SAMPLE

Writing Rhetorically

Fostering Responsive Thinkers and Communicators

Jennifer Fletcher

Foreword by Jim Burke

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Understanding Writing as Communication and Problem Solving

I wouldn't be a very good swimming instructor. That signature look of terror and betrayal on a person's face as they struggle to stay afloat would be my undoing. My first impulse would probably be to pull them out of the water, wrap them in a towel, and give them a cookie. I don't like seeing people struggle. "It's OK," I'd probably say. "Just use this kick board. Or the noodle. That looks like fun."

So it's been no small feat for me to finally reach a point in my work as a writing teacher where I don't rush in to solve my students' problems for them. Writing can cause painful feelings of being in-over-our-head and out-of-our-element that don't necessarily go away once we've "learned" to write. I hear this anxiety in my students' voices when they ask me questions about their writing:

"How do I start?"

"What do I say now?"

"Should I just write one paragraph on each source?"

"Is this right?"

"What's my thesis?"

For many years, I'd do my best to answer these questions. I wanted to help. And I had answers (or at least opinions), so I generously dispensed my advice to students, and their writing often improved.

But I noticed that my high school students continued to ask me these same kinds of questions, grade after grade, year after year. And when I started teaching first-year college writing classes, I noticed that students were still asking these questions. They weren't yet practicing rhetorical problem solving—the ability to analyze a communication task and to make their own choices about content and form based on the contingencies of particular rhetorical situations. They were depending on me to tell them what to do and how to do it.

Cultivating Independent Learners Through Rhetorical Thinking

In contrast, students who have learned to think rhetorically about writing can tackle new tasks without extensive scaffolding. They have their own strategies and processes for responding to unfamiliar literacy demands. They can change how they write in response to diverse audiences, purposes, and occasions. Rhetorical problem solvers are independent learners. In *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*, Zaretta Hammond describes "independent learners" as students who can "size up any task, map out a strategy for completing it and then execute the plan" (2015, 122). These capacities are the goal of equitable writing instruction.

We sometimes teach writing in ways that increase students' dependence on us and delay their growth as problem solvers. To grow as a problem solver, you need extended experience troubleshooting problems. But we often don't let students practice solving rhetorical problems. We tell them their audience (usually us). We choose their genre for them. We give them their purpose. And then we make all the stylistic and organizational choices for them by handing them a paragraph template and list of rules to follow. No wonder, then, that so many new college students want their instructors to just tell them what to do.

This book offers a different approach. When we teach writing rhetorically, we honor and nurture students' rhetorical agency. Instead of telling students what to write, we help them approach writing as communication and problem solving—and we understand that this is challenging intellectual work students will ultimately have to do for themselves.

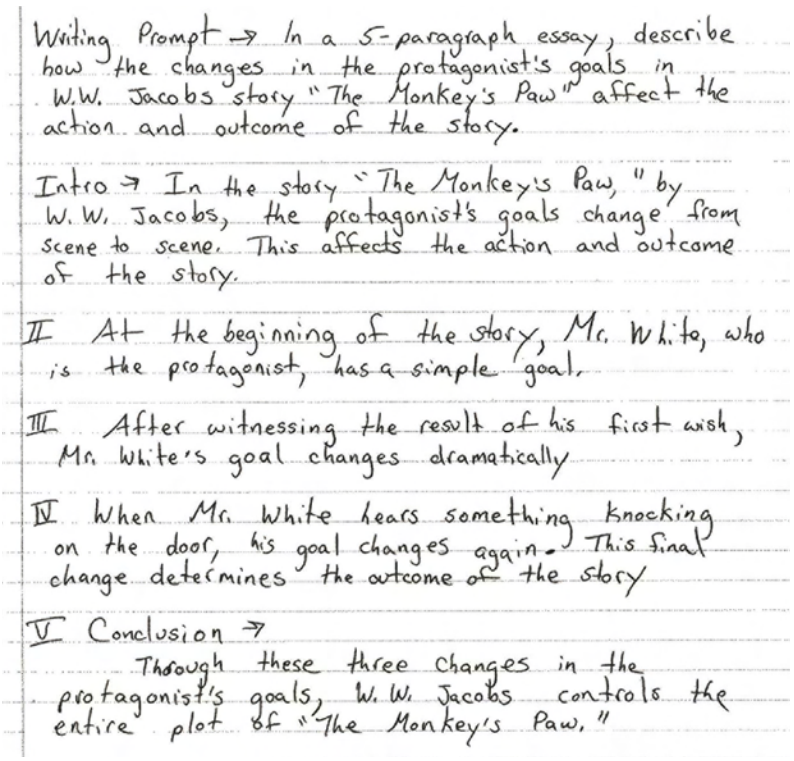
That doesn't mean that we leave students to sink or swim. Throughout this book, you'll find strategies for engaging and supporting students in the productive struggle that leads to growth and independence.

From Novice to Expert: Writing (and Teaching) Rhetorically

Writing rhetorically, explains composition professor E. Shelley Reid, means paying "attention to the needs of the author and the needs of the reader rather than the needs of the teacher—or the rules in the textbook" (2011, 4). When we write this way, we make moment-by-moment decisions based on our message, audience, purpose, and occasion as we struggle with "the live, negotiated process of writing for real people" (Reid 2011, 4). And, boy, do we struggle.

I always try to remember that my students are progressing on a continuum from novice to expert, and that there are special steps I can take to make sure those learners in the novice range feel fully supported. What novices do as novices is not wrong. It's expected. For example, the National Research Council describes novices as being "more likely [than experts] to approach problems by searching for correct formulas and pat answers that fit their everyday intuitions" (2000, 49). This is certainly what I did as a novice teacher, which is why I took a prescriptive approach to writing instruction. I hadn't yet learned to see the big patterns and ideas in my field, so a set of rules and formulas was a satisfying starting place.

Like those Facebook fails of birthday cakes gone wrong, some of my early attempts to teach writing were well-intentioned mistakes. My biggest concern as a new teacher were all those zeros in my grade book. Many of my sophomores and juniors were in danger of failing my classes, so I tried to find ways to make sure everyone had at least *something* to turn in on the days essays were due. My solution was to do much of the work for my students. I wrote their introductions for them. I wrote their conclusions for them. I wrote their topic sentences. I even picked a selection of quotations for them to use as support. And, of course, I told them their essays should be exactly five paragraphs long. Here's one of my old overhead transparencies for an interpretive essay on the short story "The Monkey's Paw" by W. W. Jacobs.


Writing Prompt → In a 5-paragraph essay, describe how the changes in the protagonist's goals in W.W. Jacobs story "The Monkey's Paw" affect the action and outcome of the story.

Intro → In the story "The Monkey's Paw," by W. W. Jacobs, the protagonist's goals change from scene to scene. This affects the action and outcome of the story.

II At the beginning of the story, Mr. White, who is the protagonist, has a simple goal.

III After witnessing the result of his first wish, Mr. White's goal changes dramatically

IV When Mr. White hears something knocking on the door, his goal changes again. This final change determines the outcome of the story

V Conclusion →
Through these three changes in the protagonist's goals, W. W. Jacobs controls the entire plot of "The Monkey's Paw."

FIGURE I.1
"Just do what I tell you to do, and you'll be fine."

I thought I was providing scaffolding and modeling, but I wasn't allowing students to make any substantive decisions for themselves. The take-away message was that academic writing is a matter of conformity, not creativity and communication. I was teaching for compliance, not teaching for transfer and agency.

I had to learn to trust my students to make their own choices—and their own mistakes. This is the path to expertise, the only way novice writers (and teachers) grow beyond their reliance on rules and formulas. Our students deserve to have teachers who support their full intellectual development, with all its messy growing pains.

Rhetorician Linda Flower explains that rhetorical problem solving entails a variety of cognitive strategies for "exploring the rhetorical problem, for generating ideas, for adapting to the reader, and for understanding and monitoring one's own writing process" (1989, 13).

The Challenge

I need to be honest here: What I'm asking you to do may actually make your students' writing seem worse for a while. When we give students step-by-step instructions, paragraph formulas, and sentence templates to follow, their writing instantly looks better. Students who were struggling to write anything before are suddenly producing cohesive academic prose. That feels like a win.

But this is kit writing, not rhetorical problem solving. It's like those packaged sets for building bird houses you can buy in craft stores. While some assembly is required, the creative design work has already been done for you. John Warner, author of the popular book *Why They Can't Write: Killing the Five Paragraph Essay and Other Necessities*, says students are underprepared for college writing classes because they've learned to produce "imitations rather than the genuine article" (2018, 7). Formulas replicate the surface features of academic writing but don't allow writers to engage in real composing.

"To write," says Warner, "is to make choices, word by word, sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph" (2018, 5). Students don't get better at making choices if all the choices are made for them. We need to move novices past mimicking the forms of academic writing without fully experiencing the intellectual processes that produce those forms in authentic contexts.

Empowering Students to Solve Problems and Make Decisions

A rhetorical mindset helps students see themselves as independent writers who are capable of figuring out how to write well in new situations. This is now a common scenario in my teaching life: A student says, "I don't know how to do this." And then I say, "I bet you'll figure it out."

I've had to learn I'm not being mean when I say this. If I give students a nudge toward independence and then sit back and wait, chances are they try something that works. I don't abandon them—I'm their teacher, after all—but I do give them room to think,

write, and experiment. I'm there as a sounding board as soon as they have an idea to test. Once students get comfortable with this kind of struggle, I find that letting them work through their own problem-solving process is actually less frustrating for us both than me trying to tell them exactly what to do. When I'm in charge—and it's my model they're trying to replicate—there's a chance they can get it wrong. But when we're facing a new rhetorical situation together as colleagues and colearners, then whatever works—works. We might both be surprised by the eventual solution.

Developing a repertoire of troubleshooting strategies is more important than ever. A 2015 report published by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) identifies communication and problem solving as employers' top priorities for college students. The survey of business and nonprofit leaders on which the report is based found the following:

> Nearly all employers (91 percent) agree that for career success, "a candidate's demonstrated capacity to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems is more important than his or her undergraduate major."
>
> Nearly all employers (96 percent) agree that "all college students should have experiences that teach them how to solve problems with people whose views are different from their own." (Hart Research Associates 2015)

Consider your own approach to writing. When you write, what kinds of decisions do you need to make? How do you know how to make these decisions? And how do you know when something's not working? Now think about your students. How do they know what to do? What's their process for making—and evaluating—writing decisions?

Metacognitive awareness helps writers break free from an overreliance on rules or teacher directions. As Flower notes, "understanding and monitoring one's own writing process" (1989, 13) is a key aspect of rhetorical problem solving.

Teaching for rhetorical agency calls for an approach to writing that honors student choice.

Teaching for Transfer

The goal of a rhetorical approach is transfer of learning. Transfer of learning is the use of past learning in new situations. Because situations vary widely, making appropriate use of prior knowledge and skills often calls for significant adjustments. Teaching writing for transfer thus helps students think differentially about literacy tasks and contexts. That is, students have to assume that reading and writing in one setting could be different from reading and writing in another setting. As John T. Gage notes, "no two pieces of writing arise from the same situations or need to satisfy the same conditions" (2001, 6).

This is why rhetorical thinking is key to transfer of learning. In a rhetorical approach, one size does not fit all.

Teaching for transfer also requires long-term thinking. It doesn't work to take shortcuts on the road to transfer. Transfer happens as a result of deep, internalized, principled learning. It's driven as much by learners' beliefs and attitudes as their knowledge and skills. Many formulas and templates intended to accelerate students' proficiency in academic writing do little to develop the deeper understandings and dispositions needed for effective communication and productive problem solving. This worries me.

Short-term thinking doesn't help us solve complex problems—like a global pandemic or the threat climate change poses to the world's food supply. Of course we want to help students pass their classes and do well on high-stakes tests. But we don't want to be shortsighted in meeting short-term goals. Some strategies used to help students succeed on school-based tasks can become obstacles to success down the road. This is especially true of strategies that interfere with students' ability to think rhetorically or make their own decisions.

Students' beliefs and attitudes often endure long after they have forgotten the formula for slope or the definition of iambic pentameter. We need to consider the learning most likely to stick.

Considering the Principles Behind Our Writing (and Teaching) Practices

In my early teen years, I took ballet classes five days a week at a little studio in a strip mall in Orange, California. My teacher, a stern woman with a commanding presence, had performed with the American Ballet Theater in the days when the dance world was still orbiting around George Balanchine's star. She used to enthrall us with stories of dancing on the raked stages of Europe, a feat that seemed almost impossible to me since I could barely manage my pointe shoes on level ground.

While I never danced at an elite level, ballet has been something I've carried with me throughout my life. It's still a part of me. Never mind that I haven't been able to do a double pirouette since 1992. Dance changed the way I see the world and myself.

What has stuck with me all these years later isn't the technical knowledge. It is the joy in a certain quality of movement, the experience of embodied art, and the satisfaction of working hard enough to make progress. These are foundational principles I've retained from all those ballet classes that I now apply to other areas of my life, especially my writing. Dance taught me to work for the criticism, not the praise. The real prize is the expert feedback that helps you grow.

When we teach writing, we need to consider the learning students will carry with them into their future lives. Teaching writing for transfer entails paying special attention to the foundational principles fostered by our instructional approach, including learners' beliefs

about what constitutes ethical and effective writing. When we understand the underlying principles of an approach, we can adapt its methods to new contexts and purposes. This is what the research on transfer tells us (Haskell 2001).

This book asks several questions about the principles behind our practices:

- What kinds of communication habits are we fostering by our instructional approach?
- What mindsets are we fostering?
- How does the way we teach writing—and especially argument writing—impact our students' capacity for collaboration, ability to solve problems, and way of being in the world?

We need to look beyond shortcuts to "proficiency" to the transferable learning that will still be valuable in years to come.

Developing Theoretical Knowledge

Students need a conscious awareness of their operating system—their own "theory of writing" (Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak 2014, 4)—if they're going to effectively repurpose their learning in new settings.

If you ask, "Why did you do that?" and students answer, "Because you told me to," chances are they're not yet thinking rhetorically about their communication choices. Writing instruction that puts the burden of making rhetorical decisions on the students helps them to develop theoretical knowledge—what I think of as "writer's brain," that constant (and sometimes obsessive) sifting of options that goes on in a writer's head during acts of composition.

Instead of giving students directions to follow (e.g., "Please organize your ideas into paragraphs"), we can ask them questions that trigger writerly thinking (e.g., "What are the main purpose and focus of this section?"). Instead of teaching students the features of "good" writing, we can help them "*to learn how to learn* the conventions of writing in new situations they will encounter" (2007, 15) (emphasis added) as Anne Beaufort recommends in *College Writing and Beyond*. Students who can think critically about writers' choices have a framework for adapting to new writing situations.

I don't want my students to just remember what I taught them. I want them to discover and develop their own set of guiding beliefs—a theory of written communication they can take with them wherever they go, a theory that will help them figure out how to communicate in forms that haven't been invented yet and in contexts that don't exist now.

Professional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing

In 2016, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) published a position statement on the professional knowledge needed for the teaching of writing that makes clear the central importance of rhetoric and transfer to our work as writing teachers.

NCTE offers a list of several core concepts and aspects of writing that teachers need to understand in order to provide high-quality writing opportunities for all students. These include the following:

- The wide range of purposes for which people write and the different kinds of texts and processes that arise from those purposes;
- Strategies and forms for writing for public participation in a democratic society;
- How people make creative and literary texts, aesthetic genres, for the purposes of entertainment, pleasure, or exploration;
- The ways digital environments have added new modalities while constantly creating new publics, audiences, purposes, and invitations to compose;
- Appropriate genres for varied academic disciplines and the purposes and relationships that create those forms;
- Ways of organizing and transforming school curricula in order to provide students with adequate education in varied purposes for writing;
- How to set up a course that asks students to write for varied purposes and audiences. (See the Position Statement for the full list.)

These are the teacher understandings that foster rhetorical thinking and transfer of learning in students. The Position Statement makes the goal of transfer explicit, adding that "the teaching of writing should also be geared toward making sense in a life outside of school" (NCTE 2016 *Position Statement on Professional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing*).

What This Book Offers

Throughout the chapters that follow, you'll find explicit support for helping your students develop rhetorical writing skills and practices that can be adapted and applied across contexts. These include the following:

- Inquiry, invention, and rhetorical thinking (Chapters 1 and 3)
- Writing for transfer (Chapter 2)
- Paraphrase, summary, synthesis, and citation (Chapter 4)
- Research skills and processes (Chapter 5)
- Evidence-based reasoning (Chapter 6)
- Rhetorical decision making (Chapter 7)
- Revision and conferring (Chapter 8)

You'll find tips for teaching for transfer throughout this book, too, including ways to frame instruction that help students see the larger relevance of what they're learning. My goal is to show you what it looks like to actually do this work with students—to dig into real texts and tasks with novice writers and support them in making their own informed decisions.

Why This Matters

Teaching writing as communication and problem solving is a vastly different enterprise—with vastly different social implications—from teaching students to follow rules and formulas. It's the difference between honoring students' autonomy and enforcing their compliance. When we teach writing rhetorically, we support students in becoming independent problem solvers who are well prepared to take rhetorical action: to discover their own questions, design their own inquiry process, develop their own positions and purposes, and contribute to conversations that matter to them.

CHAPTER ONE

Taking the Rhetorical Approach

When it is effective, writing is rhetorical, i.e., it takes into account the values, ideologies, interests, needs, and commitments of the people, the audiences, for whom it is intended.

—NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH, POSITION STATEMENT ON UNDERSTANDING AND TEACHING WRITING

Let me tell you about Tim White. I first met Tim when I heard him speak on ocean fisheries at the Monterey Bay Aquarium. Tim is a scientist who studies sharks, great white sharks to be exact. Part of his research involves leaning over the side of a boat to tag great whites . . . by hand.

What follows is an excerpt from a research paper Tim coauthored (2017) on the interactions between shark behavior and the activities of fishermen that was published in *Biological Conservation*, a peer-reviewed academic journal.[1] See what you notice about this real-world example of science writing, especially the language I've marked in bold:

> Collectively these diverse forms of insight into how coastal sharks use space . . . **empowers us** to make much more informed decisions about how best to tailor marine management tools to meet conservation objectives.

1. Biological Conservation *is an international journal in the discipline of conservation science that uses a double-blind review process. Its audience includes botanists, marine scientists, ecologists, biologists, and zoologists. See the "Author Information Pack" for the journal's full rhetorical context, at https://www.elsevier.com/journals/biological-conservation/0006-3207?generatepdf=true.*

> . . . these results also make it **equally clear** that it would be **prudent** to develop diverse portfolios of conservation measures.
>
> **Our** capacity, for the first time, to summarize publicly accessible data on fishing activity along the perimeter of large MPAs . . . provides **an exciting and sobering view** of the significance of the observed movements of grey reef sharks beyond MPA boundaries.

Besides getting up close with great whites, Tim's doing some other seemingly risky things: He's using the first-person pronoun ("we") and emotional language in a scientific research paper.[2] If his K12 education was typical, at some point he was probably told not to do these things. He was probably taught the "rules" of science writing:

- No "I believe" or "I think"
- No emotion or "fluff"
- No opinions
- No persuasion—just facts

But Tim's not following these rules. Why not? Because the way scientists communicate with each other in their own discourse communities does not necessarily match the conventions of academic writing being taught in many high schools.

What's more, scientists don't write only for other scientists. They also need to be able to communicate the importance of their research to nonspecialists. Here's White again, this time in an interview for the *Stanford News* (2017), a publication that reaches a broad audience, including potential donors. Notice the use of casual language:

> If marine monuments are axed we could also see oil drilling and deep-sea mining happening just a 20-minute boat ride away from our nation's healthiest coral reefs.

If this seems like a rather obvious point, let's consider the implications of telling students to avoid opinion or personal feeling in science writing. What exactly are we teaching students? And why are we teaching them this? What beliefs about writing are we cultivating through our instructional approach?

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2. *The article also uses genre conventions common to scholarly papers, including an abstract, list of keywords, figures and tables with numerical data, dense sentences, Latinate vocabulary, numerous citations, and standard section headings (e.g., Introduction, Materials and Methods, Results, and Discussion).*

The Rhetorical Approach

The rhetorical approach is as much a mindset as it is a set of concepts and strategies. It's a mindset that says, *Here's a communication problem—now how I do solve that problem with the materials and resources I have on hand?* Rhetoric should not be just an extra unit we squeeze into our curriculum; it's a way of thinking.

What it means to take a rhetorical approach—to read and write rhetorically—is different from the treatment rhetoric sometimes gets in English classes, where rhetoric is seen as more of an enhancement to the literacy staples: a kind of postproduction filter that can make writing look better (Now add some pathos!) or a bonus level to ELA that only needs to be accessed by students in Advanced Placement courses. The kind of rhetorical thinking and rhetorical writing I'm talking about in this book is important for all students and all aspects of communication.

When I sat down to write this chapter, I didn't start with an acronym or a six-step process or a template or a list of what not to do. Instead, just as Tim White probably did, I started by thinking about my audience and what I can contribute to the conversation. What do teachers already know about rhetoric? What do they know about writing? What makes these topics timely and important right now? I pictured the educators I've worked with over the years in K12 and higher education, my former colleagues at Buena Park High School in Southern California, and the many teachers I've worked with through California State University's Expository Reading and Writing Curriculum. I thought of how many things have changed since I earned my Single Subject Credential in 1995. And I looked at my favorite professional resources—those by people like Sara K. Ahmed, Thomas Newkirk, Cornelius Minor, and Donalyn Miller—to remind myself what kinds of books are most valuable to busy teachers. Beginning with these considerations of audience, context, purpose, and genre is a key part of writing rhetorically.

Effective teaching begins with these same considerations. When we study the characteristics of workplace or scholarly writing in preparation for designing a lesson, we're teaching rhetorically. When we situate a text in its unique historical or cultural moment, we're teaching rhetorically. When we customize activities for an extra-lively sixth-period class or differentiate instruction for a striving writer, we're teaching rhetorically. Think of all the times you've handpicked books for particular students ("I thought of you when I read this novel!") or interrupted your lesson plans to reteach a difficult concept. We may not explicitly be teaching rhetoric, but when we do these things, we're practicing the alert responsiveness to the situational and social contingencies at the heart of rhetorical theory.

This chapter is about what it means to adopt a rhetorical approach to texts, to forgo formulas in favor of contingencies. It's about how the study and practice of rhetoric can prepare students for the varying literacy demands of school and life, and how teaching rhetorically can help teachers respond to the diverse communities of learners we serve. It's an ambitious approach; the ultimate goal is deep and transferrable learning.

What's Rhetoric?

In *The Elements of Reasoning*, revered rhetorician Edward P. J. Corbett and Rosa A. Eberly define rhetoric as "the elemental art of humans and their language—written and spoken, read and heard" (2000, 8). Rhetoric's fundamental concern is how to communicate effectively in diverse contexts. You may have seen a diagram of Aristotle's rhetorical situation before (Figure 1.1).

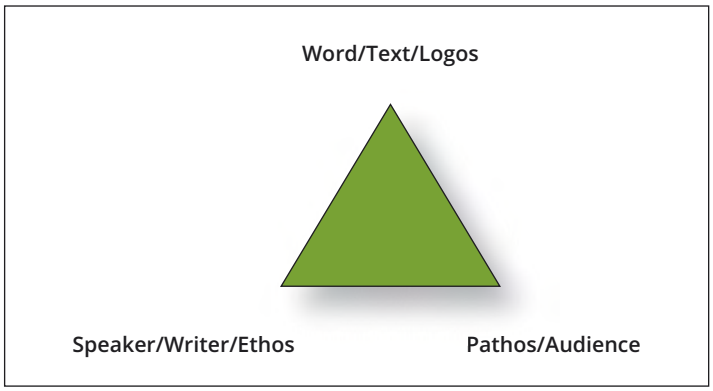


FIGURE 1.1
The rhetorical triangle

Aristotle, of course, didn't use graphic organizers. But the numerous representations of "the rhetorical triangle" on the Internet do get at a key idea in Aristotle's lectures: the skilled rhetorician has to keep tabs on all the connections among the meaning-making agents in an act of communication, including appeals to the speaker's or writer's image (ethos), the content and structure of a "text" (logos), and the audience's frame of mind (pathos). Framing and informing all these elements is the unique social context of individual texts, whether spoken or written.

Rhetoric is intended to affect the making of decisions. The presumption is that the audience will think, act, or feel differently if persuaded by rhetorical action. The effective practice of rhetoric is thus essential to civic participation, workplace collaboration, community activism, social advocacy, and any other form of collective decision making. This is why audience is so important. Rhetorical action seeks to reach real audiences, not just imagined or hypothetical audiences. Rhetors truly try to change the world.

Writing rhetorically, then, is about taking action to achieve real purposes. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) position statement on Professional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing highlights the importance of rhetorical knowledge:

> The different purposes and genres [of writing] both grow out of and create varied relationships between the writers and the readers, and existing relationships are reflected in degrees of formality in language, as well as assumptions about what knowledge and experience are already shared, and what needs to be explained. (NCTE 2016)

The Common Core State Standards (NGA and CCSSO 2010) also calls for adaptability and responsiveness in students' communication practices, recommending that students write "for *a range* of tasks, purposes, and audiences" (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.10) while focusing on "what is *most significant* for a *specific* purpose and audience" (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.5) (emphasis added).

The Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing (2011)—a report by the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA), the NCTE, and the National Writing Project (NWP)—similarly sees rhetorical knowledge as the basis of academic success. The *Framework* describes rhetorical knowledge as "the ability to analyze and act on understandings of audiences, purposes, and contexts in creating and comprehending texts" (1).

As these statements suggest, rhetoric is adaptive by design. Aristotle explains this built-in flexibility in his classic definition: "Rhetoric may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (*Rhetoric* I.2). Learning to see what persuasive strategies are available in any given case helps students respond to the unique contexts of different academic conversations. They begin to understand that each conversation has new participants and guidelines—and that no single set of guidelines can cover all the contingencies they'll encounter.

We can tell students, as the Common Core does, that it's important for them to attend "to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing" (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.1.D), but until they experience these situational shifts for themselves, it can be difficult for them to know what we're talking about. Indeed, we sometimes seem to work against this goal by adopting approaches that are more prescriptive and homogenizing than rhetorical. In the interest of supporting learning across content areas, for instance, teachers may agree to use all the same rubrics or the same structures for essays. Getting all teachers and students to be "on the same page" can seem like a good idea—and it certainly reduces the challenge students face in trying to understand different disciplinary ways of thinking and communicating.

But the problem with standardizing literacy practices across diverse rhetorical contexts is that this method doesn't prepare students to change how they read and write when the situation demands. What's more, training students to expect writing to follow the same standards regardless of context can result in serious misreadings of texts. A student might think a writer is doing something "wrong" if they don't follow the rules the student has been taught.

In their analysis of decades of writing research, Arthur N. Applebee and Judith A. Langer note that studies suggest that "what counts as 'good writing' is itself socially constructed and context specific" (2013, 6). The features that characterize effective writing vary widely across different disciplines and social contexts and continue to change in response to changing needs.

Taking a rhetorical approach involves considering texts as rhetoric.

The Trouble with Prescriptivism

Understandably, the impulse to improve students' writing by teaching them formulas for generating academic prose often arises from grading frustration. Confronted with a stack of essays filled with wonky reasoning and incoherent syntax, we mutter to ourselves, "Why do they do this? Can't they see that this isn't a sentence? Why do they expect me to understand what they're saying if they don't understand what they're saying?" And so we start to compose our list of everything we *don't* want students to do the next time they write an essay for us: No more run-ons and fragments, no unsupported claims, no vague language, no digitalk. We do this because we hope to save ourselves the trouble of repeating all the same comments on the next round of essays. We also want to spend our time responding to the substance of our students' thinking, not untangling their prose. If we can just fix some of the common errors in style and structure, we reason, we can concentrate on higher-order competencies, like analytical reading skills.

In the context of our individual classrooms, this kind of contractual agreement between a teacher and students makes sense. If you, the student, will apply my feedback to your future drafts, then I, the teacher, agree to focus my comments on more important matters. The problem happens when situated feedback starts to take the shape of universal precepts in students' minds—either because our feedback is framed as a set of prescriptive writing rules or because we've launched a preemptive strike against grading frustration by giving students formulas in advance.

I've learned to ask myself a tough question: Is my instructional approach aimed at helping my students to read and write better or helping me to grade more easily? You can see how it might be the latter: I've written "example or evidence needed" for the 142nd time next to an unsupported claim in a research paper, and I think, "That's it! I'm not doing this anymore!"—and so the "Include at least one piece of evidence for every claim" rule is born.

I'll share with you some of the rules—and their rhetorical revisions—I've generated over the years (Figure 1.2).

As you can see from the list shown in Figure 1.2, much of my prescriptivism centered on the surface appearance of students' writing, unfortunately giving the impression that I cared more about form than content. Especially in my earliest teaching years and with my youngest students, I took the burden of inventing an organizational structure away from the writer. I had seen the kind of writing my students would produce without my help (I thought), so I fell into the habit of providing an outline that told students exactly what they needed to address in each section of their essay. Sometimes I even gave students whole introductions or conclusions that they could append to their own body paragraphs, and I often gave them skeletal frames of paragraphs that they then could complete according to their own topic or argument.

To be fair to myself, I was genuinely concerned about the number of zeros in my grade book. I thought more students would complete their assignments if I just provided more

PRESCRIPTIVE RULES	RHETORICAL GUIDELINES
Never use a "dead word."	Use precise language that is appropriate for your audience.
Introductions must identify the thesis or main idea of the writing.	Consider the rhetorical work your introduction performs, including the kind of reader-writer relationship it creates and the way it prepares your reader for what follows.
Include two parts commentary to every one part evidence in your body paragraphs.	Analyze your evidence carefully.
Include a con for every pro.	Respond to multiple perspectives.
Avoid emotional appeals.	Choose evidence and language that will put your audience in the "right" frame of mind to hear your argument.
Body paragraphs must have at least six sentences.	Know what you want each paragraph to say and do.
Include two direct quotations in each body paragraph.	Adequately support your claims.
Avoid using the first-person "I" in academic writing.	Evaluate the effectiveness of the persona you've created for your audience.
Be sure your essay is five paragraphs long.	Write an 800–1,000 word essay that is adequately supported and developed.

FIGURE 1.2
Prescriptive rules vs. rhetorical guidelines

"scaffolding." Unfortunately, my scaffolds were often far more literal than metaphorical. I wasn't just offering the modeling, cognitive support, and intellectual framing that would ultimately help my students achieve mastery and independence; I was building the essay for them. Worse, I was doing the thinking for them.

Taking a Rhetorical Approach to Argumentation

What's more, prescriptive thinking can sometimes produce rules that are almost impossible to follow. If we're told as teachers, for instance, that we *should* teach argumentation but *shouldn't* teach persuasion, we might be left scratching our heads, wondering where one begins and the other ends.[3] Similar injunctions to help students anticipate "the audience's knowledge level, concerns, values, and possible biases" (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.1.B) but avoid the use of pathos can leave us nonplussed.

---

3. *See John Duffy and Patrick Clauss's essay "Argument vs. Persuasion in the Common Core Writing Standards" (NCTE discussion forum) for a thoughtful critique of the specious distinction between these terms.*

In contrast to narrow approaches to argumentation, rhetorician John Gage (2000) presents argumentation "as a process of inquiry into questions at issue that is best pursued if guided by principles but not governed by rules" (xv). Gage further sees argumentative writing as "a large enough category" (xv) to include an array of intellectual and literacy practices needed for postsecondary success. He explains: "Argumentative writing, for me, does not focus on one mode of developing ideas to the exclusion of another. The process of coming to conclusions may engage the writer in every possible kind of compositional pattern, depending on the nature of the issue and the writer's situation" (xv).

In fact, a prescriptive approach to argumentation can interfere with the engaged learning and problem solving John Bean (2001) describes as essential to the development of critical thinking skills. Predisposing students to see a pro for every con and a counterpoint for every point—regardless of the contingencies and particularities of individual texts and contexts—cuts short the intellectual struggle at the heart of impassioned inquiry. The student response to this is often disengagement. Bean explains:

> Once writing is imagined as "packaging," students find little use for it. Separated from the act of thinking and creating, writing becomes merely a skill that can be learned through grammar drills and through the production of pointless essays that students do not want to write and that teachers do not want to read. (16)

Prescriptive approaches can additionally make it harder for students to apply their learning to new tasks and contexts. Rhetorician Rebecca S. Nowacek (2011) says that "transfer [of learning] is best understood as an act of recontextualization" (8). However, if all contexts are treated the same—that is, if rules are presented as something we always or never do—how do writers know whether or not their prior knowledge is relevant in a new situation? How, for instance, can students tell if a research method they used in an English class transfers to a research project they're conducting in a history or science class?

Prescriptive approaches can also have a negative effect on students' attitudes. Rule-driven pedagogy can encourage high-achieving students to become cynical about academic discourse conventions because they see success as a matter of exploiting the arbitrary preferences of their teachers. I think of what my son's fifteen-year-old friend said about the secret to surviving high school: "You need to just do what they tell you to do, so you can get the 'A' and get out of there."

Other students who earnestly complied with the conventions prescribed by their teachers are deeply dismayed when they discover those rules don't apply in new situations ("But that's how I've always been told to do it!"). Both experiences can result in disengagement.

When we use a rhetorical approach to texts, we're trying to develop our students' conditional knowledge. Invoking shades of Aristotelian rhetoric, The National Research Council (NRC; 2012) says that conditionalized knowledge "includes a specification of the contexts in which it is useful" (43). The NRC moreover takes aim at "forms of curricula and instruction [that] do not help students conditionalize their knowledge" (43)—such as grammar books that list rules for proper usage without specifying when these rules apply.

Teaching Toward Expertise

A mark of expertise is knowing what to do when. In her classic study on the professional knowledge of nurses, Patricia Benner describes how inexperienced nurses lack "discretionary judgment" and must rely heavily on rules. "Since novices have no experience with the situation they face," Benner writes, "they must use these context-free rules to guide their task performance" (1982, 403). According to Benner, this overreliance on rules can result in less effective patient care since it doesn't account for exceptions or conditions of applicability. Seasoned professionals, on the other hand, demonstrate a keen ability to read the nuances of particular scenarios. A key difference between a rookie and a veteran, Benner says, is that "the expert operates from a deep understanding of the situation" (405). This is as true for writing as it is for nursing or teaching or any other practice.

Rule-governed behavior limits our ability to respond flexibly and appropriately to unique situations. One high school freshman told me, "I write how I'm told to write," when I asked him how he changes his writing style for different tasks or purposes. If we want to support our students in becoming expert learners—instead of plateauing in a perpetual state of rule dependency—then we need to give them opportunities to practice making their own decisions about what's needed and relevant in a specific context. Writing instruction should develop students' expertise.

Composition scholar Elizabeth Wardle unpacks the implications of prescriptive approaches in her discussion of teaching writing for transfer:

> If students are taught decontextualized skills or rigid formulas rather than general and flexible principles about writing, and if instructors in all classes do not explicitly discuss new and previous writing assignments, it stands to reason students will not see similarities between disparate writing situations or will apply rigid rules inappropriately. (2009, 770)

While rules and established procedures continue to guide how experts do their work in many fields, experts have something that novices don't: discretionary judgment.

We need to help students grapple with diverse writing situations in ways that increase their independence and flexibility.

Teaching for Change

Educating students for adaptability presumes a future world that doesn't just maintain the status quo. Training students in rules and formulas only works if we think the world will never change. But, of course, the world does change. Think how many times we heard the words "unprecedented," "new normal," and "pivot" in 2020. Teaching for transfer means we take seriously the idea of lifelong learning because we believe the world of tomorrow will be different from the world of today, and we don't want our students to be left behind.

If we're teaching to the status quo, rather than teaching for change, we also run the risk of upholding practices that privilege the same students who have traditionally succeeded in high school and college. In an interview for the blog "Literacy Junkie," Cornelius Minor, lead staff developer at Teachers College Reading and Writing Project and author of *We Got This: Equity, Access, and the Quest to Be Who Our Students Need Us to Be* (2018), notes the inherent injustice of teaching to the status quo: "The biggest thing to know as an anti-oppressive educator is that the way things have always been done has gotten us where we are now, and that's not okay."

Rhetoric professor Vershawn Ashanti Young made a similar point about the importance of teaching for change in his Call for Proposals for the 2019 Convention of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), the premier professional organization for scholars of writing studies. As program chair, Young invited colleagues to share "communication pedagogies that open possibilities, many of them yet unknown."

Young is one of the coauthors of *Other People's English: Code-Meshing, Code-Switching, and African American Literacy* (2018). He has also written teaching guides on helping students use code-meshing (i.e., blending standard and undervalued language codes) to create an authentic voice in academic speaking and writing. His code-meshing 2019 Call for Proposals—in it, he writes, "Ahm talkin bout buttressing the public good"—is a compelling demonstration of the power of rhetorical agility. It also stands as a critical reminder to teachers that academic language conventions aren't set in stone.

Admittedly, it can be challenging to be in perpetual learner mode. How often I wish the IT department at my institution would just pick one course management system and stick with it, so I could skip the endless training modules.

But I believe educating students for compliance carries even greater drawbacks: the job that never materializes or that turns out to be not at all what you expected or that undergoes radical changes midway through your career. Think of some of the resistant responses to change you've heard before:

> "But we've always done it this way!"
>
> "That's not what I signed up for."
>
> "I'm too old to go back to school now."
>
> "We just need to get things back to the way they used to be."

These aren't the reactions to change that lead to personal fulfillment and flourishing organizations and communities.

There are two student responses to unfamiliar tasks or content that are especially concerning to me: (1) "I don't know why I never learned this," and (2) "That's *not* how I learned this."

Both responses limit students' ability to adapt to new situations: the first, by attributing the unfamiliarity to a deficiency in the students' preparation, so that they feel they just aren't ready (and perhaps don't belong); and the second, by resisting any changes to the "rules" or methods the students previously mastered in their education.

This isn't just a problem in ELA classes. A professor in kinesiology I know described the challenges new students have when asked to design a physical therapy program for patients with particular needs and conditions. He shared that students often struggle with being told, "Here are your tools; you figure out what's needed," instead of being given step-by-step instructions for completing the assignment. All students need adaptive problem-solving skills and a spirit of resourcefulness. A rhetorical mindset helps learners tweak and troubleshoot their approach to meet the demands of new situations.

Teaching for transfer is teaching for change.

Lessons Learned

Learning more about rhetoric and transfer of learning helped me rethink my prescriptive approach. While I still show students what academic brainwork looks like, I now do this kind of modeling as part of the inquiry process, so that by the time I'm assessing students' summative work, I'm reading their writing, not my own.

I've also grown more aware of the way my approach to writing instruction impacts my students' approach to reading. Transfer of learning naturally occurs between reading and writing. If I teach students to follow generic formulas in their own writing, I'm encouraging them to expect these formulas in the texts they read—an expectation sure to be frustrated by the many real-world texts that don't include two parts commentary to every one part evidence.

The take-away: Teaching for transfer prepares students to navigate change successfully; teaching formulas sets students up to be frustrated with change.

Classroom Activity: Writers Two Ways

To show students the kind of situational changes they'll be called on to navigate in their future lives, I share several examples of rhetorical style makeovers: instances in which writers make different language choices in response to different needs. Studying writers "two ways" makes clear the rhetorical adaptability that's the basis for transferrable literacy skills. The following activities also help students understand transfer as an act of transformation.

DEBORAH TANNEN TWO WAYS: TRADE BOOK VS. SCHOLARLY ARTICLE

Consider the following two passages by sociolinguist Deborah Tannen. The first excerpt is from a *New York Times* bestseller, and the second is from a scholarly article. Same writer, different contexts and purposes. Comparing and contrasting these two texts can help students see how Tannen adapts her style to suit the interests, values, and expectations of the particular audiences she's addressing.

Excerpt 1: from *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Communication*:

> Granted, women have lower status than men in our society. But this is not necessarily why they prefer not to make outright demands. The explanation for a woman's indirectness could just as well be her seeking connection. If you get your way as a result of having demanded it, the payoff is satisfying in terms of status: You're one-up because others are doing as you told them. But if you get your way because others happened to want the same thing, or because they offered freely, the payoff is in rapport. You're neither one-up nor one-down but happily connected to others whose wants are the same as yours. Furthermore, if indirectness is understood by both parties, then there is nothing covert about it: That a request is being made is clear. Calling an indirect communication covert reflects the view of someone for whom the direct style seems "natural" and "logical"—a view more common among men.
>
> Indirectness itself does not reflect powerlessness. It is easy to think of situations where indirectness is the prerogative of those in power. For example, a wealthy couple who know that their servants will do their bidding need not give direct orders, but can simply state wishes: The woman of the house says, "It's chilly in here," and the servant sets about raising the temperature. The man of the house says, "It's dinner time," and the servant sees about having dinner served. Perhaps the ultimate indirectness is getting someone to do something without saying anything at all: The hostess rings a bell and the maid brings the next course; or a parent enters the room where children are misbehaving and stands with hands on hips, and the children immediately stop what they're doing. (1990, 225–226)

Try this: Have your students read this passage, and then ask them what they notice about Tannen's argument and rhetorical choices. What's her main point? Why does she say, "indirectness itself does not reflect powerlessness"? How does she support her claims? Students might note that Tannen offers descriptive anecdotes: for instance, a wealthy couple who compels their servants to do their bidding simply by ringing a bell

or a parent who controls a child's behavior through an authoritative look and posture. Tannen doesn't explicitly refer to real people she's interviewed or observed, nor does she given any indication of the methods she used to gather this data—or even whether or not the examples she cites are research based. Rather, Tannen's anecdotes sound like speculations about what people *might* do based on patterns she's noticed.

This passage is further notable for its use of colloquialisms (e.g., being "one-up" or "one-down"), the second-person "you," a sentence starting with a conjunction ("But"), and unqualified generalizations (e.g., "Women have lower status than men in our society")—in other words, all the things we often tell students *not* to do in their academic writing. Tannen also doesn't use the kind of evidence, voice, or structure we typically ask high school students to use when they write a research paper. Why not?

To answer this question, students can examine another sample of Deborah Tannen's writing, this time from a peer-reviewed article published in the quarterly journal *TESOL Quarterly*. The article's title is the first clue that Tannen is writing for a different audience: "Researching Gender-Related Patterns in Classroom Discourse."

Excerpt 2:

> Ironically, although many researchers have found that men tend to interrupt women more than women interrupt men, James and Clarke (1993), surveying studies of interruption and gender, note that researchers who compared all-female to all-male conversations found a higher rate of interruption in the all-female conversations. However, these interruptions were typically supportive in nature, reinforcing the point made by the original speaker rather than wresting the floor.
>
> This brings us to further cautions that must be kept in mind whenever language is observed in action: One must take into account (a) the context in which a linguistic strategy is used, (b) the conversational style of the participants, and (c) the interaction of those styles. Furthermore, intentions and effects are not necessarily the same. For example, regardless of the speaker's intentions, the effect of an overlap can be obtrusive when used with a speaker who believes only one voice should be heard at a time—and consequently feels compelled to yield the floor—but constructive when used with a speaker who feels that two voices going at once is the sign of a lively, involved conversation—and consequently feels free to continue speaking over the overlap. (1996, 342)

Tannen's prose is still fairly accessible here (refreshingly so for an academic article), but she's clearly making different rhetorical choices from *You Just Don't Understand*. For instance, the third-person "one" has replaced the second-person "you," creating a

more formal style. Even Tannen's use of the first-person "us" is more academic and precise than in the first passage because here she's directly addressing an insider audience; Tannen really does mean "*we* sociolinguists and teachers of English to speakers of other languages." Tannen's language is now more technical, her structure more methodical (e.g., using lettering to order key points). The use of passive voice (e.g., "language is observed") further depersonalizes her description of language study, and her generic references to "a speaker" instead of a detailed sketch of individuals (e.g., a wealthy couple, a disapproving parent) give the passage an objective, empirical quality. While there is still some casual diction in the passage (e.g., "two voices going at once"), Tannen's distinctive, personal voice is subdued here, and the reader has the sense that any competent sociolinguist could have conducted this research and produced the same results.

After comparing and contrasting the two passages, my students and I explore the following questions:

1. Which text is the research paper and which is the popular trade book?
2. Which one is written for a scholarly audience and which one is for people looking to improve their personal and professional relationships?
3. Which one is meant to inform and entertain and which one seeks to further the knowledge base in a specific academic field?
4. Which one could you find in a self-help section in a bookstore?
5. Which one would have an abstract?
6. Why does Tannen write in these different styles?

Here's how an eighth-grade girl from Monterey County responded to these questions:

1. "The second paper is the research paper, the first is the book."
2. "The second is for scholars, and the first is for people/couples improving their communication skills."
3. "The first is to inform, the second is to research."
4. "The first."
5. "The second."
6. "To appeal to and reach different audiences."

The conversation we have helps students to see that Tannen hasn't forgotten the rules of good academic writing in *You Just Don't Understand*. On the contrary, she's demonstrating her superb ability to do what the Common Core calls for all college- and career-ready students to do: "produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization,

and style are *appropriate to task, purpose, and audience*" (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4) (emphasis added). Real-world writing means we're constantly changing how we write to suit the needs of particular rhetorical situations.

This can be a transformative idea to high school students who might at first be inclined to judge the excerpt from *You Just Don't Understand* as "bad writing," especially if they're used to more formulaic approaches like the five-paragraph essay. A few more examples of rhetorical style makeovers can drive this point home with high school students. When I discuss these examples with my classes, students say things like, "It doesn't even seem like the same writer." That "ah ha" moment leads to the realization that they, too, can develop this kind of versatility.

By the way, I've also had the experience where a student reads the two passages by Tannen and says they're exactly the same. That might be your starting place. If your students are new to rhetorical analysis, you'll probably need to offer extra support for reading and annotating these kind of passages (a "Think Aloud" works great). Students may need more help understanding the concepts of audience, purpose, context, and genre, too. (See Chapters 3, 7, and 8 for more on these concepts.)

One ninth grader I worked with, for instance, said both passages were written in the same "formal" genre with "the sole purpose to inform" and that the only difference between the two texts is what they're talking about.

When students only write what they're told to write, it's little wonder that they see all rhetorical situations as the same. Students need extended practice making their own choices in response to diverse rhetorical situations.

Developing Students' Rhetorical Sensitivity

For the following set of paired texts, ask students to describe how the writer's diction, syntax, structure, and tone change from the first excerpt to the second—and how these changes reflect the demands of each text's unique audience, purpose, and occasion.

LEON PANETTA TWO WAYS: NEWSPAPER COLUMN VS. LEGISLATION

Lawyer, walnut farmer, and former Central Intelligence Agency Director Leon Panetta was President Barack Obama's Secretary of Defense from 2011 to 2013. The first sample of Panetta's writing comes from a column published on September 9, 2001, in the *Monterey County Herald*.

Excerpt 1: from "The Price of 'Spin' Versus the 'Truth'" by Leon E. Panetta

> Huey Long—the infamous Louisiana politician of the Thirties—once promised a certain constituency in an election campaign that he would deliver a public works project to them if elected. When he failed to deliver the project after he was elected, he was asked why. His reply: "I lied!"

Long's admission was brutally frank. It was the kind of honesty that worked well for Long. Why is it so difficult to work for many of those in public office today?

The typical strategy is to tell people what consultants and pollsters say the public wants to hear and when the facts prove differently, to keep repeating the same words in the hope that repetition somehow will make it right. But there is a terrible price to be paid for this political "spin" game—the lost trust of the people.

Panetta's personal voice is strongly present throughout this column, as are the rhetorical strategies common to op-ed pieces: anecdote, dialogue, simple diction, short sentences, and forceful claims. It's an emotionally engaging piece with a human touch.

Now look at Excerpt 2, also written by Leon Panetta.

H.R. 5973 (101st): Central Coast National Marine Sanctuary Act

Sponsor: Rep. Leon Panetta [D-CA17, 1993-1993]

Introduced: Oct 27, 1990

Referred to Committee: Oct 27, 1990

A BILL

To designate the waters of the central coast of California as a national marine sanctuary.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the 'Central Coast National Marine Sanctuary Act'.

SEC. 2. CONGRESSIONAL FINDINGS.

The Congress finds that—

(1) the waters of the Central Coast have special national cultural, educational, research, and economic significance, because of their—

(A) unique physical characteristics, including major permanent upwellings and current interactions located in the Californian transition zone between the Oregonian and Californian climatic provinces and its interrelationship with the Nipomo Dunes-Point Sal National Natural Landmark,

(B) unique ecological and biological characteristics and productivity, including the presence of many endangered or threatened species of marine mammals, birds, and reptiles and a mixture of fish, mammal, shellfish, and plant species not found elsewhere in the Pacific Basin, and

> (C) important economic values, including commercial and recreational fishing and tourism; [. . .]

The Bill concludes that "the designation and treatment of the waters of the Central Coast as a national marine sanctuary is necessary for the preservation and protection of this unique area of the national marine environment as an area of national significance." Nowhere does Panetta, native son of Monterey, make a personal appearance in this text, and indeed, it would be inappropriate and disruptive for him to do so. The ethos of the Bill is the voice of the United States Congress, and the rhetorical choices Panetta made in authoring this legislation are rigidly constrained by legal protocol and parliamentary procedure.

Panetta's versatility as a writer offers a powerful example of how different communicative functions call for different language forms.

Underlying the stylistic transformations achieved by Deborah Tannen and Leon Panetta is a deep understanding of how language functions in specific contexts. Both writers are keenly aware of their meaning-making options—that is, their "available means of persuasion"—in the rhetorical situations they face. If we want our students to develop this same expert knowledge and intellectual agility, we need to help them think and communicate rhetorically. Formulas and prescriptions don't lead to deep and transferrable learning. As the National Research Council dryly notes in *Education for Life and Work* (2012), "If the goal of instruction is to prepare students to accomplish tasks or solve problems exactly like the ones addressed during instruction, then deeper learning is not needed" (70).

See the activity directions and student sample that follow.

Developing Students' Rhetorical Sensitivity

SAME WRITER, DIFFERENT CHOICES

Directions to Students: **Compare and contrast two different texts by the same writer. What do you notice? Start by recording your observations in a Venn Diagram. Then answer the questions that follow in your notes. Consider the writer's word choice, sentence structure, tone, and use of genre conventions in each text.**

1. **What do you notice about the choices this writer has made in each text? What are the similarities? What are the differences?**
2. **Why do you think the writer has made these choices?**
3. **What do these choices tell you about the writer's audiences and purposes?**
4. **What do they tell you about the genres the writer is writing in?**
5. **When have you had to change how you write to meet the needs of different situations?**

Conclusion: Facilitating Rhetorical Decision Making

Facilitating rhetorical decision making is challenging work that calls for a delicate balance between support and freedom. Students want to make their own choices about their writing. They thrive when they act as self-directed learners who establish their own goals, pursue their own interests, and make their own mistakes. *And* they can feel frustrated and mystified if we repeatedly say, "It's up to you," when they ask us how to complete a task. Transparency and choice don't always make easy bedfellows.

I've learned that I can lighten the load for students, especially younger students, by narrowing the range of choices they have to make at one time. This keeps them moving forward in their growth as writers and thinkers without making them feel like we've abandoned them to find their way out of the woods alone.

I'll have more to say in later chapters about the specific kinds of choices students have to make when they write rhetorically, but for now, I want to note that we don't have to present students with the full smorgasbord of options on day one. Extensive practice and coaching in a few key aspects of rhetorical decision making—like how to choose the best resources of language or the best evidence—will go a long way toward shifting students' thinking about writing and writers.

The point is that, ultimately, we're preparing students for situations that don't come with teacher scaffolds or directions. We need to keep our eyes on that important future.

CHAPTER TWO

Teaching Writing for Transfer

Successful writing transfer occurs when a writer can transform rhetorical knowledge and rhetorical awareness into performance. Students facing a new and difficult rhetorical task draw on previous knowledge and strategies, and when they do that, they must transform or repurpose that prior knowledge, if only slightly.

—ELON STATEMENT ON WRITING TRANSFER

We do not teach for what is. We teach for what can be.

—CORNELIUS MINOR

While the other chapters in this book target rhetorical writing skills, this chapter offers extra support for instructional planning and delivery. If you've been reading about taking a rhetorical approach to writing instruction and thinking, *OK, how do I actually do this?*, then this chapter is for you. And if you've been hearing a lot about the importance of transfer of learning and want to know more, then this chapter is also for you.

First, I want to make a quick pitch for teaching for transfer. You'll find a planning guide at the end of this chapter that can help you create your own rhetorical writing curriculum, but for now I want to invite you to consider the why behind the how. After all, knowing the why is a big part of what makes transfer possible. And if you're going to repurpose

anything from this book to make it fit your own school context, it's going to help to know the rationale behind the approach.

Here's my argument in a nutshell: If deep learning is the goal, then we need to teach writing for transfer, not compliance.

Understanding Transfer of Learning

Transfer of learning is the application of prior knowledge and skills to new tasks and contexts. It's the holy grail we seek as educators, the answer to the perennial questions of "When am I ever going to use this again?" and "Why do I need to know this?"

When I taught at Buena Park High School, I was dismayed by the number of repeat students I had who apparently forgot much of what I'd taught them before: those seniors, for instance, that I'd also taught as tenth graders who no longer used the note-taking or prewriting strategies they'd learned in my sophomore class. Such experiences are always humbling. I remember asking Marisela, an honors student I'd taught as a freshman, why she wasn't using in-text citations in the poetry analysis she was writing for my junior English class when she had mastered MLA style so beautifully two years before. "Oh, you wanted us to do that?" she said. "You didn't tell us."

I came to see that my students were waiting for me to tell them whether their prior learning was relevant or not. They weren't making the connections for themselves because they saw each new class as an idiosyncratic game with its own set of arbitrary rules—and the teacher as the sole and exclusive rule maker. Gerald Graff uses the term "the volleyball effect" (*Clueless in Academe* 2003, 27) to describe the way many students bounce superficially from course to course and teacher to teacher without internalizing the intellectual habits that would help them relate one learning experience to the next.

In our efforts to teach for transfer, there's a reason our reach often exceeds our grasp. It can be really difficult to repurpose prior learning in relevant ways. For students to use what they've previously learned in new situations, they need to be able to do the following:

- Compare and contrast contexts (including the people and places involved)
- Adjust their problem-solving skills and communication strategies as needed and appropriate

In other words, they need to know what to tweak, what to invent, and what to let go. They have to become, in rhetorician Rebecca S. Nowacek's words, "agents of integration" (2011, 3), master problem solvers who intentionally seek opportunities to connect their learning across different courses and content areas. All this takes sophisticated rhetorical knowledge and flexible rhetorical literacy skills.

I want to make an important distinction here: The kind of transfer I'm talking about in this book goes beyond just doing things like using the same vocabulary strategy in multiple classes. Educators sometimes talk about transferrable skills as if these are universal competencies that are relevant in any context or situation. We see this with writing models that claim to be all-purpose solutions to students' writing difficulties—one method to rule them all.

That approach to transfer doesn't do much to develop students' situational awareness or conditional knowledge. Repeatedly using the same skill is different from transforming that skill for new purposes.

Educational psychologist Robert E. Haskell (2001) defines transfer of learning as "our use of past learning when learning something new and the *application* of that learning to both similar and *new* situations" (xiii)—abilities Haskell sees as the basis of human compassion and reasoning (xiv, 64). Other scholars have described transfer of learning as a way to help students improve their work beyond a single class or content area (Nelson Graff 2010, 376) or to understand the limits of universality (Downs and Wardle 2007, 552–553). These definitions share the common idea that, for students to successfully transfer their learning from one assignment, class, discipline, or even institution to another, they must recognize—at some level—the similarities and differences between their past and present situations.

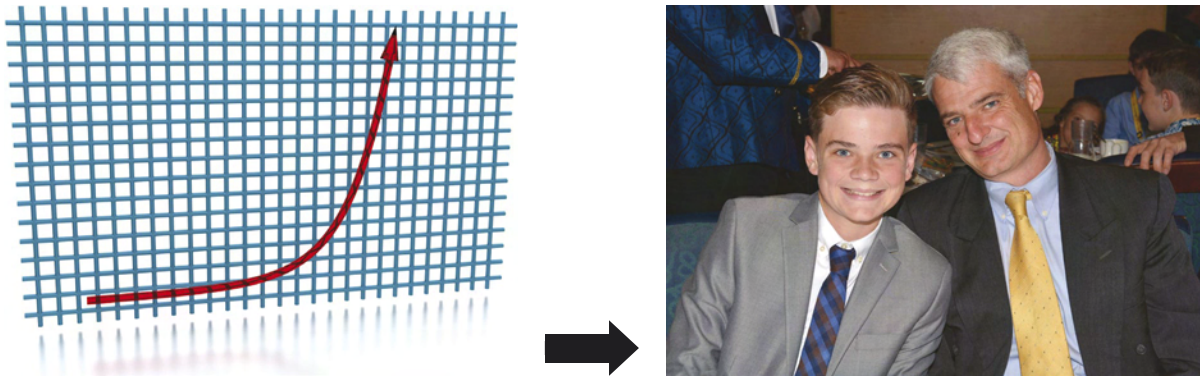
For instance, a college freshman who successfully wrote a literary analysis in her twelfth-grade English class will likely be able to transfer her knowledge of how to support claims with evidence to a similar assignment in her first-year composition course. A more challenging kind of transfer happens when this same student can then modify what she knows about evaluating literary evidence to suit the demands of a history paper. In these examples, the student's deep knowledge of *how* to analyze and compose texts is the key to transfer of learning.

We teach for transfer by developing our students' ability to think rhetorically.

Transfer also happens when students have a deep knowledge of disciplinary concepts. A mathematics student who understands that a function is a way to describe a relationship between two things can metaphorically apply the principles of exponential and linear functions to nonmathematical relationships—like the way a bond between father and son increases in intensity over time or the way the steady loyalty of an old friend provides constant support (Figure 2.1a and Figure 2.1b). An apt ability to extract generalizations of this kind is the alchemy that turns science into poetry.

In *Future Wise*, David N. Perkins says, "*Transfer* means that the learner acquires knowledge and skills in one setting and carries them over to other settings that may be very different [. . .]" (2014, 111) (original emphasis).

Transfer thus entails not just an ability to see similarities in different situations but also, as Elizabeth Wardle notes, an ability to "appropriately *transform and expand* knowledge so it works in a new situation" (2009, 770) (emphasis added).



(a) (b)

FIGURE 2.1
Applying exponential functions to father-son relationships is an example of transfer as transformation.

I want to invite you to take a step back and consider the intellectual agility required for our students to successfully negotiate all the different literacy sites and situations they'll encounter in the twenty-first-century world—and what kind of academic preparation they'll need to meet those challenges. It's a lot, right? As ELA teachers, we own a major piece of this real estate. We work with diverse and complex texts on a daily basis. Helping students read, write, and think across contexts is what we do.

The Goal of Transfer

We teach for transfer because we want to support students' growth from novice to expert writers. Depth, mastery, expertise, independence, self-direction—whatever we want to call it, there's a stage when learners shift from "fake it 'til you make it" to really owning their intellectual processes. This doesn't mean they work alone, but it does mean they're not overly reliant on someone else's instructions or authority. They can think on their feet and make their own choices. They know what to do when. That's when transfer happens.

But transfer, or to be more precise, teaching for transfer, is also a catalyst for deeper learning. In *Visible Literacy*, Doug Fisher, Nancy Frey, and John Hattie explain that transfer is "both a goal of learning and a mechanism for propelling learning" (Fisher, Frey, and Hattie 2016, 107). Teaching writing for transfer sets students on the path toward independence and supports them in becoming expert learners.

Keeping an eye on that developmental continuum is important. Much of writing instruction focuses on introducing students to skills and strategies. We teach things like RAFT (**R**ole, **A**udience, **F**ormat, **T**opic), or a six-step writing process, because we're apprenticing students in the practices of expert writers. But transfer is ultimately about the destination, not the starting point.

Knowledge Needed for Transfer of Learning

Several big ideas are emerging from the research on transfer of learning that have important implications for teachers. The most important is probably this: If we want students to apply their learning after they leave our classrooms, we have to explicitly teach for transfer.

That involves doing some things that we may not already be doing, such as developing students' procedural, conceptual, and conditional knowledge or providing "expansive framing." If *conditional knowledge* and *expansive framing* are relatively new terms to you, then we have that in common. The scholarship on teaching for transfer has sparked some of the newest learning I've experienced in my quarter century as a teacher. But it's also been some of the most important and exciting.

I'll talk about what it means to provide expansive framing a bit later in this chapter. For now, let's take a look at three interrelated types of knowledge that are especially important for transfer of learning (Figure 2.2):

1. Procedural knowledge: knowing *how* to do something
2. Conceptual knowledge: understanding the concepts, principles, and theories behind *why* we do something
3. Conditional knowledge: knowing *what* to do *when*

To make our prior learning work in new situations, we need to know how, why, and when to repurpose it. Of these three types of knowledge, we tend to do the best job helping students develop procedural knowledge. The other two can be more of a challenge.

But this is precisely the knowledge students need to break their dependence on rules and formulas. Let's look at each type more closely.

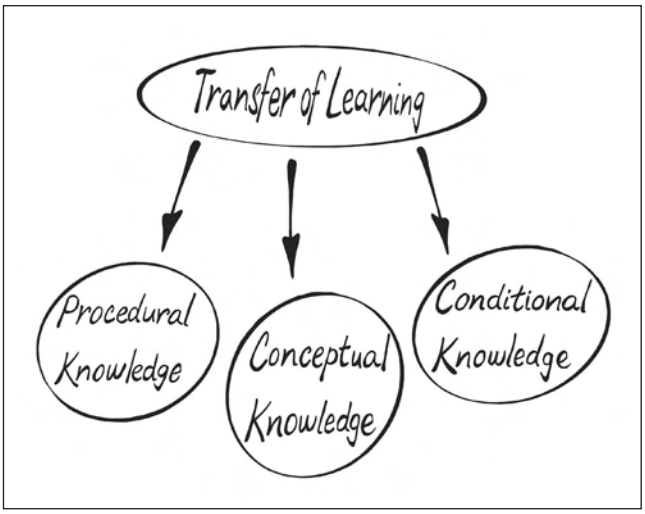


FIGURE 2.2
Knowledge needed for transfer of learning

Developing Procedural Knowledge

We've done a pretty good job over the past fifty years teaching students about the writing process. Students tend to arrive on the job or a college campus already knowing quite a bit about prewriting, drafting, sharing, and revising. They understand that writing is a process with different stages of development.

What we perhaps haven't done as well is help students surface the procedural knowledge that guides other kinds of writing moves or tasks. Because the writing process is sometimes taught as a universal model, students can have difficulty articulating other things that they're doing as writers or how to modify the writing process to produce different kinds of texts. I think we also need to be honest about the way some of our writing scaffolds—especially overly prescriptive templates and formulas—have interfered with the development of students' procedural knowledge. The process that many students use (as my son has pointed out to me) is simply to wait for the teacher to tell them what to do.

The research on transfer tells us that students need conscious awareness of the processes they use for different academic tasks in order to strategically adapt those procedures to new contexts or classes. This could be as simple as modifying the prewriting strategies a student previously used to compose a poem to write a short story instead. Or it could be as complicated as drawing on the research methods learned in a social science class to design a community service project. Procedural knowledge is "the ability to apply conceptual knowledge to new problems by using the discipline's characteristic methods of thinking" (Bean, Chappell, and Gillam 2014, 4)—it is, as George Hillocks says, "how, when, and for what purpose to use procedures that are the province of that art" (1995, 124). In his review of experimental studies on writing pedagogy, Hillocks notes that "the treatments with the largest gains all focus on teaching procedural knowledge, knowledge of how to do things" (1995, 223).

In the activities that follow, I share ways to help students surface their procedural knowledge.

Acronyms like SOAPS, RAFT, OSCAR, and so on, are procedural scaffolds; they help novice writers do things like analyze rhetorical situations and revise their writing. Experienced writers, on the other hand, have their own flexible processes for communicating across contexts.

HOW DO YOU KNOW AND WHAT DID YOU DO?

"How do you know?" and "What did you do?" are two of the most important questions we can ask students. The purpose of this next activity is to help students reflect on these questions. Students first read an article (in this example, the news article "How Well Do You Wash Your Hands?") and summarize the main idea of the article in a sentence or two. Then they reflect on their thinking process by describing how they identified the main idea and what they had to do to write the summary.

The examples that follow come from a class of fifth graders.

How Do You Know?

Directions to Students: **Read "How Well Do You Wash Your Hands? New Machine Will Tell You." Then summarize the main idea of the article in a sentence or two.**

Now reflect on your thinking process: How did you know that was the main idea? Write a short paragraph describing what you had to do to write the summary.

Here's what the students said:

"The main idea of this article is people should always take their time with washing their hands."

"After reading those paragraphs were all about hand washing. So I just looked at what the article mentioned the most. I know that the topic mentioned the most is always the main idea."

"The main idea was that people aren't washing their hands and the device would help to sanitize things better. I knew that was the main idea because that was the main problem and solution. I thought of all of the things in the article and then what was the most important."

"Two engineers had this idea of making a device that shows how well you wash your hands. Having read this article very well two times I rehearsed the shortened version in my head and wrote it."

Another student mentioned that she looked at the title for clues. Still another said he thought the first, second, or last sentence is the main idea. And one student said she reread the article to check her opinion.

The point of the reflection is to get students thinking about their own process, in their own words. What's important is the metacognition. If students are confused or need more help, you can ask them what they had to do to write whatever it is they've written. What choices did they make? How did they decide how to write their sentence or sentences? The goal of this kind of reflection is to move students toward greater independence as thinkers, readers, and writers.

And if they say, "I don't know what I did," that's helpful information, too. It means they don't yet have conscious control over their meaning-making choices, so developing that explicit procedural knowledge can be a helpful instructional goal. By the way, a lot of my first-year college students also struggle when asked these kinds of questions. They're not used to having to unpack their own thinking.

Metacognitive Prompts

When we teach for transfer, we make extra instructional space for the practice of reflecting on learning. We especially want to invite students to think about how they handled

any roadblocks they encountered. The metacognitive prompts that follow move students toward being self-directed problem solvers.

- What language choices did you make? What organizational choices did you make?
- Why did you write it that way?
- How did you make those choices? What were your other options?
- What worked? What didn't? What might you do differently next time?
- What did you learn about your writing process?
- How did you deal with any difficulties or obstacles you encountered?

See the discussion of descriptive outlining in Chapter 7 for additional ways to help your students think about what they are doing as writers.

Developing Conceptual Knowledge

If you have a deep understanding of rhetorical concepts and the principles of effective communication, you don't need an acronym or template to help you remember how to write.

Deep conceptual knowledge is needed to appropriately apply learning in new contexts. When it comes to written communication, the rhetorical concepts of audience, purpose, genre, and context have transformative power. A deep understanding of these concepts changes how students read and write. The Elon Statement on Writing Transfer (2013) recommends that teachers build students' conceptual knowledge by "constructing writing curricula and classes that focus on study of and practice with concepts that enable students to analyze expectations for writing and learning within specific contexts. These include rhetorically-based concepts (such as genre, purpose, and audience)."

I'll offer a close look at each of these concepts in subsequent chapters, but for now, it's probably helpful to keep in mind the role conceptual knowledge plays in learning and transfer. The National Research Council (NRC) reports that "organizing learning into a conceptual framework allows for greater 'transfer'; that is, it allows the student to apply what was learned in new situations and to learn related information more quickly" (2000, 17). The NRC likewise identifies deep conceptual knowledge as a distinguishing feature of expertise, noting that "experts' command of concepts shapes their understanding of new information: it allows them to see patterns, relationships, or discrepancies that are not apparent to novices" (2000, 16–17).

Here's what we can expect to happen: We introduce a complex concept such as genre to students, they write down a definition and examples, and we think, "OK, they get it." And then students start to work with that concept, and we realize they don't get it. Not yet. Building conceptual knowledge takes time and support. We can expect those surface understandings to differ significantly from the deep, internalized learning students achieve through extended practice analyzing and applying a concept.

THRESHOLD CONCEPTS FOR WRITING TRANSFER

I think it's also helpful to note a special category of concepts that researchers have described as "threshold concepts." These have been closely linked to transfer of learning. In the Editors' Preface to *Overcoming Barriers to Student Understanding: Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge*, Jan H. F. Meyer and Ray Land describe a threshold concept "as akin to a portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something" (2006, xv). Threshold concepts represent the transformative understandings needed for continued progression and participation in a field.

Think of a time in your educational journey when you first felt like you were starting to make that leap from novice to expert. This could be an experience you had as a student or a teacher, when, after an extended period of struggle and confusion, you finally felt like you were starting to connect the dots and see the big picture. Think of that moment when you no longer felt like an amateur "trying to fake it 'til you make it" and instead felt like an expert at home in a community of experts. That memory that you're recalling is a memory of a threshold crossing.

This idea of threshold concepts is important for moving students from an introductory or superficial understanding toward deeper learning because it explains why students might get stuck at the introductory stage. Some concepts really are more difficult to learn than others and will take extended time, effort, support, and practice to master. According to Meyer and Land (2006, xv), threshold concepts are generally

- transformative
- irreversible
- troublesome
- counterintuitive or destabilizing

To cross a learning threshold, we have to step outside of our comfort zone. Meyer and Land write that "such transformation entails a letting go of earlier, comfortable positions and encountering less familiar and sometimes disconcerting new territory" (2006, xv). Developing writers, for example, might find it a challenge to let go of the familiar pro/con essay structure as they shift from binary thinking to engaging and synthesizing multiple perspectives.

A rhetorical concept such as genre acts as a threshold concept when students' basic understanding of this concept (i.e., a genre is a fixed category of writing) conflicts with the deeper understanding needed to progress toward expertise and mastery (i.e., genres are flexible, socially situated forms that have evolved to accomplish particular communicative purposes).

In *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies*, a group of thirty-three leading writing scholars identifies several concepts that are "critical for anyone

who wants to help learners write more effectively, whatever their disciplines or professions may be" (Adler-Kassner and Wardle 2015, 5). These include the following ideas:

- Writing addresses, invokes, and/or creates audiences.
- Writing expresses and shares meaning to be reconstructed by the reader.
- Writing enacts and creates identities and ideologies. (2015, v–vi)

These transformative concepts from the field of writing studies might at first seem to be more than your students need to take on at this moment, but I'd like you to consider how these big ideas can help students think critically about written communication, especially if we turn these into student-friendly principles:

- Writing speaks to and shapes us as readers.
- Meaning is created by both readers and writers.
- Writing reflects and shapes who we are and what we believe.

Conceptual knowledge needed for writing transfer includes an understanding of the principles that guide effective communication in different contexts.

"It Depends": Developing Conditional Knowledge

Paying attention to changing conditions is essential for successfully negotiating the various twists, turns, and challenges we encounter in different situations. This is often what's missing from writing instruction. We say that writing is decision making, but students often don't know how to make the best choices in a particular situation. If you ask your students if they know when to use paraphrase instead of direct quotation or when it's OK to use contractions, they'll probably say that they don't. These aren't questions we typically ask student writers.

An understanding of rhetorical concepts such as genre, audience, and purpose helps students to conditionalize their knowledge of writing, that is, to understand "the contexts in which it is useful" (National Research Council 2000, 43). But conditional knowledge isn't needed just for effective communication. Conditional knowledge is important in all academic content areas and, indeed, in probably all areas of our lives (Figure 2.3).

FIGURE 2.3
Conditions impact our choices and actions.

Knowing when to apply a particular formula to solve a problem is an essential part of mathematical competence. In baseball, knowing whether to pitch a fast ball or a curve ball depends upon the type of hitter at the plate and the situation in the game (Figure 2.4). Drivers need to know how to adjust their speed and following distance in response to road conditions. And a nurse needs to know what kind of care is most relevant to a patient's condition.

FIGURE 2.4
Knowing what to do when is essential knowledge in baseball.

But students rarely hear their teachers talk about the conditions under which their writing advice is relevant. Teachers often say things like "use descriptive details" or "avoid contractions" as if doing this will always automatically improve our writing. As a result, students often internalize a fixed set of precepts about "good" writing. If you asked your students how to write a good speech, for example, here's what you might hear them say:

"Use big words."

"Start with a story."

"Use humor and emotion."

But when is using big words a good idea? What does a writer need to know about the audience, genre, and context before making this determination? These types of "context-free rules" (Benner 1982, 403) can interfere with students' performance in situations in which the rules do not apply.

John Warner, author of *Why They Can't Write* and *The Writer's Practice*, shares a similar observation from his own experience as a college writing instructor that speaks to the limited opportunities students have to develop conceptual and conditional knowledge: "When I ask students what they've been told about writing, they can list rule after rule. When I ask where these rules come from, why these rules are rules, they shrug" (2018, 4).

Knowing the contexts and purposes of writing "rules"—or better yet, writing choices and principles—empowers students to answer those "What should I do?" questions for themselves.

The NCTE position statement on Professional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing notes that "even within more academic settings like college courses, the characteristics of good writing vary among disciplines . . ." (National Council of Teachers of English, 2016)

Experts have deep conditional knowledge. In *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School*, the National Research Council (NRC) explains that experts' knowledge "reflects contexts of applicability: that is, the knowledge is 'conditionalized' on a set of circumstances" (2000, 31). Experts, the NRC notes, are "good at retrieving the knowledge that is relevant to a particular task" (2000, 43).

Novices, on the other hand, might know how to do something but they don't yet have an understanding of the principles behind why they should do something or when they should do something different.

KNOWING WHAT TO DO WHEN

The purpose of this next activity is to help students conceptualize and conditionalize their writing knowledge.

Directions to Students: **How do you know what kinds of writing choices to make in different situations? What do you base your decisions on? In the table below, think through some of the options you have as a writer and how you know what to do when. Then identify the concepts, principles, or circumstances that guide your thinking in the space on the right.**

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN . . .	THIS DEPENDS ON . . . (*WHAT CONCEPTS, PRINCIPLES, OR CIRCUMSTANCES HELP YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO WHEN?*)
. . . to use a formal or casual style of writing?	
. . . to include citations for sources?	
. . . to paraphrase instead of quote directly?	
. . . to use MLA instead of APA or other style guide?	
. . . to refute someone else's claim?	
. . . to use a personal story to develop an argument?	
. . . to use active voice instead of passive voice?	
. . . to use contractions or slang?	
. . . to include a thesis in the introduction?	
. . . to use "I" in academic writing?	

You might want to adjust the list of options based on your students' writing knowledge, for instance, omitting the item on passive voice if this is an unfamiliar term. You could also start by making the activity a checklist and just asking students *if* they know how to figure out what to do in each case.

If we give students a set of writing instructions to follow (e.g., "Be sure to capitalize the pronoun 'I' and the first letter of a proper noun"), we need to help students also understand the conditions under which those instructions are relevant. It's important to follow conventions of capitalization in much academic and workplace writing, but not in digitalk or in some poetry and critical theory. We empower students when we help them understand the rationale for written language conventions—for instance, how capitalization draws attention to the status of a word or how using lowercase letters when capitalization is expected (e.g., "one day anyone died i guess" or bell hooks) can cause readers to reexamine their assumptions and priorities. Unpacking the social and rhetorical work performed by conventions prepares students to critically examine the relationship between language and power.

If you use Graff and and Birkenstein's (2014) popular sentence templates from *They Say, I Say*, you can challenge your students to conditionalize their knowledge of writers' moves. For instance, you can ask students, "How do you know when to agree and disagree simultaneously?" or "How do you know when to name your naysayers?" Invite students to consider the circumstances under which these might be effective moves.

The Importance of Expansive Framing

The messages we send students matter. If I tell students, "We're doing this because we have to do this," I'm telling them to focus on the short term and not to worry about the long term. And if I give students a formula instead of encouraging them to make their own choices about content and structure based on their assessment of the rhetorical situation, I'm training them in compliance rather than educating them for a changing world. How we frame instruction significantly affects our students' perception of the value of what they're learning and of their roles as learners.

Teaching for transfer requires the kind of expansive framing that will help students see the big picture while they focus on challenging tasks in the present moment. Students need to know that they are learning to write rhetorically so that they can be informed citizens, effective communicators and problem solvers, and caring community and family members. When we provide this framing, we tell students, "Where you've been, and where you are, and where you're going are all important and connected."

In "How Does Expansive Framing Promote Transfer?" educational researchers Randi A. Engle, Diane P. Lam, Xenia S. Meyer, and Sarah E. Nix (2012) discuss two types of instructional framing, or ways of setting up learning expectations: expansive framing and bounded framing. Whereas expansive framing encourages students to see multiple applications for learning, bounded framing ties learning to a single task, test, or class.

As teachers, we're providing instructional framing anytime we introduce a lesson, establish a learning goal, or assign a task. We can frame an activity as something students just have to do to earn points or as an aspect of lifelong intellectual and professional growth. Frames create focus (see Figure 2.5). They say, "Look here." Expansive framing encourages

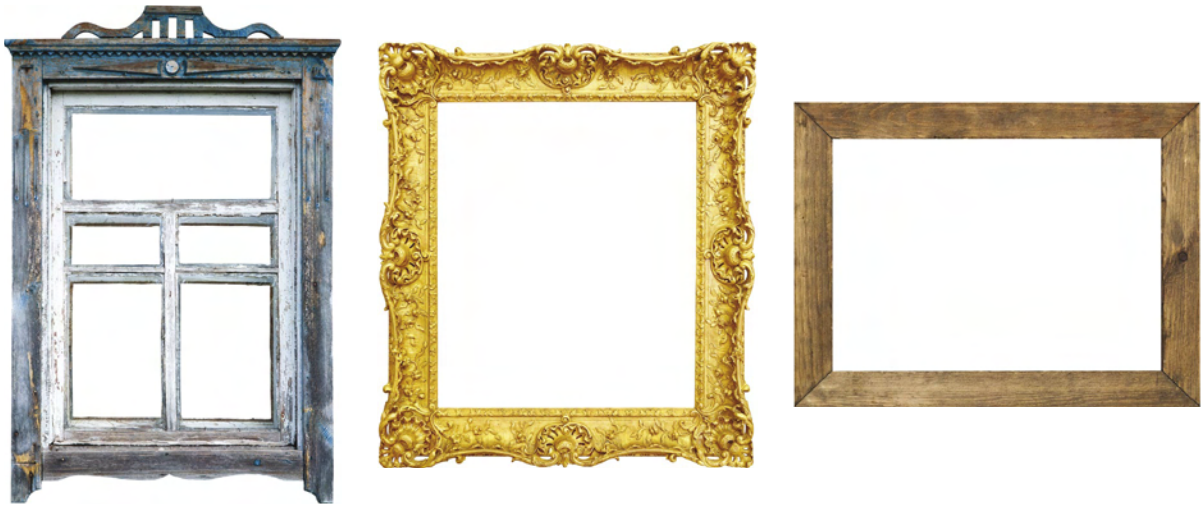


FIGURE 2.5
Frames influence how we see things.

students to focus on the broad view of learning. Bounded framing, on the other hand, directs students' gaze to the task at hand.

Engle and her coauthors note additional differences between expansive and bounded framing in their article (see Figure 2.6).

Expansive framing sets students up to be flexible and adaptive in new situations.

EXPANSIVE FRAMING	BOUNDED FRAMING
Extends learning to include the past and the future	Constrains learning solely to a short span of the present time
Extends learning to include different places	Constrains learning to a small part of the available physical space
Extends learning to include different people	Constrains learning to just a few people
Encourages students to use what they learn later	Discourages students from later using what they learn
Positions learners as active participants in a learning context where they serve as authors of their own ideas and respondents to the ideas of others	Positions learners on the periphery of a learning context, where, rather than sharing their own ideas, they are expected to report on their learning about the ideas of others, such as those presented by a text or a teacher
Encourages students to actively engage with the learning throughout their lives	Suggests the lesson is a one-time event

FIGURE 2.6
Expansive framing vs. bounded framing (See Appendix A for additional aspects of learning that can be framed.) *SOURCE: ADAPTED FROM RANDI A. ENGLE ET AL. (2012)*

I'd like to add two more distinctions that I've discovered for myself:

- Bounded framing maintains the status quo while expansive framing prepares students to be change agents.
- Bounded framing is about surviving while expansive framing is about thriving.

After considering these differences, see whether you think the following teacher comments sound like expansive or bounded framing:

"You have to know this for the test."

"This is what we have to do to meet the state standards."

"I don't like this either. It's boring. But it's required."

"Every senior has to complete a senior project to graduate."

Bounded, right? Most of us chafe at the sound of narrow mandates like these (even if we've said them ourselves). Bounded framing reinforces our authority as teachers and grade givers. It can also impede rhetorical thinking. That double impediment to agency and transfer is implicit in the NCTE's concerns with instruction that narrows students' experience with writing. In its position statement on Professional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing, NCTE identifies two problematic practices: (1) writing "only to prove that they did something they were asked to do" and (2) learning only "a single type of writing" that they are led to believe "will suffice in all situations" (2016).

Try this: For each of the following teaching scenarios, consider how writing instruction might be framed for transfer. What is the bigger picture we want students to see? How can we expand students' view of the value of what they're learning? Beyond a specific task or class, when are students going to use these skills, knowledge, or dispositions again?

TEACHING SCENARIO	EXPANSIVE FRAMING: WHAT RATIONALE COULD WE PROVIDE FOR WHY THIS LEARNING IS VALUABLE IN MULTIPLE CONTEXTS?
A lesson in which students study the key features of a writing rubric in preparation for conducting holistic scoring of an essay	?
A lesson on different types of thesis statements common to school writing, such as the three-part thesis, the open thesis, or the integrated thesis	?
A lesson on common paragraph structures in academic writing (e.g., topic sentence, evidence, commentary, evidence, commentary, concluding sentence)	?

FIGURE 2.7
Providing expansive framing

Did you come up with some ideas? Perhaps introducing the rubric study as practice in assessing rhetorical constraints and audience expectations? Or presenting the work with thesis statements and paragraph structure as a way to understand genre conventions and mentor texts? (See Figure 2.7.) This kind of expansive framing can help students see that they're learning more than just how to do schoolwork; they're developing abilities that will help them effectively assess and respond to real-world rhetorical situations.

Figure 2.8 shows some of the transferable learning that can be mined from studying a rubric.

TEACHING SCENARIO	TRANSFERABLE LEARNING
A lesson in which students study the key features of a writing rubric in preparation for conducting holistic scoring of an essay	• Understanding audience expectations and genre conventions • Understanding the values of a discourse community • Understanding that these expectations, conventions, and values can change over time

FIGURE 2.8
Teaching for transfer

Or consider this scenario: Suppose the directions for a synthesis essay require students to use at least three sources. Are there some underlying principles that can justify this direction? Are there other considerations writers need to keep in mind when deciding how many sources to cite? Now think about this: Does this direction meet a teacher need or a student need? What's the motivation for this direction? How does it relate to real-world rhetorical situations? Can the direction be revised to provide expansive framing and develop conditional knowledge?

Sometimes the attempt to provide expansive framing leads us to reconsider our instructional focus. If we can *only* come up with bounded framing for an activity, we might want to replace that activity with a learning experience that develops more portable competencies and understandings.

Students can also frame their own learning for transfer. Try sharing the following comparisons with your class (see Figure 2.9). Then ask what they notice about the differences between the bounded and expansive questions.

BOUNDED FRAMING	EXPANSIVE FRAMING
What do I have to do to get an A?	What do I want to learn how to do or do better?
Is this going to be on the test?	Why do I need to learn this? How will it help me in school, work, and life?

FIGURE 2.9
Learning for transfer

If your students find that they tend to frame their own learning in narrow ways, invite them to imagine a broader context and purpose for the skills, knowledge, and habits of mind they are developing. Encourage them to expand their thinking about the uses of education.

Remember: Frames have an important influence on the abilities and dispositions students take with them into their postsecondary lives.

Students need to see academic work as personally meaningful. Framing writing instruction for transfer helps students engage the larger value and relevance of what they're learning.

We can evaluate the transfer potential of instructional strategies by asking ourselves some honest questions:

- What habits of mind does this lesson develop?
- What are the underlying principles about inquiry, reasoning, and communication that students can extract from this lesson? Do my students know that they're learning these things? Are they developing the conditional knowledge that will help them adapt and apply this learning appropriately?
- What might this strategy look like repurposed for other tasks and contexts? What about this strategy can be transformed (not just reused)?

Framing writing instruction for transfer involves helping students see beyond the task at hand to the procedural, conceptual, and conditional knowledge they're developing as writers. Our instructional frames need to expand students' opportunities for applying their learning, not create barriers to their long-term success.

Framing Professional Development for Transfer

If you don't mind causing trouble at a faculty meeting, you might even push your administrators to frame your professional conversations to promote students' transfer of learning. Have you ever heard an administrator say, "Our goal is improving achievement data"? Yes? Next time you hear this kind of comment, you might ask *why* this particular kind of achievement is important. What exactly do we want to help students achieve? What is the larger goal worth pursuing?

The Challenge of Expansive Framing

To be perfectly candid, I sometimes still use bounded framing with my students. I understand why teachers might feel like we need to remind students that something will be on a test or is worth 20 percent of their grade or whatever stick or carrot we grab when we feel students aren't taking the work seriously. Classroom management issues are a big part of why teachers provide bounded framing. We see heads start to drop to desks or eyes

wander to phones, and we feel like we need something immediate to bring students back to the task at hand. So, we go for the quick fix: "Remember: this will be on your final exam!"

Reality checks can be helpful. Sometimes students really do need those concrete, here-and-now answers to their "Why are we doing this?" questions. There's a practical as well as an aspirational side to education. But if we consistently teach for compliance instead of transfer, we have to wonder what mindsets we're cultivating and whose status quo we're supporting.

Bounded framing can also devalue our work as writing teachers. What we do has importance beyond a single class or grade. Helping students become better thinkers and communicators is so important, in fact, that we shouldn't need to lean on an accountability system to engage students. Our grade book shouldn't be the only thing keeping students from blowing us off.

This shift toward expansive framing—toward independence, transfer, and deep learning—can be a stretch for students and teachers. Teenagers often feel like they have their hands full just trying to master the surface-level stuff. A lot of them are pretty OK with earning their points and credits and letting tomorrow take care of itself. And it is developmentally appropriate for them to feel this way.

But, as teachers, we have the benefit of both hindsight and foresight. We remember what it's like to struggle with those critical life transitions, such as starting college or a new job, and we can look ahead to the challenges our students will encounter down the road. We also have access to a growing research base that tells us many students continue to face significant obstacles to college access and completion—obstacles that include some of our own well-intentioned instructional practices, as Applebee and Langer note in their systematic study of writing classrooms (2013, see pages 4–6).

I find I'm more careful now about how I set up activities and tasks. While I'll still remind students that the quick-write they just did is prewriting for the essay they'll compose later, I also explain the transfer value of quick-writes—that this is a flexible strategy for exploratory thinking. We're not just working on individual assignments; we're developing processes and frameworks for doing intellectual work.

From Faking It to Making It: Moving from Mimicry to Mastery

There's another idea from the scholarship on transfer and learning thresholds that I'd like to share with you: the idea of the mimicry stage, a liminal state in which learners mimic the surface features of expert task performance. The mimicry stage looks like me in a Zumba class. I can sort of follow the instructor's movements, but I'm really not working my muscles or aligning my body in the same way as someone who knows what they're doing.

In progressing from novice to expert, it's common for newcomers to deal with the challenges they're facing by imitating the experts around them. Meyer and Land say

that during this stage "students present a partial, limited, or superficial understanding of the concept to be learned" (2006, xv). The researchers don't intend this as a negative description since such mimicry "might be a purposive coping strategy in the wrestle for understanding and clarity" (2006, xv).

This is an expected phase of development. Few of us make it in life without faking it first. What we don't want is for students to confuse faking it with making it. Too often, learning stalls out at the mimicry stage. Even worse, we sometimes teach toward mimicry instead of mastery by giving students reductive formulas to follow instead of authentic rhetorical problems to solve. Warner argues that much of today's writing instruction asks students to create "fakes designed to pass surface-level muster that are revealed as hollow facades when inspected more closely" (2018, 6). It doesn't do students any favors to teach toward mimicry; novices naturally start there. We don't need to make this happen for them.

We help students move from novice to expert by teaching beyond the mimicry stage, not teaching toward it.

Writing instruction should instead support students in developing competencies needed for authentic written communication. You might consider the extent to which your own students are progressing beyond the mimicry stage by noting how frequently they make the novice moves shown in the table.

COPING STRATEGIES USED BY NOVICES (SEE BENNER 1982 OR MEYER AND LAND 2006)
• Seek and follow rules and formulas
• Substitute an easier task for a more complex task
• Rush to finish a task
• Use a checklist to determine when a task is complete
• Rely on acronyms to remember procedures
• Bluff their way through a task
• Cheat or plagiarize
• Ask for step-by-step directions

There are no shortcuts on the road to transfer. *Naming What We Know* offers an important caution: "This type of [deep] learning is messy, time consuming, and unpredictable. It does not lend itself to shortcuts or checklists or competency tests" (Adler-Kassner and Wardle 2015, 9).

The National Research Council says that "adaptive experts are able to approach new situations flexibly and to learn throughout their lifetimes" (2000, 48).

Fostering Students' Independence

A colleague of mine who works in our campus writing center describes a common occurrence: A new student walks into the writing center, hands a tutor their assignment directions, and says,

"I don't know what the professor wants this to be about." If the professor won't tell them exactly what to do, maybe the tutor will.

Writing instruction that stalls out at the introductory stage increases students' dependence on teachers. By prepping students to produce "an *imitation* of writing" (Warner 2018, 5) (emphasis in original) for high-stakes assessments, schools give them "little experience with making choices in the context of writing" (Warner 2018, 5)—the essential skill that moves novices from mimicry to mastery.

Zaretta Hammond's important book *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students* offers an additional way to understand student autonomy: as a matter of educational equity. Hammond describes our charge as educators in relation to the learning continuum: "As children enter school, we expect that they are dependent learners. One of our key jobs in the early school years is to help students to become independent learners" (Hammond 2015, 13).

Figure 2.10 lists the characteristics of dependent and independent learners that Hammond discusses in her book.

THE DEPENDENT LEARNER	THE INDEPENDENT LEARNER
Is dependent on the teacher to carry most of the cognitive load of a task always	Relies on the teacher to carry some of the cognitive load temporarily
Is unsure of how to tackle a new task	Utilizes strategies and processes for tackling a new task
Cannot complete a task without scaffolds	Regularly attempts new tasks without scaffolds
Will sit passively if stuck and wait until the teacher intervenes	Has cognitive strategies for getting unstuck
Doesn't retain information well or "doesn't get it"	Has learned how to retrieve information from long-term memory

FIGURE 2.10
Characteristics of dependent and independent learners

While some form of dependence is the starting place for all learners, Hammond notes that not all students have the same opportunities to develop as independent learners—to exercise choice, act on their own initiative, and engage in problem solving. She cites research that shows culturally and linguistically diverse students more frequently experience school in ways that work against their autonomy. Hammond argues that failing to offer all students opportunities for rigor "sets students up to leave high school with outdated skills and shallow knowledge" (2015, 14). Such students, Hammond notes, "are able to regurgitate facts and concepts but have difficulty applying this knowledge in new and practical ways" (2015, 14). For these students, instruction has unjustly stalled at the novice level.

Framing instruction for transfer of learning is important. We're preparing students for an unpredictable future, not trying to replicate the status quo.

When a Scaffold Becomes a Roadblock

A scaffold is a type of frame: a structure that influences how a student sees a particular learning situation. Some of our scaffolds help students see beyond the task or lesson to the larger value of the skills, knowledge, and dispositions they're developing. But other scaffolds significantly narrow students' views of learning. This is especially true in cases in which the scaffold does the work for students and/or is combined with bounded framing (e.g., "Just follow this template to complete the assignment. It practically writes the essay for you!").

Think about the following rationales for giving students writing templates or structures to follow. Which ones do you see as supporting students' long-term growth and independence? Which ones lead to transfer?

- To make writing easier.
- To give students practice with academic language.
- To make sure students have met all the assignment requirements.
- To model expert thinking.
- To make essays easier to grade.
- To establish clear expectations for academic writing.

We often think students need extra scaffolding when they struggle with writing. What students need is the procedural, conceptual, and conditional knowledge that empowers them to grapple with difficulty—and scaffolds can be an important way to help develop this knowledge. But only if they're framed for meaningful transfer. If the essay organizers and sentence starters are used primarily with the goal of helping students complete a task they seemingly can't complete on their own, chances are the learning students carry away with them is that writing is a matter of waiting for someone else to tell you what to do.

Handing students a template should not be our default response to struggle. Do students struggle when we ask them to write a summary paragraph or a rhetorical précis or an essay introduction? Sure. *We* struggle with these tasks. They're not easy. But we have other options for supporting developing writers besides putting the words on the page for them.

I become especially worried about what students are learning about the writing process when sentence frames are cobbled together into whole paragraph or essay templates.

We need to get better at asking what our students are learning *from* our scaffolds, not just what they're learning *through* them. Too often, the scaffold itself becomes the end students see. *Need to produce this type of text? There's a template for that.*

The procedural knowledge that many students develop from using the templates that teachers give them is that writing is a matter of filling in a preset form. Fill in these

boxes, complete these sentence starters, choose a hook and a thesis from this menu of options, and voila: a finished essay. I've seen whole-essay templates that were little more than Mad Libs.

And I've asked students what they're learning about writing when they use these kinds of scaffolds. It's usually not what we'd hope. Sentence starters are typically intended to teach a combination of procedural and conceptual knowledge. They offer models of how to make certain moves in academic conversations, such as how to support a claim with evidence or address a counterargument. And they illustrate an important rhetorical concept: that academic discourse is characterized by particular language conventions.

But students don't usually tell me that they're learning about academic language or genre analysis or rhetorical moves when I ask them why they're using these structures to write. Instead, here's how those conversations go:

Me: Why do you think you're using these templates?

Student: [shrugs shoulders]

Me: What are you learning about writing from these templates?

Student: I don't know. I don't know how to answer that question. I don't really think about what I'm learning at the time.

Me: What's the purpose of the templates?

Student: To finish the essay.

We need to think carefully about the underlying beliefs about writing and learning our scaffolds engender.

Over-scaffolding is a cheat that doesn't help students win the game. It might accelerate the mimicry stage—for instance, by enabling students to more quickly imitate the conventions of academic discourse—but it doesn't help students develop the principles and processes that produce academic texts in authentic disciplinary contexts.

Framing Scaffolds for Transfer of Learning

We can frame scaffolds for transfer by clarifying the goals and principles behind our instructional strategies. What principles *can* students learn from templates and models? How about any of these "threshold concepts of writing" from *Naming What We Know* (Adler-Kassner and Wardle 2015, v–vi):

- Writing speaks to situations through recognizable forms.
- Genres are enacted by writers and readers.
- Writing is a way of enacting disciplinarity.

When templates are used with the purpose of helping students develop these kinds of understandings, they can contribute to deep and transferable learning. We need to make the deeper purpose of scaffolds clear.

When I use strategies like sentence frames with my own students, I explain why I'm doing this:

> This is just to get us started. When we're new to a task, we tend to need clear examples and procedures to follow. As we become more experienced, we're better able to make our own judgments and decisions.

I'll even share some of the findings from Benner's "From Novice to Expert" (1982), such as how novices rely on rules and step-by-step instructions while experts can adapt on the fly. It's important for students to imagine their growth, to see how their needs will change down the road. Situating our own instructional moves within this context of growth and change helps students understand that learning, like writing, looks different in different situations.

Look at each of the writing scaffolds in Figure 2.11. How do you know if and when your students could benefit from each type of scaffolding? To what extent does each scaffold help students develop a deep understanding of how to make rhetorical choices in different situations? What principles about written communication and language can be extracted from each scaffold? What kind of instructional framing would be needed to make this happen? What alternative forms of support could you provide to meet these same goals?

As you examine each scaffold, consider the extent to which it promotes mimicry or mastery and dependence or independence. See if you think any of these might result in "fakes" that are not "the product of a robust, flexible writing process" (Warner 2018, 5–6).

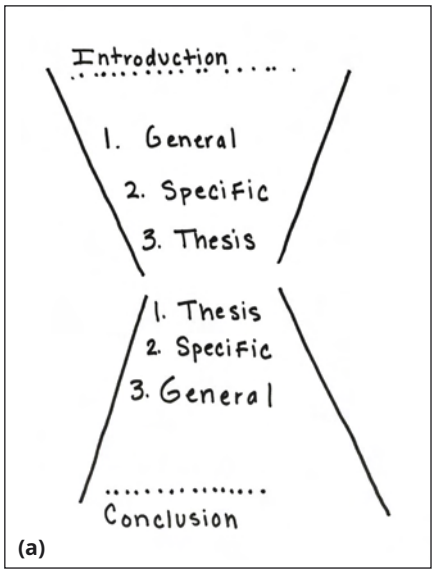
GST-TSG (Figure 2.11a): This "hourglass" scaffold offers students a formula for writing introductions and conclusions. Students first write a general statement, a specific statement, and a thesis statement for their introduction. They then reverse this order for their conclusion.

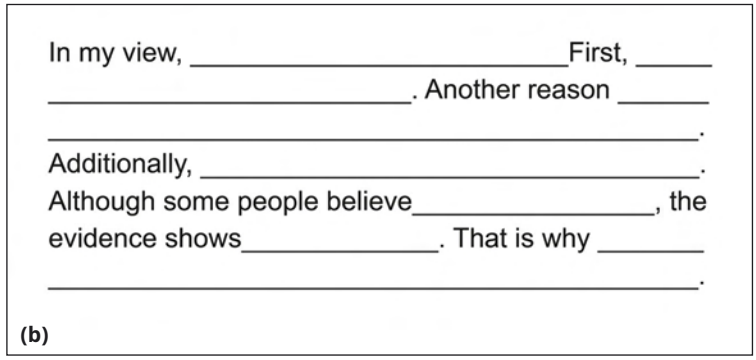
Paragraph template (Figure 2.11b): This scaffold provides ready-to-use sentence frames, transitions, and academic language and guides students through the construction of a paragraph.

Essay organizer (Figure 2.11c): This scaffold offers students step-by-step instructions for composing and organizing a multiparagraph essay.

Students don't just learn knowledge and skills; they also develop principles and beliefs that guide their thinking in future contexts.

We need to ask ourselves if we're setting students up to outgrow our scaffolds or increasing their dependence on them. If you see the scaffolds in Figure 2.11 as potentially working against students' autonomy and transfer of learning, I have some modifications to suggest. Scaffolds should be stepping-stones, not barriers.





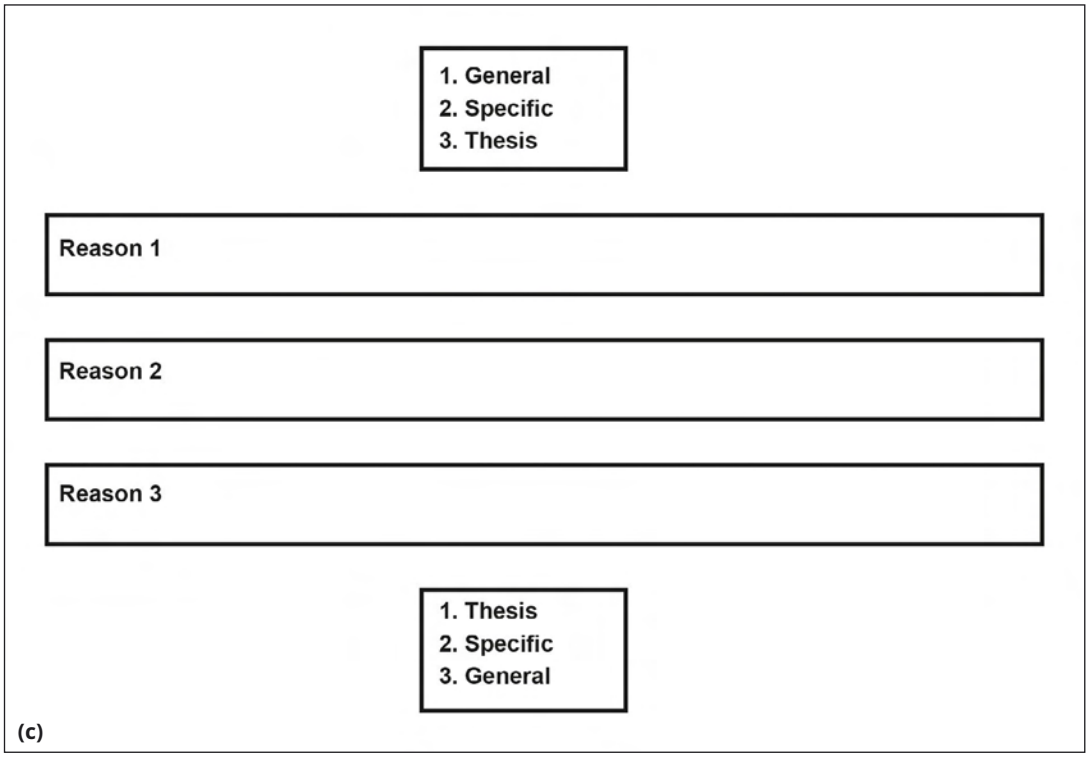


FIGURE 2.11
To what extent are our scaffolds about success on school-based performance tasks rather than effective written communication? Can a scaffold accomplish multiple aims?

Do This, Not That: The Scaffolding Edition

The activities that follow are my version of "Do This, Not That"—or, to be less didactic, let's call this section "If you like this, you'll love that."

IF YOU LIKE SENTENCE FRAMES, YOU'LL LOVE SENTENCE UNPACKING AND BLACKOUT TEMPLATES!

Sentence Unpacking

This activity is adapted from the California State University's (CSU's) Expository Reading and Writing Curriculum (ERWC) and the California English Language Development Framework.

You'll need a selection of mentor sentences for this activity. The examples below were prepared by my colleague, Roberta Ching, using *We Should All Be Feminists* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. The purpose of this activity is to help students analyze how different syntactic structures create meaning. When used with academic texts, sentence unpacking supports students in developing academic language.

> *Directions to Students:* Read each sentence and talk about what it means. Then unpack the sentence below in pairs or small groups. The sentences have already been broken into chunks for you. Take turns in your group talking about the meaning of each chunk. Share your understanding, but if no one knows the meaning of a word or phrase, look it up using Dictionary.com or Wikipedia if you agree it is essential for understanding the sentence. Then talk about the moves you see the writer making. Make sure you know what Adichie is arguing for. Then reread the whole sentence and collaboratively write a paraphrase.
>
> - "[Girls] grow up to be women / who cannot say what they truly think, / and they grow up— / and this is the worst thing we do to girls— / they grow up to be women / who have turned pretense into an art form."
>
> Paraphrase and describe this sentence. What is Adichie saying? What is she doing?
>
> - "Now imagine how much happier we would be, / how much freer / to be our true individual selves, / if we didn't have the weight / of gender expectations."
>
> Paraphrase and describe this sentence. What is Adichie saying? What is she doing?
>
> Now select a sentence that you found confusing and unpack it in your group. Read it aloud, break it into chunks, and then talk about what each chunk means. When you are finished, read the whole sentence aloud again. If you are still unsure of anything, ask your teacher.
>
> Remember: The purpose of this activity is to help you learn from the ideas and choices of other writers.

Blackout Templates

This next activity helps students learn academic language from the texts they read.

Excerpt #1

Shelly Eversley aptly summarizes part of the reason for my concern in her book [redacted]. Offering an anecdote about the time she [redacted], Eversley concludes that the [redacted] “[redacted]” [redacted], [redacted]. [redacted], [redacted]. So in order to [redacted], [redacted]. [redacted], the [redacted]

Eversley, for instance, was “[redacted]” as “[redacted]” [redacted]. In what she terms “[redacted],” she expressed her belief that [redacted]. “[redacted],” she writes, “[redacted]” [redacted] She explained that the “[redacted]” of the [redacted] “[redacted].”

Excerpt #2

Mills offers [redacted] as an example in this regard in his [redacted] of [redacted].

Mills describes [redacted] as “[redacted].” But unlike other [redacted], “[redacted],” because “[redacted].” As a result, unlike other [redacted], Mills writes that [redacted] “[redacted].” Instead [redacted] “[redacted].”

Mills doesn’t describe the [redacted], but [redacted]. What’s interesting about the [redacted]. On this Mills is clear: “[redacted]” [redacted], he says. “[redacted].” [redacted] “[redacted],” Mills writes, “[redacted].”

My personal history is replete with anecdotes like [redacted] and experiences like [redacted], and I’m trying to [redacted], [redacted].

FIGURE 2.12

Blackout templates created from the Preface to *Your Average Nigga: Performing Race, Literacy, and Masculinity* by Vershawn Ashanti Young

Directions to Teachers: Start by choosing a mentor text that can serve as a model of how writers engage other writers in academic conversations. Look for texts that perform the moves your students are learning, such as lead-ins to direct quotations, paraphrase, summary, synthesis, etc. Make copies of the mentor text and distribute to students along with black pens or markers.

This activity is designed to help students with reading-based writing tasks, including research papers and synthesis essays (see Figure 2.12).

Directions to Students: **This activity is designed to help you identify a writer's moves in a mentor text—in this case, the way that writer introduces and synthesizes the words of other writers. The text you will be using for the blackout portion of the activity is an excerpt from _____. By blacking out the writer's (or writers') content and leaving only their transitions, lead-ins, and signal words, you will create "found templates" for citing, summarizing, and synthesizing the views of other writers.**

STEP ONE: Read the excerpt. Pay special attention to the functional language in the text (i.e., the signal words and transitions that connect the writer's or writers' ideas, rather than the ideas themselves). Then use a marker or dark pen to cross out the specific content of the passage, leaving only the functional language the writer uses to introduce, explain, and synthesize the sources. In other words, you will be blacking out the "bricks" in this passage and leaving only the "mortar." The remaining functional language (i.e., the "mortar") will become the basis for your reconstructed paragraph. You now have your blackout template.

STEP TWO: Use your blackout template to compose a paragraph in which you cite, summarize, and synthesize the views of other writers you plan to engage in your own writing. Feel free to rearrange and modify the moves you found in your mentor text.

Remember: The purpose of this activity is to show you models of some language and moves common to academic discourse. Keep in mind that language conventions change over time. You can use the templates to practice some of these moves using academic language, but remember that the best way to learn how people in a community or discipline communicate with each other is to study mentor texts. See if you can find some authentic examples of this kind of language in action.

IF YOU LIKE PARAGRAPH TEMPLATES, YOU'LL LOVE COLLABORATIVE TEXT RECONSTRUCTION!

Collaborative Text Reconstruction

This activity is adapted from the CSU's Expository Reading and Writing Curriculum and the California English Language Development Framework.

Collaborative Text Reconstruction is an additional strategy for helping developing writers learn how language works. The goal of this activity is to elicit a paragraph of student writing based on a mentor text. Using these paragraphs, teachers can informally diagnose students' strengths and weaknesses in the area of sentence construction. At the end of the activity, students will edit their paragraphs, applying what

they have learned about grammar, usage, and mechanics. They will then compare their paragraphs with the original, paying particular attention to verbs, subjects, and sentence structure.

Directions to Teachers: Prepare for this next activity by choosing a mentor text in the genre your students will be producing. You'll be reading a paragraph from this text aloud.

Directions to Students: **In this activity, you will be reconstructing a paragraph your teacher reads aloud to you based on notes you have taken. Try to take notes on both the content of the paragraph and the moves it makes (e.g., transitions, sentence types, verb choices).**

1. **Take out a blank sheet of paper.**
2. **Listen as your instructor reads a selected paragraph at a normal rate of speed. Then take notes while your instructor reads the paragraph again; the notes will be essential when composing your paragraph.**
3. **Reconstruct what you heard using your notes or the keywords. Compare what you have written with other students and make changes as necessary.**

IF YOU LIKE ESSAY ORGANIZERS, YOU'LL LOVE DESCRIPTIVE OUTLINING!

Descriptive Outlining

Finally, if you like sharing essay organizers or sample outlines with your students, I think you'll love descriptive outlining. This strategy develops students' ability to understand not only what writers are saying but also how they are saying it—in other words, the moves they make to accomplish various rhetorical aims. Your students will need a mentor text for this activity. Models of student and professional writing both work great. See Chapter 7 for a full explanation of descriptive outlining, including sample purpose statements.

Here's the basic procedure (adapted from the CSU's Expository Reading and Writing Curriculum).

Directions to Students: **In addition to summarizing text as you read, proficient readers also think about why the author included sections, or chunks, of text in the first place. In this activity, you will be thinking about the author's potential purpose for each section.**

STEP ONE: Start by drawing a line across the page where you think the introduction ends. Then draw a line above where you think the conclusion begins. Now divide the remaining text into sections that make sense to you, keeping in mind that one functional "chunk" could include multiple paragraphs (e.g., an introduction that is three paragraphs in length).

STEP TWO: Summarize what the writer is saying in each section.

STEP THREE: Determine and write the purpose(s) for each section. What do you see the writer doing in each chunk? What is the writer trying to accomplish? What are the effects of the writer's choices?

Conditional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing

Conditional knowledge is also important to ethical and effective instructional decision making. The choices we make as teachers depend on explicit or implicit conditions. How do we know if or when students need a sentence frame to support their writing? Have we practiced formative assessment? Examined our assumptions about students' needs or abilities? Aligned our goals with our methods? We need to take a critical look at the conditions under which we decide to give some students templates but others choices. Teaching writing for transfer means giving all students space to exercise their agency.

Knowing what *not* to do when—when to hold back, keep quiet, or forgo the sentence frame—can be just as important as knowing what to do.

Leveraging Prior Learning: The Importance of an Assets-Based Approach

Taking an assets-based approach is part of how we provide expansive framing. We're not only looking ahead to where students are going; we're also looking back to where they've been and to the resources and personal strengths they carry with them. If we want students to act as "agents of integration" (Nowacek 2011, 3), we need to help them value and leverage their prior learning. Unfortunately, students sometimes hear the opposite message in school: "Don't bring in your personal experience." "Don't write that way in this class." "Stay within the four corners of the text." Focusing on students' "misconceptions" can make them more afraid of being wrong. I'm afraid we're to blame for some of our students' reluctance to integrate their skills and knowledge and leverage their prior learning.

Because of its suggestion of student (and sometimes teacher) deficit or ineptitude, I don't love the idea of "negative transfer"—a name researchers have given to the "performance interference" (Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak 2014, 55)—that happens when "learning from one situation [is] inappropriately applied to a new situation" (Beaufort 1999, 181). The five-paragraph essay, a form widely derided by college writing instructors, has become the poster child for negative transfer.

I worry that framing the high-school-to-college transition in this way can actually impede transfer of learning and educational equity. If students perceive that their prior learning and experiences—including, perhaps, their home language and culture—are not valued and relevant in higher education and, indeed, that they must erase what they already know in order to achieve more sophisticated understandings, they may revert to waiting for an instructor to tell them the new rules of the game instead of looking for

opportunities to make their own intellectual connections. We want students to recontextualize and repurpose their previous education, not unlearn it.

In *The Rhetoric of Reason*, James Crosswhite reminds us of the pedagogical commitments we make if we allow ourselves to take a deficits-based view of learning: "The difference between thinking of people as being deficient, and thinking of people as having abilities and potential that need cultivation, training, and developing is enormous, and it leads to radically different educational approaches and attitudes" (1996, 5).

Inclusive teaching and transfer of learning both involve viewing *all* prior knowledge, skills, and dispositions as *assets* with the potential to be meaningfully redeployed in new situations. This means that even knowledge of how to write a formulaic five-paragraph essay can be a helpful starting place if it gets changed up for a new purpose. We can tell students, "Good! You already know how to write using this structure. Now let's build on it and see where you can go."

Students' transfer of learning may not look the way we want it to at first. And that's OK. If we approach rhetorical reading and writing as acts of creative problem solving, then we should expect students to have their share of productive "fails."

Designing Instructional Units

Transfer of learning should inform instructional decision making. How do we know when our students can do more on their own? When less scaffolding is needed? If we teach for transfer, we work to move students toward independence, and we give students opportunities to make transfer choices.

I've learned a great deal over the years about teaching writing for transfer through my work with the CSU's Expository Reading and Writing Curriculum. Rhetorical thinking and decision making are central to the curriculum's approach. The ERWC Assignment Template (see Figure 2.13), in particular, has changed my thinking about instructional design—especially in regard to students' development as independent writers. The template is built to help students transfer learning from reading to writing—to read like writers and write like readers.

If you're looking for a way to bring together all the rhetorical writing competencies this book addresses into one unit, the ERWC Assignment Template is a great planning tool. Developed through a collaboration between K12 educators and college faculty, the template moves students through an integrated, recursive process of reading and writing rhetorically. You can find more information about the ERWC at https://www2.calstate.edu/CAR/Pages/erwc.aspx.

In the Assignment Template Overview that follows (Figure 2.13), John Edlund, Professor of Rhetoric at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, and one of the developers of the ERWC, offers teachers some guiding questions for curriculum development.

ERWC Assignment Template Outline with Key Questions for Module Development

(used with permission)

Reading Rhetorically	**Preparing to Read**	– **Getting Ready to Read** (What could students do to help access background knowledge relevant to the text?) – **Exploring Key Concepts** (What important concepts or questions in the text could students think about before reading it? What tasks or activities would help them do this?) – **Surveying the Text** (What do you want students to notice in or about the text before they read?) – **Making Predictions and Asking Questions** (What predictions or assumptions might readers make about the content or arguments of the text? How can you help students make useful predictions?) – **Understanding Key Vocabulary** (What words in the text are crucial to understanding, yet might be difficult for some students? How can you help students gain experience with these words?) – **Creating Personal Learning Goals** (How can you help students situate themselves within the learning goals of the module and set their own personal learning goals? You might ask questions such as "What do these learning goals mean to you?" and "What do you want to work on while you do this module?")
	Reading Purposefully	– **Reading for Understanding** (As students read "with the grain" to understand the text, are there key points or features you want them to notice? How can you help students grasp these key points?) – **Annotating and Questioning the Text** (What can you do to help students begin a dialog with the ideas, assumptions, and arguments of the text?) – **Negotiating Meaning** (How can you help students identify and overcome the features of the text that cause them difficulty, in both individual and group contexts?) – **Examining the Structure of the Text** (What should students notice about the structure of the text? How can you help them analyze it?) – **Considering the Rhetorical Situation** (How can you help students identify the basic elements of the rhetorical situation of the text and make connections between that situation and the rhetorical choices made by the author?) – **Analyzing Rhetorical Grammar** (Which words, grammatical patterns, sentence structures, or other linguistic features that are prominent in this text would be productive to analyze? How can you help students notice these features, model them, and use them in their own work?) – **Analyzing Stylistic Choices** (Considering the audience for this work, what are the likely effects of the author's specific choices of words, sentence structures, organizational strategies, or use of devices such as symbolism, metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, irony, or other tropes and figures? How do narration and point of view affect the reader's engagement with the text? How can you help students notice these features?)
	Questioning the Text	– **Summarizing and Responding** (How can you help students express the ideas and arguments of the text in their own words and clearly articulate a response?) – **Thinking Critically** (How can you help students notice and question the arguments, evidence, and rhetorical decisions made by the author?) – **Synthesizing Multiple Perspectives** (How can you help students track the different positions taken by different authors? How can you help students analyze differences and similarities in the assumptions, values, and worldviews of the authors of the texts they are reading while also clarifying their own perspectives?) – **Reflecting on Your Reading Process** (How can you help students reflect on the problems they had reading this text, the discoveries they made about reading strategies, and their progress on their personal learning goals?)

FIGURE 2.13

Expository Reading and Writing Curriculum (ERWC) 3.0 Assignment Template Overview

Preparing to Respond	**Discovering What You Think**	– **Considering Your Task and Your Rhetorical Situation** (Considering the issues and questions of the texts and the learning goals of the module, what type of writing assignment will be most effective in helping students participate in the ongoing conversation? How can you design the assignment to create a believable rhetorical situation in which students can find a voice and a purpose? How can you help students analyze the task for clues about audience, purpose, and occasion for composing? How can you help students analyze the knowledge, values, and assumptions of their audience in the context of the task?) – **Gathering Relevant Ideas and Materials** (How can you help students revisit their notes, summaries, annotations, and other materials to find ideas, expert opinions, statistics, and other facts relevant to their rhetorical situation?) – **Developing a Position** (How can you help students consider possible positions on the issues raised by the text and decide what stance they will take and how they will support it?)
Writing Rhetorically	**Composing a Draft**	(Note: The composing process unfolds differently for different writers. The concerns in this section may be fulfilled in a nonlinear fashion. In whatever order the process unfolds, students should have a draft of their document by the end of this section.) – **Making Choices about Learning Goals** (How can you help students revisit the goals they set earlier in the module and set new learning goals for their development as writers?) – **Making Choices as You Write** (How can you help students make moment-by-moment choices about implementing genre conventions, selecting relevant and compelling evidence, and discovering the most effective organizing strategy for their text?) – **Negotiating Voices** (How can you help students learn to quote, paraphrase, and summarize their sources appropriately and document them accurately? How can you help students represent the dialog between their own views and their various sources?)
	Revising Rhetorically	– **Analyzing Your Draft Rhetorically** (How can you help students identify and evaluate the rhetorical choices made in their draft in light of their rhetorical situation?) – **Gathering and Responding to Feedback** (What kinds of feedback do students need from their instructor and their peers in order to improve their texts? How can students learn to turn feedback into revision?)
	Editing	– **Editing Your Draft** (How can you help students find and correct grammatical and mechanical errors? How could students connect the rhetorical grammar analysis they did earlier in the module with sentences in their own draft?) – **Preparing Your Draft for Publication** (How can you help students effectively format their work in their chosen medium to share with their intended audience?) – **Reflecting on Your Writing Process** (How can you help students think about what they have learned from writing this assignment and how they can improve future writing that they do?) – **Reflecting on Learning Goals** (How can you help students reflect on their progress on the learning goals of the module and their own personal learning goals?)

FIGURE 2.13 (CONTINUED)
Expository Reading and Writing Curriculum (ERWC) 3.0 Assignment Template Overview

Flexibility is a key principle behind the template's design. Edlund (2018) explains, "The template is a tool kit. But a tool kit lets you take whatever tool you need when you need it. It doesn't say, 'now it's time for a screwdriver.'"

I've found the Assignment Template to be useful also for creating individual lessons on particular writing skills, such as gathering evidence or integrating sources. You'll find more great teaching ideas and resources at Edlund's blog, *Teaching Text Rhetorically* (https://textrhet.com).

Conclusion: Stepping Back, Letting Go

Transfer theory explains why so many of us chafe at mandates and formulas we intuitively know are not good for our students. It also offers insights into how we can teach in ways that support students' long-term flourishing, ways that help them succeed not just on a test but in life.

Teaching writing for transfer is ultimately about letting go—about stepping back as teachers, so students can step up as expert learners.