. Though listservs can create some dangers (since they do offer a forum for occasionally inflammatory or hurtful speech), they also create many opportunities to communicate outside of class. They are most useful to posting important and timely information that would be of interest to everyone in the class, including class cancellations or television broadcasts, events, and news articles related to course reading. Listservs can also be used to create an asynchronous discussion, but online forums (which allow instructors greater control over the messages that get broadcast to the group) are better suited to such uses.

## **Why Use Technology for Teaching?**

For those who remain a bit skeptical about what technology can add to writing classes, here is a list of ways computers can be used to accomplish important goals:

- **To incorporate other voices.** Using online materials and resources allows us to break out of disciplinary boxes to examine a wide range of texts and inter-texts. Online postings of class discussion can also make student voices available for quotation and continued dialogue in writing.
- **To expand the worldviews of students.** By making supplemental information available on the web, we offer students a way of putting readings in context. The “Link-O-Mat” feature of *The New Humanities Reader* website offers multiple links to resources to enrich student understanding of the essays (visit <http://www.newhum.com/>.)
- **To share drafts efficiently.** With electronic texts, students can more easily offer feedback to each other both in and outside of class.
- **To extend the work of the classroom.** Online writing spaces help students prepare for writing their papers by doing collaborative pre-writing activities. These spaces also allow students to continue class activities, thus increasing time on task and improving peer support outside the classroom.
- **To allow participation among those who miss class.** Courses with an online component or activities available online can make some



participation possible for those who cannot attend a particular class session.

- **To break out of the student-teacher dyad and sponsor a public voice.** When student work is broadcast in the form of web pages and online forums, it is no longer “just for the teacher,” and students must imagine a public voice for themselves.
- **To depersonalize participation.** By offering students a forum for participation where their bodies are not on display, we can enable more open dialogue.
- **To enable collaboration.** Computers in general (and interactive software more particularly) allow students to collaborate effectively in making group projects.
- **To increase participation.** All students participate when postings online are required and made public.
- **To track and measure performance.** With technology, we can easily keep track of participation and the level of performance of students. Those struggling become very apparent. Postings in online forums make participation more measurable, so it becomes a less subjective or personal part of the grade.
- **To make grading preparation less punitive.** They take the place of quizzes and tests that generally focus on retention of information. Instead, the forum gets us focused on analysis.
- **To improve discussion.** Students are more thoughtful in writing than in speaking, so putting their initial thoughts in writing can advance discussion further and more quickly than speaking alone. Requiring online postings on the day’s reading shortly before the class meets can encourage preparation, give students more chances to shape discussion (especially if student comments are used as conversation starters), and thus improve classroom participation.
- **To turn discussion into a class text.** All electronic forums are available for analysis and can themselves become class texts.
- **To distribute the labor of instruction to students.** By enabling collaboration and student interaction, technology can give students faster feedback on their ideas while lessening the teacher’s workload.

- **To reflect on visual media.** Print is becoming a less important media for communication in the world than visual media, and technology allows us to bring these alternate media into the classroom.
- **To teach technological literacy.** Students will increasingly be writing in electronic environments and need exposure to them. The English Department or Writing Program can become the center of the University for teaching all types of literacy, which only increases the importance of its role.

## Getting Started with Forums

### Ideas for Forum Assignments

One of the easiest ways to get started with instructional technology in the writing class is by setting up an online forum. In fact, most instructors who end up using technology extensively say that an online forum was their “gateway” experience that taught them the ways that technology can add a significant dimension to the class. After all, adding a forum to your class is like building a deck onto your house: it creates another space where you can gather with others for conversation. For the most part, any group activity you might do in a writing classroom can be done in the virtual space of the forum, and you would probably only have to modify your in-class handouts slightly to make them into online activities. What follow are some sample activities that have proven useful with *The New Humanities Reader*.

- **Make a Connection.** The best basic forum assignment is for students to make an inter-textual or intra-textual connection, using two quotes from either two different texts or from the same text to help them make and explore a point. You can leave the topic for these connections open-ended or you can give a specific question, but it is best to give students as much freedom as possible.
- **Point to the Text.** Require students to post a question in the forum and then to respond someone else’s question by doing two things: 1) quoting from the text and 2) explaining how that quote helps to answer the question. The key, though, is to get them to point to the text. Besides helping students work with the texts, such an assignment can also facilitates community-building in the forum by giving students a model for useful interactions in that space.
- **Connect to the Web.** Forums are a great vehicle for getting students to use online material. At The New Humanities website, you can use the Link-O-Mat to guide students to useful sites. Then have students use the forum to post their ideas about how the websites they found through the Link-O-Mat connect to the reading. Alternately, you can have students



collaborate to create their own Link-O-Mat: have each student do an online search, with the goal of finding and posting an interesting link in the forum; then have them write an annotation that explains how the site they or their peers found helps understand or apply the reading.

- **Share Your Thesis.** Teachers can ask students to post their project or thesis ideas in the forums and have peers not only offer feedback but also point to a specific idea or quotation to help the student develop the idea further.
- **Try an Online Peer Review Session.** You can easily do peer review of drafts as an online activity, with students posting their drafts in the forum and then responding to two of their peers' drafts. Of course, there are other interactive technologies besides forums that might be more effective for peer review. But if forums are all you have, they can be made to serve. The advantages of online peer review over peer review in a regular classroom are numerous:
  - It allows you to better monitor the effectiveness of peer review since you immediately get the peer review comments and drafts,
  - It provides you with access to electronic copies of your students drafts to use in preparing follow-up classroom activities (including grammar activities based on the errors that students actually make in writing),
  - It lets you extend peer review beyond the class session by having them respond to one draft during class time (in the computer classroom) and then another online later (from home or from campus computer lab),
  - It allows students the opportunity to see everyone's draft (so they can compare their work to that of the best students),
  - And it makes it easy for students who miss the class session to still participate in the review process.

### Sample Forum Assignments as Presented to Students

The following are real assignments you might give to students to write about in your online forum. These assignments can be done during class time or they can be assigned to do as homework.

- **What's your thesis?** One of the best ways to get started on revising is to try to write out a paragraph where you describe exactly what you think you are trying to argue in your paper. In other words, what's your overall point? Or, as we teachers often say, "What's your thesis?" What I want you to do in the forum today, before you move on to other directed revision activities, is to post a reply to this message that answers the question, "what's your thesis in Essay #5? and how do all of the writers you are

going to discuss fit into that thesis?” Write as much as you can, and be as clear as you can—and try to write a full paragraph that mentions all the writers we are discussing. For most of you, what you write here will be the basis for your first paragraph in your essay, where you should try to forecast your argument for your reader so as to guide him or her through your paper (though you might still revise it later). For others, this might still be a preliminary step in revision, and you may need to revisit the way you’d describe your argument once you have a better idea of just what you are trying to say in your essay. . . .

- **Weave the web.** Find an article or web page online that makes an interesting connection with our class reading. Use Google (<http://www.google.com>) to search and try out different search terms. Don’t settle on one reading right away but try looking around at various things before you make a choice. Be sure to post the link to this site so that other students can get there easily and then explain the connection you made. Give us the link and explain how the web page you found helps us reframe, understand, or complicate the assigned essay?
- **Question and answer.** Ask a clear question about a specific place or aspect of the text that causes you confusion or uncertainty. Once you are done, try to answer someone else’s question that has been posted in the forum. Be sure to do two things in your answer: 1) offer a quote from the text and 2) explain how the quote helps to answer the student’s question. We will use some of the more interesting or puzzling questions to start off class discussion.
- **Explore our website.** Go to The New Humanities website at <http://www.newhum.com>. Explore the site, focusing on the sections designed for students. Tell us about something useful you found there that other students might find valuable too. Be sure to give a direct link to that section of the site.
- **Sum up the learning.** Sum up the learning that is posted in our forum. What interests other students? What questions are being posed and how are they addressed?
- **Tell a story.** How do ideas from the reading extend into the world? Make a connection to the real world or everyday life. Tell a story of where you came across something that connected with the readings in some clear way. Explain how the occurrence or idea offers a new perspective on the reading. Have the readings affected how you made a decision in some way? Have they made you see something familiar in a new light?



- **Write the author.** Write a forum posting directed to the author of our reading. What would you ask or say to the writer? You never know: he or she may actually find and read what you wrote!
- **Write other audiences.** Write a summary of the text for a specific reader, such as your mother or your high school English teacher. What are you learning in English 101? What could your high school teachers do to help better prepare students for Expos?
- **Reflect on the forum itself.** What does our readings and your own experience suggest about the value of online forums for student learning? How do forums compare to class discussion? What are the positive and negative aspects of forums?

### Good Practices for Managing Forums

One reason instructors often give for not using technology in their classes is that it will require more time commitment from them. But this does not have to be the case. In fact, after the initial start-up (which will always take some adjustment), most instructors find that using technology such as an online forum can lighten their workloads considerably—so long as it is used effectively. Here are some good practices to make forums work for you.

- **Just-in-Time Teaching.** Set the deadline for forum postings for the time before next class when you are most likely to be reading the forum and preparing for class yourself. This will optimize everyone's use of time and let students post at odd hours.
- **Make it mandatory.** Unless students are required to post in the forum, they rarely will do so on their own. Treat online activities as either attendance or drafting activities and hold students accountable for their work in the forum. In literature or professional writing courses, where you might use a point system for grading, make forum activities an integral part of the final grade and deduct points if students fail to post online.
- **Do some forum activities in the computer classroom during class time.** A good way to make the computer classroom more collaborative is to have students do their collaborative work in the forum—answering questions and responding to each other online. It may seem less natural than normal group work activities, but you will gain many advantages: 100% participation, a complete record of every student's activities for the day, and a body of generated text that students can access from home and reflect upon further (thus extending time on task). Definitely consider using the computer classrooms the first time you have students access

the forums, since some will probably need your help getting over the technological hurdle of signing on.

- **Bring postings to class.** Treat online postings the same way you would paper drafts: bring copies of interesting paragraphs to class to stimulate discussion.
- **Keep your online responses to a minimum.** Occasionally, it will be necessary to respond to postings—especially to any early postings that might set a bad tone in the forum and encourage poor responses. By responding to one weak posting you will show students that you are reading the forum and that you care if they take it seriously. But stop there. Don't ever try to respond to everyone's postings. And tell students that while you will generally read everyone's online posting, you cannot possibly respond to them, except when you bring them into class to start discussion.



## V. Grading

Grading can be fairly anxiety producing, both for students and teachers. Having a common grading criteria can help. The following are the standards used at Rutgers University, where *The New Humanities Reader* was developed. A few notes of explanation may help you in understanding our grades:

- The official final grades for the Rutgers Writing Program are A, B+, B, C+, C, F, and E/F. Note that there is no "D" grade or any minus grades.
- The E/F is a non-punitive failing grade that we give to a student if he or she has completed all of the assignments, has a respectable attendance record, but has not been able to bring the writing up to a passing level. Once students retake the course, the grade is replaced. And the difference between an F and E/F grade often helps Deans decide whether or not a student should be suspended for overall poor performance.
- Instructors are discouraged from giving any but the official grades. It is particularly confusing, for example, to use minus or "split grades" (such as C- or C/F) when evaluating papers. Such grades create ambiguity that, in the long run, misleads students because many interpret it as a passing grade, when teachers do not intend it to be. Only work of C or higher quality is considered passing.
- While the F is the only official grade to indicate that a student has not passed the course, instructors typically use the mark "NP" (not passing) to indicate that an individual essay is not yet of passing quality. This mark is more encouraging of revision and future efforts than the F grade. An improving student who is close to passing might even receive an "NP+"!

### ***Grading Paper One***

Before moving into the grading criteria to follow throughout the semester, it is important to look first at grading Paper 1, as this is unique in that it is only concerned with writing about one reading, and is thus not yet looking for connections between other pieces in *The New Humanities Reader*. Since students are only writing about one reading, this may lead them toward summary, although using an assignment that incorporates the introduction to the reader or a short article (from a newspaper or web source) can avoid this problem. The real goal of Paper One is to help students practice reading and working with quotations, and then keep them moving toward the next reading and Paper Two.

Students can be sensitive about grades, so if some of them perform poorly on the first paper, be sure to reassure them that the second essay will allow them opportunities to improve. Rather than have them endlessly revise that first paper, use Paper Two to return to the earlier reading and to continue practicing the necessary skills. If well over half of your students receive an 'NP' on Paper One, this can be detrimental to class morale and can unnecessarily sap the confidence of many students. The following techniques may help to make Paper One a limited achievement from which students can successfully move on:

1. Set students a reasonable task. Paper One should get students working closely with specific examples from the reading. Make sure your instructions are clear and use class time to help students analyze the assignment so that it is clearly understood.
2. Have students do one-page pre-writing assignments that involve careful reading and the analysis of a particular quote. Discuss sample student responses in class or hand them back with your responses.
3. In addition to peer work on rough drafts, read through the rough drafts of Paper One yourself, and make final (but not marginal) comments on each paper. Think of your comments on rough drafts for Paper One as a form of "intervention," trying to keep students from making clear mistakes that might fail their papers (such as using no quotes).
4. Don't be draconian in your grading of the final draft. Give students a reasonable idea of the grading criteria for the course by grading Paper One by the same standards that you will use to measure their later papers, but do not look for a complete, polished performance. Look for discrete moments that work and that you can reward. Use your final comments to reinforce key marginal comments and to help each student establish priorities—one or two things to work on for the next paper. Don't overwhelm them by pointing out every flaw.
5. Consider grading pass / not pass. Though it is a standard policy to give an actual letter grade on the first paper, some instructors find it more helpful to only grade 'P / NP' on Paper One. Since it makes no difference in determining final grades, this is an acceptable option.

### ***Final Drafts and Class Activities***

On the day that final drafts are due students can exchange essays to proofread and edit for spelling and basic errors. You can use these days as opportunities to discuss grammar, syntax, paragraphing, transitions, quotation, the formulation of a thesis, and related issues. You should take time early on to assist students in the correct use of grammar. As the semester continues, we need to increase gradually our expectations of correct usage, and you may decide after the third essay that students should come to class already having proofread their final



drafts. Students who have especially persistent difficulties with “sentence level error” should be encouraged to meet you during your office hour for more focused help, and, if necessary, they should be referred to one of the Writing Centers.

On the days when they return students’ graded final drafts, many teachers again come prepared with copied sample passages (or entire papers), which then form the basis of a discussion about grading. Having samples of student writing on hand helps to make your explanation of grading criteria more concrete: you may have samples that demonstrate a problem (or lost opportunity) most common to failing papers, to C papers, etc. Or you may have passages that can be called “B moments,” even though they appear in papers graded C. And your students will ask soon enough to see an A paper. It may take you a while to get one from them, but you should not hesitate to distribute examples of A work once students have produced them.

## Simplified Grading Criteria

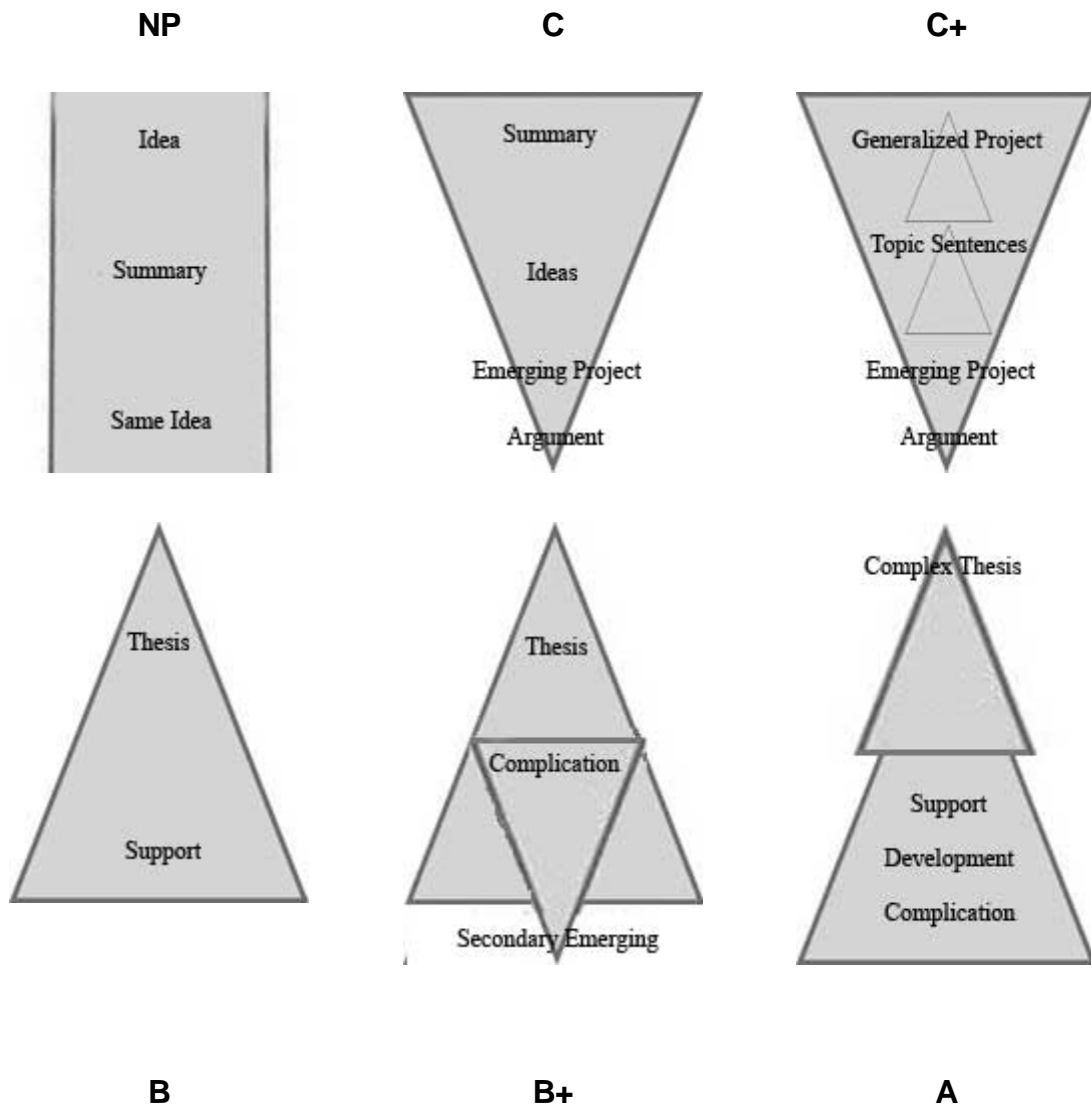
For the complete criteria, see <http://www.newhum.com>

	<b>THESIS</b>	<b>WORK WITH ASSIGNED TEXT</b>	<b>ORGANIZATION</b>	<b>PRESENTATION</b>
<b>NP</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No thesis in evidence</li> <li>Thesis buried in summary</li> <li>Little or no relation between the texts and thesis / position</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poor reading comprehension or misinterpretation</li> <li>Lacks meaningful connection between texts or with the student's own position</li> <li>Privileges student's ideas</li> <li>Weak use of textual protocols (TP)</li> <li>Over-generalizes about the text</li> <li>Works with more than one source</li> <li>Vague sense that student's voice is contributing to the conversation</li> <li>Evidence of significant reading comprehension and use of TP</li> <li>Moments of solid work with texts and use of several TPs</li> <li>Engages with more complicated ideas in readings</li> <li>Connective thinking may be implicit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Little coherence from paragraph to paragraph</li> <li>Lacks organizational structure</li> <li>Weak use of paragraphs, with few or no clear topic sentences</li> <li>Some coherent relationships between paragraphs</li> <li>Paragraphs may exhibit "emerging topic sentences"</li> <li>Has relationships between paragraphs</li> <li>Transitions and topic sentences begin to emerge</li> <li>Has some coherence but lacks meaningful structure found in B-range papers</li> <li>Sustained meaningful structure</li> <li>Reasonable coherence in presentation</li> <li>Controlled development of thesis</li> <li>Smother transitions and topic sentences than C-range</li> <li>Generally well organized</li> <li>May develop a secondary emerging thesis which complicates the original argument</li> <li>Clear, fluid, logical</li> <li>Strong use of topic sentences and other guideposts for the reader</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sentence-level (SL) errors impede meaning</li> <li>Patterns of error</li> <li>Failure to proofread</li> <li>Serious errors in citation conventions</li> <li>SL errors do not significantly impede meaning</li> <li>Some mechanical, citation, and/or formatting errors</li> <li>SL errors under control</li> <li>May have some mechanical, citation, or formatting errors</li> <li>Minimal errors</li> <li>Minimal or no mechanical, citation, or formatting errors</li> <li>Minimal or no errors</li> <li>Minimal or no errors</li> <li>Likely to exhibit eloquence or an elegant writing style</li> </ul>
<b>C</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thesis is emerging from discussion of the text</li> <li>Takes clear position at least once</li> <li>Thesis may be vague or somewhat general</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moments of solid work with texts and use of several TPs</li> <li>Engages with more complicated ideas in readings</li> <li>Connective thinking may be implicit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some coherent relationships between paragraphs</li> <li>Paragraphs may exhibit "emerging topic sentences"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SL errors do not significantly impede meaning</li> <li>Some mechanical, citation, and/or formatting errors</li> </ul>
<b>C+</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has a thesis, but not clearly articulated from outset</li> <li>Moves toward independent thesis or position, exhibiting an emerging coherence of ideas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moments of solid work with texts and use of several TPs</li> <li>Engages with more complicated ideas in readings</li> <li>Connective thinking may be implicit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some coherent relationships between paragraphs</li> <li>Paragraphs may exhibit "emerging topic sentences"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SL errors do not significantly impede meaning</li> <li>Some mechanical, citation, and/or formatting errors</li> </ul>
<b>B</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thesis articulated from the outset</li> <li>Advances independent ideas</li> <li>Thesis more coherent than "C-level" but not as complex as A</li> <li>Thesis may be somewhat limited or developed in a repetitive way</li> <li>Independent thinking consistently developed</li> <li>Engages more complex ideas in the readings</li> <li>Begins to grasp the complexity of own position or to develop secondary emerging thesis</li> <li>Complex interpretive thesis clear from start</li> <li>Independent ideas developed and presented throughout</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Takes some interpretive risks with texts</li> <li>Works with a variety of TPs</li> <li>Texts used in service of project and to provide support for it</li> <li>Uses TPs with confidence and authority</li> <li>Student's ideas in control throughout paper</li> <li>Text used to both support and complicate the thesis</li> <li>Student-centered connective thinking</li> <li>Thesis cuts across readings in unanticipated ways or finds a larger context for the conversation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has relationships between paragraphs</li> <li>Transitions and topic sentences begin to emerge</li> <li>Has some coherence but lacks meaningful structure found in B-range papers</li> <li>Sustained meaningful structure</li> <li>Reasonable coherence in presentation</li> <li>Controlled development of thesis</li> <li>Smother transitions and topic sentences than C-range</li> <li>Generally well organized</li> <li>May develop a secondary emerging thesis which complicates the original argument</li> <li>Clear, fluid, logical</li> <li>Strong use of topic sentences and other guideposts for the reader</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimal errors</li> <li>Minimal or no mechanical, citation, or formatting errors</li> <li>Minimal or no errors</li> </ul>
<b>B+</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Independent thinking consistently developed</li> <li>Engages more complex ideas in the readings</li> <li>Begins to grasp the complexity of own position or to develop secondary emerging thesis</li> <li>Complex interpretive thesis clear from start</li> <li>Independent ideas developed and presented throughout</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uses TPs with confidence and authority</li> <li>Student's ideas in control throughout paper</li> <li>Text used to both support and complicate the thesis</li> <li>Student-centered connective thinking</li> <li>Thesis cuts across readings in unanticipated ways or finds a larger context for the conversation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has relationships between paragraphs</li> <li>Transitions and topic sentences begin to emerge</li> <li>Has some coherence but lacks meaningful structure found in B-range papers</li> <li>Sustained meaningful structure</li> <li>Reasonable coherence in presentation</li> <li>Controlled development of thesis</li> <li>Smother transitions and topic sentences than C-range</li> <li>Generally well organized</li> <li>May develop a secondary emerging thesis which complicates the original argument</li> <li>Clear, fluid, logical</li> <li>Strong use of topic sentences and other guideposts for the reader</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimal errors</li> <li>Minimal or no mechanical, citation, or formatting errors</li> <li>Minimal or no errors</li> </ul>
<b>A</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Independent thinking consistently developed</li> <li>Engages more complex ideas in the readings</li> <li>Begins to grasp the complexity of own position or to develop secondary emerging thesis</li> <li>Complex interpretive thesis clear from start</li> <li>Independent ideas developed and presented throughout</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uses TPs with confidence and authority</li> <li>Student's ideas in control throughout paper</li> <li>Text used to both support and complicate the thesis</li> <li>Student-centered connective thinking</li> <li>Thesis cuts across readings in unanticipated ways or finds a larger context for the conversation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has relationships between paragraphs</li> <li>Transitions and topic sentences begin to emerge</li> <li>Has some coherence but lacks meaningful structure found in B-range papers</li> <li>Sustained meaningful structure</li> <li>Reasonable coherence in presentation</li> <li>Controlled development of thesis</li> <li>Smother transitions and topic sentences than C-range</li> <li>Generally well organized</li> <li>May develop a secondary emerging thesis which complicates the original argument</li> <li>Clear, fluid, logical</li> <li>Strong use of topic sentences and other guideposts for the reader</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimal errors</li> <li>Minimal or no mechanical, citation, or formatting errors</li> <li>Minimal or no errors</li> </ul>



### Visual Guide to the Grading Criteria

The following set of images may help “visual thinkers” to grasp and explain our grading criteria. A non-passing paper does not arrive at a “point” and tends to be mostly summary. Passing but C-range work eventually arrives at a point, but it takes the form of an “emerging project” that only develops in the course of the paper. B and better work is able to express its thesis succinctly and clearly at the outset of the paper and support it with evidence from the text. The difference between B and better work is in the complexity of the thesis and its execution. A B+ paper has complexity but lacks full control. The A paper is able to grasp and represent its full complexity to the reader from the outset.



## ***Grading Criteria Glossary***

Our grading criteria use terms such as Thesis, Textual Protocol, Organization, and Presentation that are defined in specific ways. This glossary is meant to introduce you to these terms, and to provide contexts for you to connect them to terms you may already be familiar with.

### **Thesis**

A student should try to create a thesis or position by contributing to the conversation raised by the texts read for class. One essential skill in defining a thesis involves locating a larger context in which students can use the relationship between two or more texts as support for their own ideas. One of the signs that a paper has a thesis is the creation of new or independent ideas that are affiliated with the assignment question, but generated from the writer's unique attempt to answer that question. Ideally, students should articulate their paper's thesis in the introductory paragraph so as to clearly inform the reader from the start the position that this paper will take; however C-level papers often have the work of a thesis in the body of their paper, but not an articulation of it in the introductory paragraph. We define these unspecified theses as emerging. The paper's organization helps students define and develop their thesis.

The articulation of a paper's thesis can be thought of as analogous to argument; however, we avoid the language of argument because it suggests contention and leads students to a win or lose, prove or disprove mentality. Arguments tend to remain trapped in the texts, as students use one author to prove another author right or wrong. In contrast, the representation of a student's thesis incorporates a much broader sense of what a paper can and should accomplish.

Students who do not have full control over their thesis but are trying to make a point are typically described as having "emerging projects." An emerging project can become a thesis once the student is able to articulate it clearly and foreground it for the reader, using it to structure the paper. You might say that a project is a thesis that needs some work.

### **Textual Protocol**

Students should be encouraged to work closely with the text, and avoid personal narrative or over generalizations. Working with text refers to a variety of textual protocols students use to support their thesis. A key part of working with text involves textual responsibility, by referencing, paraphrasing, and quoting assigned readings. Textual responsibility also means taking into account what an author has said, and any students who ignore parts of an author's text in making their own claim are being textually irresponsible.



A student will need to discern when to reference or paraphrase and when to quote. Some textual evidence provides students with examples: this evidence can often be referenced or paraphrased. Some textual evidence provides students with concepts or ideas: this evidence should usually be quoted, as it has the potential to lead the way to analysis and interpretation. Crucial to the concept of working with text is the idea that students should treat their own ideas as a text at play in the conversation. In this way students will need to think connectively. Connective thinking works on two levels: students should connect or relate their own ideas to their textual evidence and also relate ideas among texts in support of their thesis. By effectively using quotations, students can discover connections between different texts; the concept of “thinking connectively” extends this idea. Thus we want to stress that connection is only one form of working with quotation, and working with quotation is only one form of connection.

## **Organization**

Often strong papers use the organization of individual paragraphs to develop their thesis. This organization comes at several levels: within a paragraph, between paragraphs, and within the paper as a whole. Students should express, explain, and explore a central claim or topic in each paragraph, each of which supports the thesis. The paper’s paragraphs should connect logically to each other.

## **Presentation**

Student papers need to employ correct grammar, clear diction and syntax, proper mechanics (like punctuation), and correct spelling, including the use of apostrophe. Students, along with the aid of teachers or tutors, should define patterns of error in their work. “Patterns of error” is a term we use to refer to recurrent errors in a student’s writing.

Papers should be formatted with 1 inch margins, use a standard font, and have page numbers. A student will also need to follow citation conventions, as described by the instructor, as well as the program and the university in which you teach. The words and ideas of others need to be attributed to them throughout the paper. A student should identify the source of quotations, the source of paraphrased ideas and facts, and the author, title, and context of every source text.

All papers need to be proofread before they are turned in. Doing ‘spell check’ and ‘grammar check’ on the computer are generally insufficient as the computer can not know what the author is intending to say.

## **Comments and Grades**

When commenting on student papers, instructors need to remember the triage method: treat the fatal problems first. Too many instructors look at an error-ridden student paper as a publication to be proofread and leave it full of red ink. Most of us come to teaching with considerable skill as editors. We're used to reading our peers' work and offering suggestions and corrections. For some, the instinct to simply correct a grammar or spelling mistake when we come across feels almost imperative. Not only does such hyper-correction deprive students of the active engagement with correction that is necessary for their learning, it also overwhelms them with issues they need to work on.

Instead, by developing a pedagogy that focuses first on the most fatal two or three recurring errors (and no more than two or three recurring errors in any paper thereafter), instructors will see incremental improvements through the course of the term. Ultimately, practices that encourage students to find and correct their own errors before the paper is due, will help them.

Very few papers run the gamut of potential grammar mistakes, even when it seems like it at first glance. Most students have a handful of errors, such as sentence fragments, subject-verb agreement, confusion over their/there/they're, which they make again and again. This is what we call a "pattern of error." Instructors especially need to distinguish among these varieties of error when grading student papers.

Once a pattern of error is identified, it is beneficial to circle and correct it the first few times it occurs, and name the type of error it displays. Thereafter, when you see more examples of that error occurring later in the paper, ask the student to make the correction, as by this process of applying what the instructor said and actively working to rewrite the sentence correctly, the student will more meaningfully become more aware of the nature of that error, and most importantly how to avoid making this particular type of mistake again.

## **Patterns of Error and Grading**

If we look at the grading criteria, we can see that a non-passing paper "has significant sentence-level error that makes it difficult to follow," while "a passing paper has fatal sentence-level errors under control... Although errors may appear on each page, they do not significantly impede the meaning of the essay or undermine the credibility of the writer." Patterns of error need to be taken into account both in terms of their frequency, and the nature of the error itself.

In terms of the frequency of a pattern of errors, those which the student makes several times in almost every paragraph is considered severe, whereas an error pattern which only occur once or twice in a paper, is considered mild.



As for the nature of the error itself, certain errors, including subject-verb agreement, verb tense, sentence boundary issues (run-on and fragments), and, to a lesser extent, pronoun reference are called “fatal” errors as they are considered severe enough to hinder the author’s ability to communicate effectively. A paper that has several of these kinds of mistakes on each page (an average of three or more perhaps) risks not passing.

“Non-fatal” errors include articles, preposition choices, word choice, spelling and some punctuation. Some of these, particularly the first three, may still be severe enough to prevent a paper from passing if several occur in almost every sentence, but in general they do not prevent the reader from understanding the author’s intention. In order for a student to move beyond a C+ in the class, however, they must have their errors reasonably under control.

### **Teaching Students to Recognize Error Patterns**

Sometimes you will be faced with sentences that seem overwhelming in their grammatical confusion. Here is an example from one student’s third essay:

“An outcome of re-thinking that people was brought up with kindness towards other can make us realize that different positive approach to problems that’s been going on.”

The temptation may be either to mark this as “awkward” and move on (which doesn’t really tell the student how to address the problem) or to start listing problems in the margin and overwhelm the student. Neither of these approaches is likely to be very effective. Instead, it is better to focus on a pattern of error rather than a particular sentence. In order to do this, we need to find other sentences that are awkward in a similar way. Looking earlier in the same paper, we find:

“Re-considering a more humanitarian method of solving other problems, on the other hand, would make some difference in some situations that’s been happened lately.”

and

“Since now that the journalist was killed, Americans are more raged than ever.”

Sentences A and B show us that the student runs into problems when she tries to contract verbs in subordinate clauses. This seems to be part of a larger difficulty with subject-verb agreement. Once you have noticed a problem like this, go through the paper marking all of the subject-verb errors with a line in the margin. You might notice a second problem, like a tendency to mis- or overuse “that” clauses, in which case you might mark all of those problems as well.

As previously stated, try to mark only one or two fatal errors and one or two non-fatal errors in each paper letting the rest slide. The problem with comparatives (“more raged” instead of “angrier”) in sentence C, while it looks particularly unnatural, is probably not serious or common enough in the student’s writing to be worth calling attention to at this stage. Two or three patterns of error are probably as much as the student can learn about within two weeks before the next paper is due.

In the end comment, mention to the student that he or she has x, y or z pattern of error and that this needs to be addressed either in office hours with you or with a tutor.

1. When the student comes in to talk with you, start with the “cleanest” example you can find—the sentence with the fewest problems apart from the one you are trying to isolate. Given a choice between sentences A and B above, you would probably pick B.
2. Explain to the student what the problem is—in this case the student needs to uncontract her verb to “that has”, find the subject of “has” and decide if they are both singular or plural—and help her correct it.
3. Once the student understands how to recognize and fix the problem, take her back to the final clause of sentence A and have her fix it on her own.
4. Then give her the whole sentence and see if she can find the other subject-verb problem.
5. After this, you might have her correct the rest of the mistakes you marked on her own as “homework”.

One problem may lead directly into another. Looking at sentences A and B side-by-side you might point out to the student how she uses “that’s been going on” in one sentence and “that’s been happened lately” in the other. She understands how to use a gerund correctly in one sentence but not the other. Isolation and comparison allow her to see the difference. You may find that many ESL students who have had formal grammar training recognize the problem immediately and already know how to solve it. This should not get them off the hook because they may not be able to control the error on the final exam if they make it carelessly when they are tired. These students should still meet with you in office hours and drill on practice sentences from their papers.

You do not need expertise in the meta-language of English grammar to help students, but it is a good idea to label problems as much as you are able using terms that students can look up in a common grammar book read in class. This helps you build a common language for talking with the student about his or her pattern of error. You will find that you pick this language up quickly if you start by



finding groups of sentences that are awkward in similar ways and then try to find labels to explain aspects of this awkwardness.

### **Activities for Addressing Patterns of Error**

In every class, the students seem to develop a pool of common errors. By the third paper, it should be clear what these errors are. Just as lectures on the assigned texts are less enabling than activities that require the students themselves to interpret them, so the discussion of grammar, clarity, organization, and related issues should occur in the context of workshops that require revisions and then some discussion of the results. (Not every revision is an improvement, of course.) These sorts of activities are most effective if you can talk about the mistake in the context of the students' own writing. Examples from grammar handbooks tend to be too simple to be really useful.

Many teachers scan the rough drafts pulling sentences that contain common grammar mistakes. It helps to take one or two from every paper so that everyone sees that they have a problem and no one feels singled out. Try to avoid errors that are ESL related, such as articles and preposition choices, since this embarrasses the student in question and is less helpful for the other students. Put all of these sentences together into a worksheet and hand them out in class. You might introduce this exercise by going over some examples of the two or three most frequent or serious problems. Then have the students correct the sentences either alone or in groups. At the end of the period, you can go over the "answers" in class.

### ***Marginal and End Comments***

The importance of your making careful, specific and extensive marginal and end comments on students' final drafts can not be over-emphasized. Think of these comments as having an ongoing conversation with the student, in which you are interacting with their thoughts as expressed on paper. Your marginal and end comments will help your students to stand back and see their work as a reader, and not just as the writer of the work. Additionally, your comments on the draft of one paper will help students to be more thoughtful and deliberate in the writing of their next paper.

### **Marginal Comments**

Of course, not all the instructor comments on a student paper will be about grammar, spelling and punctuation, as some will be about the content of the paper itself. It is thought helpful to use two different colored inks; one for mechanical errors and one for content related comments, as the visual impact of the different colored inks will be helpful to the student in terms of immediately understanding the issues to be addressed.

Try to make marginal comments very explanatory. Rather than just writing “good quotation”, explain what makes it good, such as how it supports the student’s thesis well, and how it relates to the overall meaning of the paper. The more the teacher’s comments engage with the students’ ideas as specifically addressed in the work, the better.

It’s also important to avoid generic, “rubber stamp” comments without specific elaboration, since students often misunderstand how they apply to their work. So, for example, instead of just commenting, “Awkward wording”, or “Subject-Verb Agreement error”, explain why this is so.

Avoid being too negative or demeaning in your comments. Comments such as, “I hardly see what you are getting at here” are of no value, and can in fact create animosity and a feeling of being demeaned. Being helpful, positive and constructive in your comments will also provide a good role model for students when they review each other’s work.

Don’t overwhelm students with an excessive number of marginal comments, as this might confuse them and deter their ability to focus on how to improve their writing. Instead, focus on about two patterns of error at a time, as mentioned in the previous section, thus establishing a hierarchy of their importance. As a general rule of thumb, have approximately three marginal comments per page.

### **End Comments**

Papers should be followed by an end-comment—at least a paragraph long—that points out at least one success of the paper, and then summarizes your two or three most pressing points of concern as they develop the next paper. It’s especially useful to students if your end-comment refers to particular places in the body of the essay. You might, for example, place a large asterisk in the margin at a promising moment in the paper and then refer back to that asterisk when discussing the promising moment in the end comment. This allows students to see exactly what you mean by your comment because they can locate it within their own text. You might also use an asterisk and a double-asterisk to contrast a strong and weak moment so that students can see where they do something well and can compare that to an area that’s not as strong.

Remember, too, that your comments should not only be about mechanical errors, but about the meaning and content of the paper, as well. Try to encourage students to look more deeply into the complexity of connecting two or more texts, to the point in which they might challenge their own preconceptions, even if this initially feels chaotic and uncomfortable.

Some teachers develop a table rather than a paragraph, with one column being on strengths and the other on suggestions for improvement. This can also be a very valid way of communicating your end-comments to students, and might provide a clear visual impression.



The end-comment should not be used to justify the grade on this assignment but should always be written with the next assignment in mind. So if some students had trouble with an idea of Jenkins that you know will come up in the next essay, you could redirect them to the appropriate passage in the text; or, if you find that a student does not demonstrate in detail how a key idea from Jenkins applies to a moment in Sacks, you may assume that such demonstration will be called for again, and so needs to be highlighted. Remember that the ultimate goal of written comments is to help the student to become a more effective writer.

### ***Determining Final Grades***

If grading individual papers is a challenging task for 101 instructors, then determining final grades must be the most challenging. To improve that process, it's best to have some shared principles and rules to go by. The following principles are those employed in the Rutgers Writing Program, where *The New Humanities Reader* was developed. The application of these principles should generate most grades. Instructors should always discuss difficult cases and potentially failing students in folder review.

#### **Principles**

- ❑ The final grade for the course is determined by averaging the grades the student received on Papers 4, 5, 6. However, where the average leads to ambiguity, then the following rule should apply: take the grade of Paper 6, and then average it with the grade of either Paper 4 or Paper 5, whichever is the higher. The rationale for making sure to include the grade of Paper 6 is that it is considered that the skills needed in writing meaningfully about three authors' texts is a crucial one, and one that might very well be useful for paper writing in more advanced writing courses, as well as other courses in general across the university.
- ❑ Students who fail the Final Exam fail the course. Cases where a student has written passing work but failed the exam should always be examined in folder review.
- ❑ The final exam is graded Pass or Fail only and is never factored into the grade for passing students.
- ❑ Final grades for the course are determined by paper grades and not by classroom behavior, participation, or attendance (except in the case where a student has failed the course for excessive absences or missing work). Any penalties exacted for late papers or missed drafts should have been deducted from the individual paper grades.
- ❑ Teachers cannot exact penalties in addition to those imposed on the papers themselves, nor should teachers award higher grades to students

whose attendance and participation were outstanding. Diligent effort, after all, will naturally contribute to higher paper grades. Note: We recommend that, when making deductions for lateness, teachers indicate the reasons for the lower grade clearly on the paper itself or on the final paper so that if a student appeals the grade the department will understand the reason the grade was lower than the paper's quality might indicate.



## VI. Sample Papers and Grades

The following papers are typical of student responses to *The New Humanities Reader* at Rutgers University and were chosen to represent each of the grade levels. The comments reflect the principles described in the grading criteria above.

### ***Frank (on Jenkins and Tannen), NP***

#### Revolutionize Education

Many people can argue today about what exactly is needed to succeed in the world. Some may argue money, others may say well connections; but one asset that is unarguably a necessity to success is education. However, looking at the education process today many people may argue that the way education should change. The society that we live in today is different from the society that existed two decades ago; thus education should be molded with this change in order to reach its maximum efficiency level. Two authors who touch on this subject of education change is Deborah Tannen in her essay of “The Roots of Debate in Education and the Hope of Dialogue” and Henry Jenkins in his essay of “Why Heather Can Write.” Both of these authors have different opinions about what and how education should change; however, they both do encourage and advocate the idea of changing the method of educating the public.

As mentioned previously, the idea of changing the method of education is being strongly encouraged by both authors. What separates the author is the way in which they think education should change. In Henry Jenkin’s “Why Heather Can Write,” he focuses mainly on how education should change to a completely new form; a form which is more suitable to the technologically advanced world that we live in today. In his critique he uses the internet as a way of actual education even at a young age. It is well known that advanced degrees such as Bachelors degrees, Masters and even Ph Ds can be achieved through the internet. However, it has never been seriously discussed of using technology, such as the internet, as a main source of education at a young age. The reason why is mainly due to the fact of lack of

social activity. However, in Jenkin's essay he looks at the life of a girl who used a book as her motivation and the internet as her tool to help educate thousands of other children. The name of the girl is Heather Lawver and the book that motivated her was Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone. Heather was a girl who struggled to succeed in the conventional way of education, also known as American public schools, due to what her parents claimed to be issues such "as racism and anti-intellectualism" (Jenkins 276). While being home schooled, she started a website based on the fictional Harry Potter newspaper called The Daily Prophet. Through this website she gained a huge fan base and countless friends, all of whom benefited from this internet project. It can even be argued to some extent that this form of education was more useful than actual public schools because the "participants at The Daily Prophet imagine themselves to be gifted students. Kids who recreationally are still a subset of the total school population, so it is very likely that many of these kids are teacher's pets in real life" (Jenkins 278). The notion of young kids finding their own way through a source of technology as advanced and necessary as the internet shows their willingness to learn can help their education improve drastically. Instead of being fed in school the information that they need to know, if they find the information that they need by themselves through the internet they prove their independence. This ultimately improves their chances of success in the 'real' world. In the second essay presented "The Roots of Debate in Education and the Hope of Dialogue" by Deborah Tannen, a different method is argued on how to change education. Unlike Jenkin's argument of using the technology and the future to base a new identity for education, Tannen seems to be more in favor of more traditional methods; methods that have been improved and polished through out history and proven to be a solid way to excel in education. She explains that the educational system is "the seed of our adversarial culture...Seeing how these seeds develop, and where they came from, it is a key to understanding the argument culture and a necessary foundation for determining what changes we would like to make" (Tannen 677). The one traditional form of education that Tannen focuses on the most is debate. This form of education is proven to be important for students to understand material better. Debate is an old form of education, which is dated back to the ancient



Greeks, and is argued by Tannen as the best way for students to learn their material. In a debate a student is forced to argue a side of an issue that he or she is personally passionate about. This passion that students have for this side of the issue forces them to try to convince their opponent by providing hard evidence and knowledge. The motives, as explained by Tannen, “are quieter – but more lasting” (Tannen 677) than other forms of learning.

The thoughts and ideas of both of these authors seem to be criticized from several fronts. In Jenkin’s theory of using technology as a main part of education, many critics will show their doubts because the internet, for the most part, is seen as more of a hobby than an actual teacher. This critique is of course true on many levels as it is hard to imagine children being attentive and focused in front of a computer for along period of time. However, these critics tend to look at the glass half empty instead of half full. What if a website was dedicated to teaching students ‘real’ education? There are numerous benefits that can be achieved from this experiment. The student will be able to study in a calm and comfortable environment. The student will be able to achieve success at his or her own pace without being force to keep up or slow down with twenty or thirty students in the classroom. Some may say that this will deteriorate their social life; this can be solved by adding chatting blogs with students in their area. The internet has a huge potential of becoming a strong way of developing a well polished education in the future, Heather Lawver is a perfect example of this. In Tannen’s argument of encouraging debate among students, critics argue the fact that US education advocates and encourages debate as much as possible already. However, when arguing about debate and its importance Tannen does not look at the American version of debate; she instead looks at the classical and European way of debate and argument. The difference between the two cultures is that in Europe the debate is more confrontational and in return more argumentative. The students are found to be more passionate and more educated on their topics of discussion. Also their desire to be labeled as the ‘right view’ is a huge motivation for them to fully understand and argue their side of the topic. The teachers as well seem to be completely different from the way in which US teachers are. They

are labeled to be extremely strict and much disciplined. Tannen uses a fifth grade French class in France as an example. In this class the students were assigned to memorize a poem and in class they were asked to recite it. If the students failed to recite the poem “the teacher screamed at the students if they forgot a line or if they didn’t speak with enough emotion. They were reprimanded and asked to repeat the task until they did it perfectly and passed the ‘oral test’” (Tannen 684). This strict form of education only gets harder as they get older. However, what Tannen notices is that this strict force encourages the students to be attentive in their work and this actually builds their passion and motivation improving their education and their debating skills through out.

The idea of changing systems of education in general, without taking in consideration either of these theories of change, is both difficult and time consuming. Some may look at these ideas and explain that it is easier said then done. However, what is important to keep in mind with both of these situations is that none of them involve starting from scratch, on the contrary it requires a build off from an established text. Both of these authors are basing their theories on material that already exist today. Looking at Jenkin’s essay the reader notices that Heather Lawvyer did not start her internet program using a new method of education, she did it by simply reading a novel that she enjoyed, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone. Not only was it just a book, it was a book that is very popular and that is known to inspire thousands of children all over the world. As for Tannen’s idea of interactive debate as a major form of education it does not require new method of education either. Debate is basically researching a topic that already exists and stating the student’s opinion on it in a formal and argumentative manner.

The way the two authors present their ideas is very intriguing. Both of them have seemed to have shown good results from their method of education. On one had one author focusing on the now and the technological advances that we as a society are constantly going through; on the other had another author looking at the traditional past and the already proven method of education as a form of education. Despite the different styles and methods of each of them both authors, Jenkins and



Tannen, are still advocating the same idea of change of education. They realize that education should not be stoned into society, but molded to fit the needs and ways of the youth. This way the outcome will be more productive and dynamic. Education is without an intricate part of success in any society and in time of life and the importance to be constantly molding and shaping it based on the way society operates is just as important.

### **Explaining Why Frank Gets an F**

The essay demonstrates some skill in using the essay form. However, it presents only an appearance of coherence and order while possessing little real substance, because it has not dealt with the readings effectively or accurately. There appear to be serious reading comprehension issues, and whether that results from lack of effort or lack of skill makes no difference in the result. The writer uses very little of the text, only quoting from Jenkins and Tannen a handful of times, and the few quotes he uses are for summary purposes only. What's more, he misrepresents Tannen's argument. It's possible that he simply skimmed the Tannen essay, since he gets Tannen's argument completely backwards, representing her as being in favor of debate as an education method when just the opposite is true. But often students who skim readings have never learned to read more carefully. For the misreading of Tannen alone, this paper should not pass. The essay also does not have a clearly articulated project that connects the two readings, and it has significant error (including a pattern of error in using apostrophes to show possession).

### ***Emanuel (on Jenkins, Nafisi, Gilbert), C***

#### Accomplishing Happiness

Everyone experiences happiness is different ways. Happiness is not something that will be around 24 hours a day, seven days a week instead it will come and go as we experience different pleasures. Those pleasures being anything we can enjoy, ranging from reading literature to playing a video game. In some cases creating your own class and classroom where you can read and write your own literature is a pleasure that is experienced by, the author of the essay "Selections from Reading Lolita in Tehran", Azar Nafisi. Azar Nafisi received great joy and happiness in having the ability to teach others. Not only do people get the feeling of being happy when they are teaching others but also by creating a place for people

with common interests that can come and share stories and ideas about that interest than leave as they please. Henry Jenkins discussed a person who did just that in his essay titled "Why Heather Can Write". Heather Lawver created an online community for people of all ages to come and share a common interest together. While sharing this interest they can interact about it and experience happiness. Happiness is not something that only comes when people are doing the activities they enjoy. It can come from good decision making as well. Daniel Gilbert wrote an essay, "Stumbling on Happiness, that discusses different ways and reasons why people become happy and the way that it is achieved. Happiness is a perk everyone would like to achieve as many times as they possibly can. But with so many side effects that have an impact on our happiness and multiple ways to become happy, there is not only one decision or activity that can truly keep, as well as make, us happy.

Everyone has a dream that they think will make them happy and/or happier. They think that if they can accomplish their dream they will be happier than they are in their current state. As Azar Nafisi did and stated, "In the fall of 1995, after resigning from my last academic post, I decided to indulge myself and fulfill a dream." (Nafisi 417). When we as human beings decide to fulfill our dreams we do so because we feel we will receive our ultimate most happiness in accomplishing our dream. This is how Azar Nafisi felt when she resigned from her job and created her own literature class with her own rules. This class being the satisfaction she has been after during her life as a professor. She wants to be able to teach her student with no strings attached. Those strings being the rules she had to follow in her life as a university professor. Ultimately, Nafisi is creating a positive outlook on her life in creating the class rather than dwell and force herself to live a life of misery while teaching at a university. Daniel Gilbert calls actions like these the inescapability trigger. Gilbert stated, "But another possibility is that we are more likely to look for and find a positive view of the things we're stuck with than of the things we're not." (Gilbert 223). When times are rough and the situation is bad we normally look for the positives of them, as Gilbert would say. This theory can be used in describing Nafisi's situation. She lived in a totalitarian society where she had to follow strict rules, the strings attached, instead of doing as she pleased, this being the negative part of her life. To make a



positive of her life and situation she created her own class that she taught out of her house, her dream. Finding a positive in a negative situation, allowing her to find happiness. Instead of Nafisi constantly thinking about what it would be like in a country where her government was not as strict as hers she decided to look for, and ultimately found, the positive side of the life she lived after fighting the negatives and dealing with the side effects of finding her true happiness.

When people strive to be happy they never plan on facing obstacles that block their path of happiness. Henry Jenkins talked about a person named Heather Lawver who had to face obstacles in her way of happiness. Jenkins stated, “The school they were inventing together (building on the foundations of J.K. Rowling’s novel) could not have been more different from the one she had escaped in Mississippi. Here people of many different ethnic, racial, and national backgrounds (some real, some imagined) formed a community where individual differences were accepted and where learning was celebrated” (Jenkins 277). Racism is still a problem in places around the world. Even though it has decreased over the years, it has not become totally extinct. Racism is one of those things that can have a major impact on your life and make you depressed if you are on the receiving end of it. Heather escaped her run in with racism by being home schooled and creating an online community where people all over the world of different cultures, ethnics, and skin color can interact amongst one another. She escaped harsh conditions by doing what is in her power to turn it around. Similar to what Gilbert describes as a “little trigger”. Gilbert went on to state in his essay, “Terrorism is a strategy based on the idea that the best offense is the one that fails to trigger the best defense, and small-scale incursions are less likely to set off the alarm bells than are large-scale assaults.” (Gilbert 220). In this case the terrorism would be the racism that was occurring within Heather’s school. Instead of fighting the terrorism head on she tactically faced it in a way where she can live happily. She did this by not having to deal with people who are constantly talking down upon her and gaining the ability to interact amongst different ethnicities. But Heather also triggered her best defensive move fighting racism by becoming home schooled and creating an online community that did not have the issues she

faced in her outside community. Her defense outmatched her opponent's offense. And even though racism is a big problem, the problem Heather faced was a small scale attack that did not promote a large enough problem that could have been dealt with on a larger scale, thus forcing her to take actions into her own hands so that she can live comfortably and happily.

When people are given choices it tends to affect their happiness. The more choices we have the more chances it will have a negative impact on our happiness. Gilbert talks about this in his essay when he stated, "Apparently, inescapable circumstances trigger the psychological defenses that enable us to achieve positive views of those circumstances, but we do not anticipate that this will happen" (Gilbert 223-224). In situations where there is no other choice but to deal with the problem we tend to find the positive side of it. We are usually happier when we do not have the choice to change something. As Gilbert showed with the students in a photography class getting to choose the picture they liked the most. One group only had one chance to pick the picture they liked most rather than the other group that had seven days to pick a picture and change it if they did not like it. So when there is no other option but to deal with the situation at hand for a one-time deal, we are happier. An example of this would be the way we must do work in school. Jenkins talked about this by saying, "Schools have less flexibility to support writers at very different stages of their development. Even the most progressive schools set limits on what students can write compared to the freedom they enjoy on their own" (Jenkins 286). In school we must follow the guidelines for us to get good grades limiting our freedom to decide how we want to complete the assignments. But if we did have the freedom to complete assignments the way we wanted we would be left wondering "would we have gotten a better grade if we completed it another way?" Just like in expository writing we must write our papers a certain way to pass and if we did have the freedom to write them another way would we be happy with the grade we receive when we know there was another way to write the paper? Just like Gilbert described when we have more options and we become less happy, than if we did not. Similarly to what Nafisi's class was expected of them. Azar Nafisi said, "I had explained to them the purpose of the class: to read, discuss and respond to works of



fiction” (Nafisi 429). Nafisi’s class did not have complete freedom to do as they wanted, like in most classes taken in different schools. But because there was a guideline they had to follow they were happy in what they were doing. Lets say they did not have the guideline and instead there was no purpose of the class at all except a gathering of people together to discuss literature. With that freedom no one would be on the same topic to discuss the issues and for the most part become more stressed than they need to be, whereas with the guidelines they are happy because they know what is expected of them. Again relating to Gilbert in saying when we have more options we are less happy than if we only had one.

Ways that we gain happiness are different for every individual. Finding the ways that make us happy is an even greater challenge to accomplish. Especially when what we think will make us happy does not. Just how some people say they will be happier if they were wealthy and sometime throughout their life they did become wealthy yet their happiness level did not change. Everyone’s happiness level is different and cannot be experienced the same way. Some people will be happier if they had more time to work on a project and others will be happier if they had less time. Each person has a different personality and thinks differently. No one is one hundred percent positive what is going to make them happy. We can only make predictions and hope that what we predict will in fact make us happy. There are many choices and forks on the road to happiness and choosing the right path is not an easy task. If it were easy, the world would be a totally different place. People would not have to fight for their happiness like Heather and Azar Nafisi did. Heather had to fight through racism in her community to become happy by making her online community. Azar Nafisi had to fight her happiness living in a totalitarian government by creating her own class that had her own rules because she did not believe her government. If everyone were happy Daniel Gilbert would not have had to do study and work to find out what makes us happy. His theories would not be relevant because he would have nothing to analyze in finding out different methods of happiness because everyone would already be happy.

## **Explaining Why Emanuel Gets a C**

The essay shows clear passing skills. Though the project in this essay is too general (arguing that everyone finds their own way to happiness through the obstacles they overcome and the choices they make), it does create coherence that emerges from a discussion of the three texts, and by the end of the paper the project is clearly articulated. The student's own voice contributes something to the conversation. Paragraphs have coherence (even using topic sentences, though they are typically rather generalized and not strong) and sentence level error is under control.

## ***Alex (Sacks and Jenkins), C+***

### A Road into Our Imagination

Our imagination is our most significant and influential sense. It allows us to develop customs, traditions, thoughts, feelings, and a way of life, no matter what our physical or intellectual limitations may be. When a person loses their sight, their imagination becomes more than just a sense; it becomes a way to still be visually active in society. In Oliver Sacks' essay, titled "The Mind's Eye", he delves into the psyche of the blind. For many people the imagination becomes a new pair of eyes, hence his title "The Mind's Eye". When a person becomes blind they have to adapt to a whole new way of life, a new culture. Society has slowly adapted to a new culture as well, technology and the Internet. In Henry Jenkins' essay, titled "Why Heather Can Write", he explores the fairly new culture of online forums and Harry Potter fan fiction. Heather and many other adolescent authors publish stories that expand J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series. In both cases a new culture is formed and the imagination is being constantly used. The imagination is the primary sense in human perception. It allows us to properly adapt to significant changes in our lives, to compensate for what we lack and to shape an identity.

Jenkins and Sacks investigate how people use their imagination in their everyday lives, and how it has become a part of whom they are. In recent years, the advances in technology have attracted people of all ages. Children of all ages, including those who may only be old enough to go to pre-school, are now learning how to use computers. The Internet has shown to be a great tool for people to stay



connected with each other. It also brings people together who share a common interest in the form of chat rooms and online forums. At the Sugar Quill, [www.sugarquill.net](http://www.sugarquill.net), young authors write stories that expand upon J.K Rowling's Harry Potter series. "The Sugar Quill's genre classifications provide models for different ways would-be writers might engage with Rowling's text: 'Alternative Points of View', which reframe the events of the book through the eyes of another character ...; 'I Wonder Ifs,' which explore the possibilities that are hinted at... 'Missing Moments,' which fill in gaps between plot events... picks up her pen again" (Jenkins 283). These models that Sugar Quill provides for its adolescent writers, make it possible for them to actively use their imagination. The author must create a story on their own and further develop the characters, the plot, and major conflicts. Every person has a different imagination and as a result, every story that is created is different, even though they all contain same topics and characters.

People who have lost their sight, have different life styles even though they are all blind, the difference is in how their imagination interprets and perceives the world around them. Through Sacks we have an insight to the life of a blind person. Arlene Gordon, a seventy-year-old woman who has been blind for over thirty years, considers herself a visual person. She likes to travel with her companions and have them describe the scene to her (Sacks 514). Arlene still has a heightened visual imagery system. She likes to pick out her own clothes as long as someone tells her what color they are. Arlene's imagination is vital to functioning in everyday life. Although the young author's who post their stories on the Sugar Quill do not need their imagination to function, it still has made them very different people. Like Arlene, their heightened imagination has allowed them to become more creative and see the world in a different light.

Jenkins and Sacks note in their essays how people use their imagination have a positive approach and better understand others and the world around them. By using your imagination to create a story you must develop all elements of the story, including characters. In order to develop a story and write about the characters the author must explore all qualities humans' possess. This means that the author must

look at all types of different human behaviors, personality traits and mannerisms. The author must have an understanding of interpersonal relationships, how people react to one another. One of the adolescent authors in Jenkins essay describes how getting inside the head of a character helped her in real life. "...getting inside the head of a character who was very different from herself helped her make sense of the people she saw around her at school who were coming from very different backgrounds and acting on very different values. She saw fan fiction, in a sense, as a useful resource for surviving high school" (Jenkins 284). The young author has used fan fiction as a resource to help her understand how others might be feeling. By interpreting others feelings correctly she can respond in a positive and effective manner. By publishing her short stories online and having others critique them, she has achieved a sense of accomplishment in herself. Sacks points out that like the young authors, the imagination of the blind plays a significant role in determining relationships with others and understanding the world around them. Sacks introduces us to Dennis, whose senses have heightened due to his state of blindness. The heightening of Dennis's senses helps him determine other people's feelings even though he cannot see their facial expressions. "Dennis, earlier, had spoken of how the heightening of his other senses had increased his sensitivity to moods in other people, and to the most delicate nuances in their speech and self-presentation.... they might now be aware of" (Sacks 517). Dennis is able to relate more closely to others and make a more intimate connection to their feelings. Dennis is visually independent from his surroundings. He based his judgments and his experiences are shaped by his evaluations from his other senses. His experiences with people are more inter-personal. He cannot see what a person color a persons' skin is or how a person dresses nor does he try to picture it. This lack of imagination has allowed Dennis to form bonds with people that he may not have formed if he had seen what they looked off. His heightened senses have allowed him to rely on his ability to judge a person for the type of character they are and not for other reasons. Dennis's imagination has helped him become more aware of his surroundings and may be more in tune with the real world than you and I. By being able to understand others' emotions he is able to interpret situations correctly and respond appropriately.



Both the young online authors and the blind use their imagination as a primary sense and make important decisions to interpret the world around them.

In their essays Sacks and Jenkins give sufficient evidence that the imagination is essential to human perception and that it most benefits us when it is over-active, allowing us to out step our normal boundaries. However, both authors give an instance where an overactive imagination may do more harm than good. Zoltan Torey lost his sight in a chemical accident. For some time he refused to picture the outside world. However he was afraid that if he did not keep his imagination active he would lose it. "Well aware that the imagination (or the brain), unrestrained by the usual perceptual input may run away with itself...hallucinations or dreams (Sacks 511). Torey did not want his mind to "run away" on him so he restrained it and kept checking to make sure what he was visualizing was real, he needed physical evidence that tipped the scales toward one side. The participants in this new culture, known to many as fan fiction, may be taking Harry Potter fandom to a new level. Although they know that Harry Potter is a fictional character, this may not be enough to keep their conscious mind from running away with the idea. It is good that so many children are writing and creating their own stories. The new authors are passionate about what they are writing about and are highly motivated, but what about the other subjects such as math and science? "Some teens confessed to smuggling drafts of stories to school in their text books and editing them during class; others sit around the lunch table talking plot and character issues with their classmates or try to work on the stories on the school computers until the librarians accuse them of wasting time. They can't wait for the school bell to ring so they can focus on their writing" (Jenkins 285-286). This new type of writing is allowing the kids to interact with each other on a different level intellectually and providing a safe escape from their daily lives. However, this new fandom is keeping its authors from expanding into other fields such as math and science. Most of them will get very good at writing, and develop high regard of their writing. So when they do not perform so well in math and science, it will deter them and lower their self-esteem. All

conclusions that we draw from our experiences is a direct result of our imagination, if it is overactive it may keep us from seeing what is really there in front of us.

The imagination aids the senses to reconstruct experiences, and interprets our assessment of the outside world. When the imagination is active we find it easier to connect and understand others, as well as our selves. The imagination is vital to human function and when it becomes overactive we must channel it into a productive state. Our imagination has allowed us to better interpret others and ourselves. The children in the online forums are now more tolerant to different types of people. The imagination has heightened the senses of the blind so they can also establish connections with other people despite differences in culture and ethnicity.

### **Explaining Why Alex Gets a C+**

This essay is very promising and strives for coherence (complete with a basic thesis) yet also takes on complications (raising the problem that the imagination can be dangerous as well as helpful). The attempt at complication indicates the potential for stronger work as the semester progresses. The essay has a clearer structure than a typical C essay, which comes from using the classic five-paragraph form. However, it also shows the problem of the five-paragraph form because it is ultimately too formulaic, and the paragraphs and ideas are not organically structured or tied to the thesis, as one would see in a B level essay.

### ***Jane (on Sacks and Jenkins), B***

#### Comparable Worlds

When my great grandfather first immigrated to America, the language of his native tongue was no longer a dignified and respected instrument of communication. The Korean language, proud and unique, has a history spanning over five thousand years with unique characters not shared with any other culture, unlike Chinese and Japanese which both use Kanji. This treasured and ancient language became an unappreciated form of speech and was discouraged from use. This absence of communication for him was such a handicap that he might as well not have been able to hear or speak. Eventually, after many years of interacting with English speakers he was able to become fluent in a foreign language without the aid of



teachers or instructors. He adapted to a new and alien culture the same way he would learn a routine. Just as my great grandfather learned how to function in a different environment, people with physical disabilities like blindness learn new habits the same way one would adapt to an unfamiliar culture. Oliver Sacks, author of “The Mind’s Eye,” and Henry Jenkins, author of “Why Heather Can Write,” discuss the similarities between learning and the adoption of new cultures. Moreover, both authors would agree that imagination is used as an exceptional sense for an enhanced learning or adopting. Self learning and adopting new cultures are comparable in every aspect, including the magnitude in which imagination becomes a primary sense. Assimilating to a different culture is teaching oneself how to manage the demands and challenges of a changing world, through the use of imagination.

Educating oneself in a new and unknown subject and adapting to a strange and unfamiliar culture consist of two basic elements: having the desire to learn and the willingness to recognize your shortcomings so you can work at overcoming them. The primary component in adapting to a new culture is having desire; without this desire there is no purpose in continuing. Aspiring to adapt to a new environment and choosing to educate oneself with new knowledge is a very personal decision, something Sacks and Jenkins are completely in sync with. Jenkins notices how one person who chooses to do something, without the influences of outside forces, could do miraculous things. “Inspired by reports that J.K. Rowling’s novel was getting kids to read, [Lawver] wanted to do her part to promote literacy” (Jenkins 275). Heather Lawver, creator of the Daily Prophet website, was creating a means for children to teach themselves to write. Accommodating to a culture that demands for skilled and educated writers, many children look outside the classroom and teach themselves how to write. However, the only reason these children can learn skills and styles for writing is because they have a desire for the subject. If there is no wanting of or desire for a skill, learning cannot be successful. Students in classes begin to have an interest when the subject is something that matters, if there is no connection they can make, there is no learning in the process. “It is one thing to be discussing the theme

of a short story you've never heard of before and couldn't care less about. It is another to be discussing the theme of your friend's 50,000 word opus about Harry and Hermione that they've spent three months writing (Jenkins 280). For Hull, the routine of learning began with his interest in becoming a "whole-body seer". "Being a 'whole-body seer,' for Hull, means shifting his attention, his center of gravity, to the other senses, and he writes again and again of how these have assumed a new richness and power" (Sacks 508). Hull adopted a new form of "visualization," one in which his body was the key for "insight" of the surroundings. Some may argue that Hull didn't choose whole-body sight, but that he was forced upon it. People may say, of course Hull had to use his other senses, sight and visualization were no longer even options. However, being forced upon a non visual imagination is not true for all blind people. Zoltan Torey decided to go about a different pursuit of visualization. "... he had been blinded in an accident at the age of twenty-one, while working at a chemical factory... although 'advised to switch from a visual to an auditory mode of adjustment,' he had moved in the opposite direction, and resolved to develop instead his 'inner eye,' his powers of visual imagery, to their greatest possible extent" (Sacks 510). Clearly, Hull and Torey were not forced into adopting a specific mode of adjustment, visual verses auditory, but they taught themselves a new routine only because it was something the individual desired. Learning is a process that requires a desire. The children who write fan fic for papers and blogs taught themselves advanced skills and sophisticated grammar and vocabulary only because they wanted to. There were no pressures on these children from schools or parents to participate in such forums, only to do the work assigned in the classroom. There is such a passion in the hearts of children that desire to become writers that through learning there are no restrictions on knowledge and the mind can grow quickly and eloquently without any restrictions. "Some teens confessed to smuggling drafts of stories to school in their textbooks and editing them during class (Jenkins 285). It is that desire to learn which makes learning process work; it is the same desire to learn that people are able to adapt to new cultures and environments. The key catalyst, desire, is the first aspect identical in the adaption process and learning.



The second circumstance that allows for self learning and adapting to changes to be a synchronized and unified progression is understanding your needs. For Sacks' subjects, each person had his or her own unique method of adoption of change. Adapting to a culture is not something that is done with groups, but it's a personal experience. Hull, Torey, and Tenberken each had their own method or choice of adjustment. Each had a unique and personal mode of adjustment. "[Tenberken] is essentially an artistic imagination, which can be impressionistic, romantic, not veridical at all, where Torey's imagination is that of an engineer, and has to be factual, accurate and down to the last detail" (Sacks 513). Tenberken saw the world in a new way as if the entire Earth was an art piece and full of color, while Torey saw it in a very professional manner with mathematical certainty. In contrast, Hull's imagination did not use any visualization; his imagination was full of appreciation and spirit. Every individual when adapting to a new circumstance must be tuned to a specific and unique system. While Hull, Torey, and Tenberken had their own method for adapting, so did the children Jenkins points out on the internet. Each had an individually tailored peer. "The largest Harry Potter archive, [www.fictionalley.org](http://www.fictionalley.org), currently hosts more than 30,000 stories...More than two hundred people are on its unpaid staff, including forty mentors who welcome each new participant individually" (Jenkins 282). The process of self learning is a personal one, and sites such as Fiction Alley understand the importance and offer such tools and resources. It is what separates learning and adapting from group organizations, the attention that a person can obtain compared to a class room style of learning (Jenkins 283). There is no class or group that can teach blind people to function together. It is something that each person must experience by themselves, through learning. Sacks could not make it any more evident how every person needs their own plan. People could not go through the same process, Hull had a very spiritual learning, Torey had a very analytical and mechanical learning with specific pictures, and Tenberken had a very artistic learning from the use of all the colors in her vision.

Like any other sense the imagination can be tuned more finely than to become more acute. A musician has such finely tuned hearing that the slightest

variation in pitch is recognized; a hunter's sight is so acute that the slightest movement from a bush means the capture of game. The musician and hunter have their senses honed because of the exercise and usage of them. The imagination is an underlying sixth sense within each person. Although it is not a physical sense that can be measured concretely, the imagination plays an intricate role in a person's ability to advance him or herself. The imagination like any other sense must be developed and exercised to improve. Unfortunately, there are not as many opportunities for the strengthening and development of the imagination. The sense of imagination is inherent within all of us, but is never used. It requires an extraordinary circumstance for the imagination to be tapped into. However, once the sense for imagination is tapped it becomes an extraordinary gift. From Hull's imagination, "[He] comes to feel a sense of intimacy with nature, an intensity of being-in-the-world; beyond anything he knew when he was sighted. Blindness now becomes for him "a dark, paradoxical gift...not just, 'compensation,' ...but a whole new order, a new mode of human being (Sacks 508). The imagination is something that weakens when unused, but can be of great power once started up. For Hull, Torey, and Tenberken blindness forced them to tap into the 6th sense. For Heather Lawver, her catalyst was just reading Harry Potter (Jenkins). Once the imagination is tapped the imagination which was once thought of no importance becomes the 1st sense, the apex of all senses. In a way the imagination goes from a barely used meaningless ability within the person, to becoming the primary form and most heavily used sense of the entire body. The power of imagination is unlimited when used correctly. For Torey, his imagination gave him back the ability to do normal chores, like retiling a roof (Sacks 510). For individuals like Lawver the imagination provided a place for learning and an escape for other. Some found writing as a release for the troubles in their actual lives and the imagination protected and saved their minds (Jenkins).

I will never know precisely how my great grandfather assimilated and adapted to a different and strange culture through his own power and will to learn. But Sacks and Jenkins suggest that successfully learning and adapting to an alien world typically follows a similar process and they help me to imagine how he succeeded.



The steps that the blind take to choose and control a mode of adjustment are the same that adolescents and young writers use in adopting a new skill or culture. It begins with a desire to change oneself, improve one's life, then knowing what you need. Not every person has the same problems and same solutions in their lives. Although self learning and adapting are both important, the imagination is what allows for all of our personal advancements. The imagination can be thought of as another of our human senses, the sought after 6th sense, but knowing how it advances us and how we can use it to our advantage is key in personal development.

### **Explaining Why Jane Gets a B**

This is a solid B performance, with a clearly articulated thesis and good development of its ideas, using evidence from the text. Error is mostly under control. There are many levels of coherence to the paper, and it returns to its thesis in its conclusion, coming full circle in classic B fashion. However, though it lays out an original thesis regarding the method of achieving goals in life and presents a coherent theme, it ultimately is rather one-dimensional in its argument and does not achieve the complexity of stronger work.

### ***Bertrand (on Jenkins and Nafisi), B+***

#### A Private Sense of Freedom

Benjamin Franklin once proclaimed that "Any society that would give up a little liberty to gain a little security will deserve neither and lose both." There is always a struggle between national security and personal freedom. In order to hold freedom and security in balance, a society must learn to cast aside its common judgments and embrace individual equality. Partially as a result of outdated education systems and ways of thinking, however, many societies around the world fail to meet this criterion for a democratic society, forcing the people within them to create their own, more equal, communities. In "Why Heather Can Write," Henry Jenkins describes a society of writers who withdraw from traditional learning environments to fully embrace a more supportive online culture. Azar Nafisi, in "Selections from Reading Lolita in Tehran" details her experiences teaching Western (and therefore forbidden)

literature to a small group of women shortly after the founding of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Both groups, though not supported by the larger society, used literature to help them cast aside public restrictions and discover a private notion of freedom.

One of the ironic effects that censorship has on a population is that despite its intolerant attitude towards 'forbidden' materials, it can inspire individuals to try even harder to achieve their ends than in a free society. Censorship is maintained by individuals who claim to represent the people and make sure that so-called 'harmful' materials do not reach the general public. In essence, the censor ensures that only acceptable media is available, allowing for society to proceed in a moral manner. Censorship becomes an issue when the censors either do not accurately represent the majority of the population or they do not discriminate against what they review, censoring all media equally. This latter case applied in Iran, where all western literature was subject to heavy standards. As Nafisi put it, "Could one really concentrate on one's job when what preoccupied the faculty was how to excise the word wine from a Hemingway story when they decided not to teach Brontë because she appeared to condone adultery?" (Nafisi 423). This may seem like an obvious example of censorship in a theological society from a typical Western view, but it should be noted that book-banning also occurs in democracies, as Jenkins notes. Varying levels of censorship therefore are clearly present in societal structures across the globe, from democracies to non-secular totalitarian governments.

If a democracy, therefore, is thought of as a tolerant society where each member is free to express their views, then either the United States is not a democracy or our definition of a democracy is flawed. That begs the question: what is a democracy? John Rawls, a prominent 20th century philosopher has proposed a method by which one can create a democracy, involving the participants in every step of the way. This method starts by having individual members of the society-to-be enter into the society from behind a so-called veil of ignorance. Only by passing through this veil and accepting the rules of the social contract can one be a member of this society. Initially, the social contract treats every individual equally. Entering members have the option to change it- for example one could change it so that



people who bake bread have the ability to arbitrarily arrest other members of society. The catch, however, is that from behind the veil, nobody knows what role they are going to play in the new society. An abusive rule such as the one above, therefore, would favor bakers, but since new members of society would have no idea of what role they were to play (baker or not) when they crossed through the veil, this rule would not be favored. A simple test to the laws of this society, therefore, would be: am I comfortable being on both sides of this rule? If the answer is no, then that rule does not apply in the society behind the veil. Truly democratic society, therefore, has no favorites, no landed elite, no hereditary powers and no arbitrary decisions- an especially sore point with Nafisi when she submitted her resignation letter to the powers that were at the University of Tehran. She wrote, "More than ever, it was this arbitrariness [of being told what to do and when at a moment's notice] that had become unbearable" (Nafisi 422). The applications of Rawls' 'veil' theory are immediately apparent when taken next to the young authors in Jenkins' text as well as the women in Nafisi's passage. While burdened by the fear of being ostracized socially in a school community, the (mostly) teenagers that contribute to dprophet.com, a Harry Potter fan fiction site are all able to freely do so through a veil by which they pass many times daily to become writers ripe with creativity and talent.

When [the authors] talk about books themselves, they make literary comparisons with other literary works or draw connections with philosophical and theological traditions; they debate gender stereotyping in the female characters they cite interviews with the writer or read critical analyses of the works; they use analytic concepts they probably wouldn't encounter until they reach the advanced undergraduate classroom. (Jenkins 285)

By creating a community where every writer is treated equally, Heather Lawver, the founder of dprophet.com has almost perfectly achieved the Rawlsian true democracy of a society where the roles of its constituents are not defined by bias or fiat, rather, the role each member plays in the greater society is one of active participation. Ironically, in post-revolution Iran, the Ayatollah achieved the opposite of the Rawls' ideal society. By imposing traditional garb, such as the head scarf and

veil, Ayatollah Khomeini imposed restrictions on his society based around sex and role. Khomeini literally reversed the role of the veil- passing through the veil now concealed your identity and marked you as part of a lower social caste, just below men. When Nafisi refused the chador she knew she was also resigning her post as a professor in Tehran. The society that Ayatollah Khomeini created in post-revolutionary Iran was far from a democracy, but it was in some ways very close to societies that claimed to represent the very ideals that the Islamic Republic of Iran sought to repress.

By choosing to resist censorship in a non-violent way, individuals can cultivate resistance in others. In protesting the Ayatollah's strict control over cultural material, Nafisi sought to create her own democracy, a society where individuals could come to learn and constructively pursue subjects of their own interest without the arbitrary rules of being told what to do and how. An important irony to note is the fact that in meeting secretly, Nafisi was starting a revolution of thought in Iran in the same way that the Ayatollah had started a political revolution. Certainly, during the time of the Shah, meeting in groups with the intent to overthrow the sitting government was tantamount to treason. In essence, Nafisi's goal was a society like *dprophet.com*, an entire decade and a half before J.K. Rowling published the first of the Harry Potter novels. The reason Nafisi sought to create a secluded society in the heart of post-revolutionary Iran she describes is similar to Scheherazade's role in "A Thousand and One Nights," the classic eastern tale of the power of imagination. Nafisi tells us that "Scheherazade breaks the cycle of violence by choosing to embrace a different terms of engagement. She fashions her universe not through physical force, as does the king, but through imagination and reflection. This gives her the courage to risk her life and sets her apart from the other characters in the tale." (Nafisi 430) Similarly, Nafisi was a contemporary Scheherazade, resorting to passive intellectual education at a time of heavy-handedness and force. This compares to the Potter fan fiction writers where many of them chose to pursue academic development online, even as schools around them tried to teach using the traditional methods that stifled creative writing. The benefit derived by contributors online was plain to see, according to Pierre Lévy, "...each learner contributes to the larger collective



intelligence; but both are describing parts of the same experience- living in a world where knowledge is shared and where critical activity is ongoing and lifelong.” (Jenkins 285) The Rawlsian setup of the online community that Nafisi tried to emulate in Iran maximizes creative learning in the way that the black and white style of mass education cannot.

By pandering to students and to other political pressure groups, mass public education seems a form of censorship, restricting access to information. It encourages ‘black and white’ thinking, classifying decisions into absolutes and not considering many options available. For example, education for women in Nafisi’s Tehran was subject to impromptu searches of handbags. Nafisi’s students were “...penalized for running up the stairs, for laughing in the hallways, for talking to members of the opposite sex” (Nafisi 422) In the United States, Heather Lawver had a similar example with the Mississippi public school system. The system, geared towards standardized test preparation and fraught with prejudices from past eras was not an ideal learning environment for Heather’s parents. “It was hard,” Heather explained, “to combat prejudices when you are facing it every day. They just pulled me and one of my brothers out of school. And we never wanted to go back” (Jenkins 276). Neither account provides a description of a safe, productive learning environment. The reaction to this blind system for both parties was a retreat to a private space of the imagination. Lawver started a website where individuals could create and discuss their works, and Nafisi simply stopped teaching at a state university and instead held her classes at home. In discussing literature, each group received the opportunity to see what was wrong with the societies around them. Armed with this knowledge, each group was then able to start taking steps towards removing the problems they encountered daily, rather than surrendering to “black and white” thinking and absolutes.

The natural reaction to oppression is to expand into another community. By promoting collaborative thought through writing and active participation, Azar Nafisi was able to bring her students out of Iran, beyond the veil and into a truly democratic society, using the class to develop their sense of what freedom could be. This bias

free community mirrors fan fiction websites like dprophet.com where the same principles of shared experiences and group participation are put to work in creating an ideal learning environment. The lack of standards traditionally assigned to societal participation, such as race, gender, etc. have been discarded and the result is a discussion that transcends the common moral, physical and political boundaries. It is these effects of literacy that allow the community to develop and grow as a whole.

### **Explaining Why Bertrand Gets a B+**

This essay achieves a level of complexity in its argument (regarding the private freedom offered by literature) that is suggestive of A-level work and clearly superior to a B-level argument. But the writer does not demonstrate sufficient control over the complex ideas that the paper takes on, and there is a level of incoherence in the presentation that needs to be corrected to achieve an A.

### ***Basil (on O'Brien and Krakauer), A***

#### Lose Your Illusion

We create illusions of the truth because it is easier to believe what you want to be true than what you know is true. The line between what is true and what is illusory is blurred by our own self-deception. We lie to ourselves because we want to be better than we are, better than we know ourselves to be. Our self deceptions are frequent and even petty, and usually have negative consequences. We stay up all night when we know we need sleep. We eat more than we know we should. We work ourselves to exhaustion. We take on more than we can bear, and we fail to ask for help when we know we need it. We create myths for ourselves to spare us the humiliation of our own human frailty. Those myths prevent us from realizing the truth, to our detriment. We see examples of these dangerous myths in Tim O'Brien's "How to Tell a True War Story" and in Jon Krakauer's "Selections from Into the Wild." In "How to Tell a True War Story," O'Brien presents us with a fictional account of his experiences in the Vietnam War and, in doing so, creates a myth that allows him to deal with the complexities of war and to make sense of reality. Similarly, in "Selections from Into the Wild," Krakauer presents us with the story of Christopher



McCandless, a man who created a myth of himself in order to discover his own personal truth. Unfortunately, McCandless's self-deception left him ignorant, and that ignorance cost him his life. What both authors show us, ultimately, is how to see truly by looking hard at the lives of the self-deceived. It is through the stories of the deceived that we come to know the truth.

Confusion is a common experience, but not something we willingly accept, preferring to make sense of things even when they don't make sense. It is difficult to understand everything that happens in our lives, so much so that even in remembering an event it takes on our own inventions. O'Brien's narrator puts it thusly: "In any war story, but especially a true one, it's difficult to separate what happened from what seemed to happen. What seems to happen becomes its own happening and has to be told that way" (O'Brien 442). The details we invent become part of the story, which only adds to the confusion, further complicating the truth. O'Brien goes on describe this confusion, assigning it the ethereal quality of a swirling fog:

For the common soldier, at least, war has the feel—the spiritual texture of great ghostly fog, thick and permanent. There is no clarity. Everything swirls. [...] Right spills over into wrong. Order blends into chaos, love into hate, ugliness into beauty, law into anarchy, civility into savagery. The vapors suck you in. You can't tell where you are, or why you're there, and the only certainty is overwhelming ambiguity (O'Brien 448).

Here, O'Brien describes the obfuscation and moral ambiguity of war as an all-consuming cloud, a sea of contradictory ideas swirling together into a single mixture of uncertainty. We understand that the war of which he speaks is a metaphor, if not a microcosm, for life. And life is not unlike liquid water, its essential component—it ebbs and flows, takes on the shape of its surroundings, and changes form under pressure. Changing form under pressure is exactly what Christopher McCandless was looking to do with his life when he tried to purify himself in the crucible of the

Alaskan taiga. Krakauer depicts the landscape to which McCandless would subject himself:

The trail climbs a hill beyond the uppermost pond, then rejoins the twisting, rocky creek bed before ascending again into a jungle of scrubby vegetation. The going never gets exceedingly difficult, but the fifteen-foot-high tangle of alder pressing in from both sides is gloomy, claustrophobic, oppressive. Clouds of mosquitoes materialize out of the sticky heat. Every few minutes the insects' piercing whine is supplanted by the boom of distant thunder, rumbling over the taiga from a wall of thunderheads rearing darkly on the horizon (Krakauer 357).

Here, Krakauer describes an ominous succession of the oppositional forces that indeed are nature, and in doing so, he is aware of how much he does not understand, both about Alaska (even after multiple trips) and about life in general. How much less would McCandless have understood, given his limited experience? McCandless went on his journey seeking self-awareness, but could not fathom how much there was to understand outside of himself. He sought to prove himself against the Alaskan wilds, but his story only offers proof of how much he was deceived by his feeling of mastery over his environment. O'Brien and Krakauer, by being aware of their own ignorance, understand that nature cannot be fully understood, and they both truthfully tell the story of how others deceive themselves by a story of mastery over a nature they can never master.

When we begin to understand the inevitability of death, then we accept the true knowledge that we cannot completely master nature. Such awareness is not easy to deal with, and so often we are left only to grieve. O'Brien illustrates such grief in the figure of Lemon:

Then [Lemon] took a peculiar half step, moving from shade into bright sunlight, and then the booby-trapped 105 round blew him into a tree. The parts were just hanging there, so Dave Jensen and I were ordered to shinny up and peel him off. I remember the white bone of an arm. I remember



pieces of skin and something wet and yellow that must've been intestines. The gore was horrible, and stays with me. But what wakes me up twenty years later is Dave Jensen singing “Lemon Tree” as we threw down the parts (O'Brien 448).

The death of Lemon in and of itself is not as significant as all that it represents: the pain of loss, the impermanence of life, the extent of human fragility—both physically and emotionally. What the narrator focuses on in the aftermath of Lemon's death is the aesthetic horror of throwing body parts down from a tree, rather than the emotions surrounding the fact that just a moment before those parts were a living, breathing person. And it would be easy to write off Dave Jensen as having a macabre sense of humor, but his singing “Lemon Tree” is his own way of grieving, even as he is making light of the situation. He has to laugh it off because to deal with the indiscriminate cruelty of death head on would be too much. More than that, though, Jensen's singing is honoring the fallen soldier by making that tree a monument to Lemon. We make monuments to the dead not so that they are remembered by others but so that we remember them, what they meant to us. When Krakauer and his companions encounter the place where Christopher McCandless died, it, too, has the feel of a monument:

We pause some distance away from the bus and stare at it for a while in silence. Its paint is chalky and peeling. Several windows are missing. Hundreds of delicate bones litter the clearing around the vehicle, scattered among thousands of porcupine quills: the remains of the small game that made up the bulk of McCandless's diet. And at the perimeter of this boneyard lies one much larger skeleton: that of the moose he shot, and subsequently agonized over (Krakauer 358).

Here, Krakauer paints the picture of an old graveyard, some ancient burial ground, and that “Magic Bus” is McCandless's mausoleum (Krakauer 349). We are also presented with another stark realization: the necessity of death in order to sustain life. Those scattered bones are the remains of that which had sustained McCandless

during his ill-fated journey. Similarly, Lemon's death kept those other soldiers alive; had he not stepped on the booby-trapped round, another soldier surely would have. The resting places of McCandless and Lemon hold lessons for the living.

Still, though, to truly be aware of the truth of the world, we must accept the trueness of it; if we do not, then we remain ignorant of it. O'Brien exemplifies this awareness of truth through the use of a second narrator within the story, Mitchell Sanders. Visually, Sanders is represented as always handling a yo-yo. This yo-yo is rich in meaning. It epitomizes Sanders as factually unreliable, going back and forth in his story. And yet despite Sanders playing fast and loose with actual occurrences, his deft maneuvering of the yo-yo represents the truth at the heart of his story. Finally, the yo-yo is a warning, like a canary in a coal mine, which O'Brien illustrates when the narrator recounts, "At one point, I remember, Mitchell Sanders turned and looked at me, not quite nodding, as if to warn me about something, as if he already knew, then after a while he rolled up his yo-yo and moved away" (O'Brien 441). Rolling up the yo-yo represents a temporary surrender to the truth that is in nature. As Sanders tells his story of the listening patrol to the narrator, it becomes more fabricated, more and more unbelievable, even as he gets closer and closer to the truth:

"So what happens is, these guys get themselves deep in the bush, all camouflaged up, and they lie down and wait and that's all they do [...]. And man, I'll tell you—it's spooky. This is mountains. You don't know spooky till you been there. Jungle, sort of, except it's way up in the clouds and there's always this fog—like rain, except it's not raining—everything's all wet and swirly and tangled up and you can't see jack [...]. Like you don't even have a body. Serious spooky. You just go with the vapors—the fog sort of takes you in...And the sounds, man. The sounds carry forever. You hear stuff nobody should ever hear."

Sanders was quiet for a second, just working the yo-yo, then he smiled at me (O'Brien 443).



Again, Sanders realizes that to know the real truth requires you to give yourself over to a “spooky” invisibility—to forget yourself. “Working the yo-yo” is like making a magical charm to ward off the danger of that knowledge.

O'Brien's narrator accepts the truth in Sander's story and ultimately becomes aware of the truth in the world, unlike Christopher McCandless who failed to accept this truth. Krakauer describes McCandless's self-imposed ignorance: “In 1992, however, there were no more blank spots on the map—not in Alaska, not anywhere. But Chris, with his idiosyncratic logic, came up with an elegant solution to this dilemma: He simply got rid of the map. In his own mind, if nowhere else, the terra would thereby remain incognita” (Krakauer 356). McCandless fails to acknowledge the truth of his surroundings, as we see all too clearly through Krakauer's depiction of the Teklanika River. Through Krakauer, we learn that “[t]o McCandless's inexperienced eye, there was nothing to suggest that two months hence, as the glaciers and snowfields at the Teklanika's headwater thawed in the summer heat, its discharge would multiply nine or ten times in volume, transforming the river into a deep, violent torrent that bore no resemblance to the gentle brook he'd blithely waded across in April” (Krakauer 348). McCandless's understanding of the world did not come easily to him. For McCandless, understanding life meant a life of experience. Though he may have been deluded, his goal was true: to find something new within himself, some new strength or purpose. He needed to know he was the man he thought he was. Unfortunately for him, he also needed to know things that his limited experience did not provide, namely that the stream he strolled across would become an impassable torrent eight weeks later. When Krakauer later describes the river as “livid with runoff” (Krakauer 355), it was not the river that had changed, it was McCandless's ignorance that had not waned. In April, McCandless failed to listen to the melting snow; in July, he found himself inexplicably trapped. He knew enough to survive for a time, but his ignorance did not allow him to heed the warnings around him. The truth that had eluded McCandless, like the truth at the heart of Sanders' fable, was that there is truth all around us if we just allow ourselves to listen for it. It eludes us because, as Sanders puts it, “Nobody listens” (O'Brien 445). He

continues, “Hear that quiet, man? [...] That quiet—just listen. There's your moral” (O'Brien 445). We remain ignorant because to truly be aware of all the sound and silence in the world—the everything and nothingness of life—requires more of us than we are willing to give. It is easier to tell stories than to listen to the truth.

The only obstacle to our finding the truth is our own ignorance. In our confusion and grief, we keep ourselves ignorant of the truth because we are unwilling to deal with the pain of it, the smallness of ourselves. But the more we understand about life, the more we understand that ultimately our truths only matter to us. Our truths are ours alone. Our individual truths are only a part a greater truth that we will never truly understand. Once we accept that, then confusion and grief subside, and we can accept ourselves, as we are.

### **Explaining Why Basil Gets an A**

This paper clearly achieves both the complexity and coherence that are the hallmarks of A-level work. The writer's success, in part, comes from a close encounter with the text and a willingness to listen to it carefully to draw out implicit meanings. Though the student uses quite a few block quotations, the passages chosen are rich in detail and the student spends time teasing out their meanings. There is also a striking level of polish and eloquence to the prose which contributes to the overall coherence of its ideas.