

## COMPOSITION II

### ENGL 1023

#### Essay Assignment 1: Literacy Critique<sup>1</sup>

Many of our conceptions, or commonsense understandings, of writing are actually misconceptions that don't hold up under closer scrutiny. In the first chapter of *Writing About Writing*, you read about early, powerful, and personal influences on reading and writing inside and outside of school. Common ideas about literacy don't always hold up when writers and researchers stop relying on assumptions and actually examine literacy practices closely.

For this assignment, you will identify a construct or conception about writing and analyze it yourself. You may address any construct (e.g., features of academic, personal, or spiritual/inspirational writing) or conception about writing that has been identified in the reading selections we've covered, or you may critique other common conceptions that haven't been discussed, such as "best-sellers reflect good writing," "only novelists are true writers," or "mastering college-level writing is indicative of being fully literate."

#### **Invention**

Whatever construct or conception you choose, you should begin brainstorming by mining your own experiences. If you choose the issue of "good writing," for example, you might ask yourself:

- What counts as good writing for me?
- What are the features of good writing?
- Where did my ideas of good writing come from?
- Are my ideas of good writing suitable for all writing purposes and contexts?
- In what way is my conception of good writing too limiting and even stifling, or, conversely, freeing and invigorating?
- Would I behave differently as a writer, or understand myself differently as a writer, if I thought of "good writing" in a different way?

#### **Researching and Analyzing**

Now conduct some outside research to help you understand whether others share your conceptions and where those conceptions might have come from. You have several options for research. Some possibilities include:

- Surveying or interviewing your classmates;
- Setting up an online survey through Blackboard or on a social networking site like Facebook;
- Conducting historical research to see how your construct has been portrayed in the popular media over time. (For example, there are numerous moments in American history when news media have announced a "literacy crisis." The stories around those "literacy crises" clearly construct "literacy" to mean certain things and not others, and the meaning of the term seems to shift over time. By analyzing these articles, you could see how news media have defined literacy in ways that shape public understanding.)

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<sup>1</sup> This is an adaption of the assignment titled "Considering Constructs about Writing" in WAW, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., pp. 167-9.

## **Organization**

Take some time to plan what you will write and how you will write it. By now you should realize that texts take shape differently depending on their rhetorical situations and purposes. Think and talk with your classmates and me about those with whom you want to share your reflection and research, and what the most appropriate forms (genres) are for reaching that audience. Here are some possibilities:

- Do you want to share your ideas with members of your local community? Would you present your ideas/findings in the form of a letter to the editor of your local newspaper? If so, what are the features of such a letter – especially given that the only intended reader isn't the newspaper editor alone?
- Do you want to tell your high school teachers about your new understanding of “good writing”? If so, how could you best communicate with them? Via email? If so, what are the characteristics of email correspondence and how would you adapt your message to its conventions?
- Do you want to write an article to share your findings with a national audience? If so, for what media outlet (print magazine, website, academic journal)? Who are the readers drawn to that media outlet? What is their prior knowledge? What is their attention span? How do they expect sources to be used?

## **Style**

Once you determine who you want to share your findings with, and what the appropriate genre is for reaching them, you should find and analyze numerous examples of that genre. What's their typical length? Tone? What language do they use? How do they cite sources (or not)?

## **Drafting**

Given your findings, audience, and genre, what claims do you want to make? What support will you provide for those claims? How much detail should you go into regarding that support? These answers hinge entirely on the expectations and conventions of your audience and genre.

## **Revising**

Once you settle on workable answers to these questions, compose a rough draft of your text to share during individual conferences. Consider the feedback discussed during conference and revise.

## **What Makes It Good?**

Consider that this is meant to be an informative text that you could give to a friend, parent, or teacher in order to help them see a writing-related concept as a construct and understand it in a new way. What makes this assignment good is your ability to do this. This is not an easy task. You are being asked to get people to reexamine something that they may not believe can or should be reexamined. Your text is “good” if the person who reads it puts it down and is somehow changed for having read it.



### **Documenting Sources**

Use one documentation style (i.e., MLA) consistently to attribute information and expression of ideas to your sources. Every time you quote or paraphrase from the sources provide the corresponding parenthetical citation. The last page of your essay should be a “Works Cited” page, which lists the sources to which you made reference in your essay.