

COMPOSITION II

ENGL 1023

Essay Assignment 2: Literacy Study¹

Collaborate with a group of classmates on a formal research study of some theme that emerges when everyone's literacy experiences are compared. You can use the following instructions to guide the writing of this kind of study, which lends itself to answering "bigger" questions or making larger points than a single literacy narrative can.

STAGE I: Conduct a Self-Study

All students in the group should post answers to the following questions on the blog set up for each group on Blackboard:

- How did you learn to write and/or read?
- What kinds of writing/reading have you done in the past?
- How much have you enjoyed the various kinds of writing/reading you've done?
- What are particularly vivid memories that you have of reading, writing, or activities that involved them?
- What is your earliest memory of reading and your earliest memory of writing?
- What sense did you get, as you were learning to read and write, of the *value* of reading and writing, and where did that sense come from?
- What frustrated you about reading and writing as you progressed through school? By the same token, what pleased you about them?
- What kind of writing/reading do you do most commonly?
- What is your favorite kind of writing/reading?
- What are your current attitudes or feelings toward reading and writing?
- Where do you think your feelings about and habits of writing and reading come from? What in your past has made you the kind of writer/reader you are today?
- Who are some people in your life who have acted as literacy sponsors?
- What are some institutions and experiences in your life that have acted as literacy sponsors?
- What have the essays by Brandt, Malcolm X, Alexie, Rose, Berkenkotter & Murray and Mahiri & Sablo [or Roozen] made you think about your past or present as a reader and writer?

STAGE II: Discuss and Code the Self-Study

In your group, read the answers to the self-interviews. Look together for common themes, recurring trends, or unique experiences, and determine which of these might be most interesting to further research and write about. Be sure to consider what data you will need to collect to explore these themes. (For example, do you need to interview some classmates further or interview people who aren't your classmates?) Common themes that emerge from this sort of study include the role of technology in literacy, hobbies as literacy sponsors, motivations for literacy learning, privilege and access, and help overcoming literacy struggles.

STAGE III: Collaborate to Write about Emergent Themes

Pair up with another student and choose an emergent theme to write a paper about. As a pair, pinpoint a specific research question related to your theme and gather whatever further data are necessary. Drawing on terms and ideas from this chapter's readings, you can then write your analysis of and findings on this theme.

¹ This is an adaptation of the assignment titled "Group Analysis of Literacy History" in *Writing About Writing*, 1st ed., pp. 460-462.

STAGE IV: Planning and Drafting

Before beginning to write, the group of authors as a whole should consider audience and genre appropriate for this paper. Discuss the following questions together:

- Who should be the audience for what you write? How can you best reach them?
- How would you like to write about your findings? In a somewhat formal, scholarly way? In a more storytelling, narrative way?
- What content/format would make this narrative most effective? Paper, text-only? Paper, text, and images? Online text and images? Online text, images, video?

As you analyze and begin to write with your partner, you should consider the following questions:

- What is your research question?
- What answers to this question do your research and analysis suggest?
- What data support each of these answers?
- What have you learned from your paper, and what does it mean for the rest of us?

Those questions will actually help you arrange your paper, too, in most cases. That is, an introduction poses your research question and explains the value of it. The following section explains how you attempted to answer the question—what methods you used to gather the data you used to try to reach answers. The next section discusses the data and what answers it led you to. Finally, the conclusion answers the question "So what?" by stating the implications that your findings seem to suggest.

If you haven't written collaboratively before, you may find it somewhat challenging to coordinate schedules with your co-writer, to decide how to break up the work of writing the piece, and to make sure you share ideas and information efficiently. You'll also most likely need to rewrite each other's material slightly in order to make it sound as though the piece was written in a single voice.

What Makes It Good?

A good analysis of an issue emerging from your group's literacy history may take a number of different shapes but will tend to have these traits in common:

- A clear, directly stated research question
- A detailed description of what methods you used to try to answer the question
- A clear explanation of what you found in your research and what conclusions it leads you to
- An statement indicating why your findings might matter
- The usual: readable, fluent prose; transitions that make the paper easy to follow; and editing and proofreading that keep the paper from distracting readers with typographical errors and mistakes

Documenting Sources

Use one documentation style (e.g., MLA; APA; Chicago) 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, as the name indicates, lists the sources to which you made reference in your essay.