

A Student-Centered Philosophy for Revising Writing Assignments

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As teachers of a range of courses in the Kennesaw State University English department, we share a philosophy of negotiable, collaborative assignment shaping in our classroom communities. In the essays that follow, we share stories of assignments that we regularly use but continually reshape in response to varying classroom communities and student interpretations. Because we share a wish to be surprised and challenged by student work, our "regular" assignments provide guidance within a framework that encourages risk-taking. Yet we all recognize that this open-endedness may cause some students to be unsure about expectations (in practical terms, how to succeed with the assignment). So another key aspect of our philosophy involves encouraging classroom talk where students and teacher negotiate the meaning and the process of particular writing tasks within the context of the classroom community and instructional goals. The teaching contexts represented in the essays that follow include:

- A freshman composition course for joint-enrollment honors high school students
- A freshman composition course for new and returning undergraduates
- An upper-level course for students undertaking professional writing in the disciplines
- An upper-level methods course for pre-service middle school and high school teachers
- A graduate course for professional writing students

Reenvisioning an Assignment for the Joint Enrollment Classroom

Martha F. Bowden

In my first composition class, the final writing assignment was a research paper. Each student was to investigate three events that happened in the year in which he or she was born. The assignment has a number of attractive qualities: it encourages the use of a variety of sources, and requires some ingenuity, especially at the outset. Students are encouraged to look at newspapers and other periodicals; the library catalogue does not automatically unfold a wealth of information until the student has progressed far enough to have some topics to look up. Students also learn some important things about events in the world around them, and the way those events have shaped them, even though they

have no memory of them. Finally, it has the great virtue of allowing general conversation about research approaches and credibility of sources, while practically guaranteeing that no two students would write the same essay. The guarantee was especially sound at Kennesaw State College, as it then was, with our hefty enrollment of so-called nontraditional students. Or so I thought.

In the ensuing years, many things have changed in my composition syllabus. In fact, it is probably safe to say that *everything* has changed: my increasing focus on argument has resulted in new textbooks, individual writing assignments, final assessment, use of journals and so on. The one element that has not changed is that last writing assignment. It continues to be a good way to approach research, a forum that engages the students' interest, and provides a nice variety of final products. I think the epitome of the assignment's success came the quarter I had a fifty year spread in the classroom—a joint-enrolled student, just seventeen, and a sixty-seven-year-old grandmother, who, having put two sons through law school, had decided it was her turn.

The assignment itself had undergone some refinement. Requiring the writers to argue for a particular world view using these events for support resulted in the piece having a kind of unity, rather than being three mini-essays. I also, in response to what my students were doing, expanded the definition of "event" to include culturally important and interesting phenomena: book publication, sports events, medical and legal milestones. I really did get tired of Watergate, and a thoughtful person can make perceptive comments about a society based on its Academy Award decisions.

Thus I had a tidy, engaging, interesting topic which encouraged both research and reflection, which could develop beyond a report, which allowed for argument, and which varied from student to student as each took his or her birth year and ran with it. And then one day I walked into my first class full of joint enrollment honors students and found myself faced with over twenty students whose age range ran the gamut from seventeen to eighteen.

Kennesaw has had a Joint-Enrolled Twelfth Grade, or JET student program for some time, which is how I managed to have a seventeen-year-old in the class I mentioned above. But several years ago, when the university began an honors program for its regularly

enrolled students, it developed at the same time a related offering for the joint enrollment student, including special sections of some classes, and closer articulation with the public schools to ensure that the courses the students take with us meet their requirements for high school graduation. I have taught freshman composition in the honors program since its inception.

So here I was, with twenty-plus students and no variety of ages. Because part of the reason for the assignment was an exercise in student diversity, I had to think of some way of expanding the topic. I did not want to drop it altogether because it still has a lot to say to students of any age. For example, today's high school seniors and college freshman have lived all their lives with the reality of AIDS; it is therefore instructive for them to learn that the HIV virus was identified the year they were born, for here is an event which has shaped their world and the way they live in it. They are very aware of, and influenced by popular culture—perhaps more so than some of my older students who, having spent a number of years in the work force, or in the services, or raising children, or some combination of all three, have become removed from and immune to the enchantments of MTV. Thus, investigating how that culture grew out of influences brewing at the time of their birth is also instructive. What is more, they are more likely to have parents whom they can interview, which provides an opportunity to evaluate sources. I tell them to treat their interviews as a preliminary source, one that gives them both a place to start investigating large issues and a way of personalizing their essays. When their parents' memories prove hazy or inaccurate, we can talk about a couple of things—both the potential inaccuracies of oral histories, and the effect of sleep deprivation on memory function. One of the high school students, upon learning that while his mother was in labor his parents watched two episodes of *MASH*, found the scripts of those episodes on the internet and used them very provocatively in his essay. So I wanted to keep the assignment, but I didn't want twenty-three essays about 1979. For that reason, I have expanded the reaches of the topic to the first five years of their life—the preschool years, the ones that seem to take longest at the time, and whose events are most thoroughly forgotten.

There are other ways of developing diversity as well. Given the demographics of the student base—most, although certainly not all, of our students come from relatively affluent, although not necessarily stable homes, and most are still living in the counties in which they were born—I have very few international students; I don't even have very many who were born in other states! But I encourage the few I have to pull the events of their original culture into their essays, to confuse the

world view, to suggest that while we are all born into the same world, our perspectives on the nature of that place are not necessarily the same. One of my students, whose family is Vietnamese, explained that he was born in Hong Kong because that was as far as his mother got before she went into labor. My comfortable, middle class students need to hear those stories. And I will take all these variations on the assignment into my regularly enrolled classes from now on, because, as those students discovered, major trends do not always respect the calendar year, and where you were born makes a difference.

Not only does this assignment have something to say to all students, I believe it has something special for the Joint Enrolled. They are poised to move into the world, away from their parents and their accustomed paths of friendships. We began the semester describing discourse communities, but of course for them, those communities are in flux and are about to change, in some cases radically. The old sites of communication—their jobs, their schools, their sports activities—will disappear in the next few months, and their roles in those which remain, like their families and close friendships, will not be the same. One young woman has already described her feelings of disjunction, of not “belonging” with her high school friends. Nonetheless, the forces they will reveal to have been at work eighteen years ago—the medical discoveries, the legal decisions, the political trends, the technological advancements—will continue to affect their lives, particularly as they begin to move about that world as adults. Consider the children born in 1918: by the time they were eighteen, the events of their birth year and the years immediately following it meant that they graduated from high school in a world steeped in depression and headed for a war in which they would be frontline participants. On the other hand, since their birth, scientists had discovered penicillin and insulin, both of which made their survival to the age of eighteen more certain. The existence of antibiotics would provide a shield against infection, one of the greatest contributors to war casualties in the past. But nothing could provide a shield against atomic warfare, under whose shadow the children of those eighteen-year-olds would grow up. By the time my students have finished their essays, they will be aware of some of the forces that will affect the rest of their lives because, while the first writing assignment turns them inward, the last one turns them out. And out is where they are going to have to go, very soon.

Accommodating Student Voice in Nonfiction Writing: An Ethnography Assignment in English 1101

Margaret B. Walters

The ethnography assignment that I use in my English 1101, Composition I, class at Kennesaw State University is an adaptation of the one described by James Thomas Zebroski, in Chapter Two, "Using Ethnographic Writing to Construct Classroom Knowledge," of his 1994 book, *Thinking Through Theory: Vygotskian Perspectives on the Teaching of Writing*.¹ This assignment gives students the opportunity to closely study a community and to say something important about that community; it also supports the students' realization that they can set up a problem, analyze and resolve it, and then formulate ideas about what a community is and write about it. Thus, the ethnography reinforces the students' sense of self as part of a wider community, but more than that, shows students that writing can be alive and interesting and that they have lots of things to say.

Laying the groundwork for a research paper that is published for other members of the class, this assignment asks students to make frequent visits to a site of their choice (in order to study a group of people engaged in some activity), and to analyze the data they collect through observations, field notes, and interviews. The research consists of (1) observing people and their activities at the site, as well as the site environment itself; (2) making field notes in a double-entry notebook (on one side of the page describing people, their behaviors—gestures, conversation, and actions; the site environment—its physical and social and cultural surroundings, or, in other words, the ambiance of the site (its atmosphere); on the other side of the page, students are asked to describe their own feelings about the site and what they observe taking place there, as well as their own mood at the time of the site visit; and (3) interviewing people who participate in activities at the site of study.

One of the things I want to happen by using this assignment is to give students the freedom to choose their site of study and to write about what interests them because the most vivid and cohesive writing among first-year composition students seems to derive from writing about their own experiences. The modifications I have made to the assignment each time I've taught it are based on what I and my students have learned about what happens in field research and when students write about sites that create consternation in the readers of their reports—their peers. Learning to accommodate student voice, to make room for their choices to find expression, especially when their subject matter explores controversial or surprising topics, requires that students, as part of the class writing community, and I, as the

teacher, take a liberal, freedom-of-expression approach. It also means that I must be careful not to dampen their enthusiasm or slight the seriousness with which they approach the task.

What surprised me about the first set of essays was the diversity of student ethnographies, which ran the gamut from the ultra-conservative (a "singles" Sunday school class in an evangelical church) to the ultra-liberal (the exotic dancers in a nightclub). The student who chose the latter field site was one of the dancers at the club. Interestingly, she refused to share her initial draft with her writing group, asking me instead to evaluate her essay in class. As I had only been aware that she had chosen to write about her place of work but not what her occupation was, the draft was quite surprising, both in its subject matter and in its frank and less than objective treatment of her site. For instance, in this first draft, she wrote about her sexual orientation. Though the greater part of her study dealt with her field observations of the women who danced at the club and their camaraderie and interactions with customers, her self-revelations seemed out of place. Were they meant to shock, since the essays were to be published? And did such revelations belong in an ethnography? I told her that while an ethnography often describes the observer's point of view and can express feelings about the site, she needed to consider how relevant the personal information was to the study of the site and whether she wanted to reveal herself in this way to the class as a whole. However, I stopped short of suggesting that she delete the personal information. If students are to write about a site of their choice, they shouldn't be constrained by the teacher and other students' potential shock at what takes place at the site. Her final draft, however, revealed that she chose to take out the personal references, yet left in the observations about the sexual orientation of other dancers at the club. The final draft was a much more objective study in tone, yet still contained personal elements, such as her interest in making a great deal of money and her love of dressing up and dancing. Needless to say, given the conservative bent of many of the students in the class, her essay excited a lot of talk, and led to interesting comments in the students' final reflective essays, which analyzed the ethnographies of the class as a whole. However, the reflective essays were treated confidentially, which proved to be a good thing, given the controversial nature of some of the studies. For example, some students expressed their shock at her occupation and distress that she was engaged in such activity—a few even offered prayers that she would find Jesus and give up this line of work. Interestingly and fortunately, in class discussions of the ethnographies in general, students were respectful and polite and did not express the horror

and shock they revealed in their reflective essays, which were only seen by my eyes.

At this point, I began to question whether I should use this assignment again, given the ethical and rhetorical challenges that resulted. Yet, I also wondered if it might be a natural inclination for some students to take the opportunity of this assignment to advance their own views of how best to live one's life or to "shock" the readers, both teacher and classmates, with the startling details of their particular site. Some of the studies might have been informed by a desire to shock—such as the exotic dancer's study and another student's study of his friends' apartment—the site of a local "Animal House" culture. However, for the most part, the studies seriously explored what community means and how people in these communities act and interact. Two of the best studies in this regard were the study of a local night club featuring underground music (alternative and punk), ravers, mosh pits, and wave dancing; and the study of a band of musicians, in which a student wrote tellingly of the dynamics of individual personalities trying to form a cohesive whole musically while being torn apart by the tensions resulting from the liaisons that kept forming and reforming among various members of the group.

As this assignment has evolved, I have changed the reflective essay so they wouldn't take the opportunity to "judge" others' life-styles, especially in our diverse classrooms. Instead, the essay asks students to reflect on how they see themselves as observers / writers and to consider what their motives are in selecting the site, as well as choosing what to write about once they have collected their field notes and interviews. This change is aimed at helping students see their own, often hidden, biases that might show up in their reports and what this might say about their ethos as writers. So far, it has led to greater insight for some students.

If students are to become full-fledged writers in their academic careers, then they need to learn how to establish their own credibility in the eyes of their readers. The strengths of this assignment may lie in honoring students' voices and choices. Only when we sanction their right to choose freely and write freely can they grow as writers and learn the pleasures of expressing what is meaningful to them. And the self-confidence that I have seen this assignment engender can only be a bonus as they continue their writing in other courses.

Discovering the Structure of Professional Writing: When Revising an Assignment Entails Revising the Course

M. Todd Harper

Often, when we revise an assignment, we find ourselves revising the assignment sequence of the course. After asking students to propose and research the writing

in their field of study for a course in Professional Writing in the Disciplines, I discovered that students were failing to connect it with other assignments in the course. In order to make the connections more visible, I moved the assignment to earlier in the semester (as opposed to the end as it had been the previous semester) and followed it with the types of writing that they had discovered in their research. In this essay, I will discuss how the re-sequencing of one assignment changed the nature of the rest.

At Kennesaw State University, Professional Writing in the Disciplines combines technical and business writing with writing in the disciplines. Students practice the various genres of their field of study, while also reflecting upon the rhetorical situation and the process of their writing. For example, a student might document computer instructions for a layperson. As the student produces her text, she might also reflect upon how the text is shaped by its audience.

Several factors have influenced my assignment sequence for the course, most notably the variety of students who take the course. Originally, the course was designed to read "Professional Writing in the Disciplines: (the name of a particular discipline or field of study). For example, the pilot course was entitled "Professional Writing in the Disciplines: Computer Science and Information Systems Management." Joe Bocchi, the originator of this course, piloted it with a series of assignments designed especially for CS and IS majors, reflecting the technical nature of their fields. However, because of the interest in the course by other majors and the limited resources to teach the course, the specific disciplinary identification was dropped and the course was opened to all students who had completed their general education writing requirements.

When I inherited the course the following semester, I had to design assignments that would benefit all of my students, not just one group. I designed an assignment sequence with four major assignments: a report analyzing a journal in their field, a revision of a document, a proposal, and a research study. The proposal and the research study were based on the same assignment module of interviewing a professional about the writing he/she does. The other two assignments were freestanding and, thus, were perceived by the students as unrelated to the proposal or report.

Initially, the student response to the assignment sequence, in particular the proposal and report, was mixed. For my computer science and information system's management students, the assignment module was generally successful. To their surprise, they discovered that professionals within their field write extensively using a wide range of genres from research reports and fiscal studies to business letters and memos.

Many previously assumed that their jobs would simply involve technical support. These students have made important connections between the technical and business aspects of their jobs through the writing that they have discovered.

For my non-CS and IS majors, most notably my liberal arts majors, the response to the assignment module was more negative. All of these students-with the exception of one-chose to interview a faculty member. In terms of a success, these students realized that academics do more than write journal articles and books. Like their CS/IS counterparts, they too saw that professionals within their field write reports, letters, and memos, not to mention all of the writing apparatus surrounding teaching. However, in choosing an academic, these students became trapped in thinking that the academy was the only logical outcome of their degree. This was especially problematic since none of these students intended to go into academia.

Yet, all of the students complained about the relationship between the proposal and the report with the journal analysis and document revision. First, they argued that their research demonstrated that few professionals rigorously read academic journals. Instead, these professionals usually read trade magazines. (The exception, of course, being the academics.) Second, the students noted that I had not assigned more of the business or technical documents that they encountered in their findings. Many were especially surprised by the amount of business writing that they would have to do. Third, the students complained that the proposal and report had more to do with their writing than the genres that they would produce in the field.

In revising the proposal and report assignment module, I have changed the entire assignment sequence of the course. First, I have made the proposal and report into the centerpiece of the class. The proposal and report have been placed in the first half of the semester and guide the assignments that follow. Second, I have assigned business and technical documents that my students had discovered in their results. Most notably, students now practice writing resumes, letters, memos, technical definitions, documentation, and instructions. Third, I have maintained the focus of the proposal and report on the writing of a professional. However, I have begun to stress how this writing is similar to the proposals and reports that they will do in their field.

In choosing this course of action, I have changed the course while trying to meet my students' expectations. As students practice the genres of their field-a proposal, research study, memos, letters, instructions-they also reflect upon issues in writing. Although this sounds like a logical revision, it has not been without its difficulties. Most notably, it still clashes

with the expectations of my CS/IS student. First, these students are required to take Professional Writing and, therefore, feel that it should meet their specific needs. Currently, they feel the course is defined too broadly. As of now, I continue to negotiate their differences, and, I imagine, I will continue to revise this course as long as I teach it.

From Academic to Professional Writing

Carol P. Harrell

By the time English education students take the methods course in the semester before student teaching, the focus of writing instruction makes a transition from purely academic to the beginnings of professional writing. Secondary English Methods, a seven-hour class, meets three hours a day, three days per week; in addition, the students spend one morning each week observing in a variety of secondary school settings. This pattern continues for eleven weeks, and then the students go to a secondary school and participate in an extended field experience. During this four-week experience, each student is assigned to a teacher and spends three hours a day observing and teaching. These students are at the point in their academic career when they are ready to consider the development of their professional literacy.

Toward that end, the students have several writing assignments in the eleven-week course segment, the time they are on campus. One assignment that is particularly important as they begin to think about writing as a professional is the explanatory paper they do in conjunction with a unit plan they develop. The first requirement is a unit plan, a typical day-by-day plan they would follow if teaching in a high school classroom. Included in that unit are elements of instruction in all of the language arts, which include reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing. The second part of the assignment is a paper devoted to a theoretical explanation of why the pedagogical strategies used in the unit were chosen. In effect, these pre-service teachers define and defend their practice by supporting their beliefs about good instruction with research on the teaching of English.

In the past, the unit plan and theoretical defense have been done the Friday before the students go into the schools. Herein lies the problem; these pre-service teachers define and defend their practice *outside* the real-world experience. The course offers the practical experience, but the assignment designed to defend pedagogical strategies occurred before the students learned what real teachers do in real classrooms. In defense of the assignment, I believe pre-service teachers need to know how to prepare units before they go into the schools to teach, so doing the first part of the assignment (the unit plan) before the teaching component

make's sense. The second part of the assignment is problematic; although I know that my intentions to have students complete all of their assignments prior to the demanding field experience are good, asking students to defend teaching strategies before trying them out became an issue in this writing assignment.

The four-week teaching experience comes when students are out in the field at the end of the term, so they are not provided an easy avenue in which to give me feedback. Occasionally, however, students have come by my office after the semester is over and suggested that the theoretical explanation and defense might be a more substantive piece of writing if it followed the field experience. These writers are aware that after they have taught they know more about effective practice because they've experienced the classroom, and that knowledge could direct them as they defend their developing practice with theory. Some mention that they wish they could rewrite the theoretical section to incorporate their classroom experience.

Several factors are at play related to the writing assignment discussed. The point made by the students, and my own concern about the positive issue of having a field experience incorporated into the methods course, coupled with the disadvantage of its placement at the end of the term, thus eliminating time for guided reflection caused me to rethink the writing assignment.

In her book, *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers*,² Erika Lindemann offers some guidelines for designing writing assignments, and I decided to use those to direct my assignment evaluation. First, she says writing students should practice adjusting relationships among writer, reader, and subject while manipulating more and more complex variables. Reader, writer, and subject were not in question in this assignment, but I realized my goal was to present a real-world, professional writing experience. Unfortunately, this was happening without allowing the course's built-in strength of classroom teaching to drive the assignment. The students saw this and were aware that their writing would be strengthened if they could write as a more experienced writer, more knowledgeable of their subject that would allow them to write within the context of more complex variables.

Lindemann also says that defining a writing assignment requires knowing students well, anticipating problems, finding words to define the task, and avoiding clutter that might distract. The students and I recognized the clutter, "writing about practice before practicing," but for me to find words to define their writing task ahead of the actual field experience proved problematic at best and became the clutter I needed to avoid. The problem was, however, that I was stuck in the rut of "we've always done it this way," which included being in class for eleven weeks, out in the field the last four,

and all course work completed before the fieldwork started.

The third directive Lindemann gives in her discussion of writing assignments says that we must decide the writing assignment's function as a teaching tool, assess its relation to other assignments, and plan instruction, class discussions and group work, to support the assignment. One thing I emphasize in the methods course is that students think outside the box when considering ways to approach instruction. As I applied this principle to my own teaching, I saw a way to incorporate my students' voices into the writing assignment attached to the unit plan. I realized that I could offer students a way to manipulate more complex variables while offering them a chance to write from a developing voice if they wrote the theory section after their field experience. Not hard to see in retrospect, but without having been through the writing assignment with the students, I missed the point when designing coursework deadlines that meshed realistically with the demanding requirements of the field experience.

As I pondered Lindemann's third point-the assignment's function as a teaching tool and its relation to other assignments-I realized that I needed to change not only the writing assignment, but also the timeframe for the field experience. With that in mind, when planning for the fall term, I moved the field experience up a week, so that students completed their four-week teaching, and then they returned to the college classroom the last week of the term. The students wrote the unit plan component prior to the field experience, but bringing them back on campus offered the time needed to reflect on what worked and what didn't as they experienced the classroom. The redesign allowed the students to consider their book knowledge about teaching in relation to their real-world experience with teaching, and in doing so, that blended knowledge became the beginning point for informed professional writing about the theory that supported a developing pedagogical stance in the teaching of English at the secondary level.

Breaking the Bonds of Academic Genres **Susan M. Hunter**

My story of writing-assignment making involves students enrolled in a master's program in professional writing where "professional writing" encompasses creative writing, composition and rhetoric, and applied writing of the business and journalistic type. Before I discuss the challenge of seeing writing assignments through the eyes of this master's-level students, I need to provide you with a profile of them. Many are practicing professional writers, employed as technical editors or public relations workers; some are writing

teachers; some have non-writing-related careers. Ranging in age from 23 to 55, most are returning to the university classroom after some years in the workplace or raising families; eighty percent are women. Many do not have undergraduate degrees in English. Their professional and personal motives for pursuing a master's degree in professional writing are varied. Since their personal motives differ widely, I'll generalize about why they undertake this master's program based on their largely pragmatic professional motives. The majority will not choose to pursue a doctorate. Those who want to move up in their current workplace take applied writing courses such as Web-based corporate visual communication or computers and communication; those who want to publish literary fiction and nonfiction take creative writing workshops; secondary teachers who want to increase their expertise and raise their salary take courses in composition and rhetoric to learn more about the theory and practice of teaching writing. All have somewhere along the line been told they have a "flair" for writing.

Imagine, then, the heterogeneous group through whose eyes I must continually re-see the writing projects I assign in the core class, "Issues and Research Methods in Professional Writing." In this course, students take risks with unfamiliar genres for which they receive some open-ended guidelines about genre, topic choice, and rhetorical context. But they have few models for these genres from past writing and reading experiences, and I do not supply sample papers from previous courses. They keep a writer's notebook of responses to course readings; they interview a professional writer and present the results in question-and-answer form or as a profile; they team up to write collaboratively a comparative analysis of how data from these interviews confirms or challenges ideas from course readings; they present a book review orally and in writing; they write a critique of a source they have consulted as part of a literature review for a research proposal; they compile a portfolio of journal entries and revised writing prefaced by a cover letter that reflects on and connects the selections. Journal, interview, comparative analysis, book review, critique, research proposal, portfolio—returning students initially feel intimidated by these academic genres in a graduate program where they expected to get hands-on practice until they realize that these genres can transcend the academy to serve popular, commercial, and workplace discourse communities as well.

In the workshop talk that facilitates this writing, students reconceive genres as they learn them. Individually and collectively, they re-make genres as their own, resisting acculturation into an academic community, even as they become members of the discourse community of the course and the graduate

program. These writers do bring to the course a tacit knowledge of the genres specified in the assignments. As we talk about work-in-progress, you can hear them dredging up memories of critiques and proposals from past academic experiences, searching for some familiar benchmark. The genre that I designate for each writing assignment becomes a useful starting point for "unpacking" rhetorical purpose. Although they still clamor for models, without them, these writers are given—and then give themselves—permission to extend the boundaries of the assignment guidelines purposefully for their own rhetorical reasons. For example, a student presented an oral book review, not by summarizing and evaluating the book as had been done in book reviews she'd read in the past or heard presented in class. Instead, exclaiming at the start, "This is the only way I can think to do this," she related her personal reactions to selected parts of the book to give a history of *her* reading, turning a book review into a literacy narrative. After reading about interviewing as a research technique, another student asked the journalist she interviewed exclusively about his interviewing strategies. She explained that she had become so engrossed in discussing this topic with the journalist that she had completely forgotten to consult the guidelines for the interview project that specified questions about the professional writer's composing process. For the collaborative assignment, one team of writers rejected an analytical approach choosing instead to compose a symposium that enacted a conversation on collaboration among the professional writers they had interviewed and the scholars they had read. In these three cases, rhetorical exigency and personal interest motivated writers to cast aside the constraints of genre or guidelines. The discourse community of the classroom allowed them to invent genres, choose alternatives, and ignore restrictions. In my role as writing-assignment maker, I have learned to be continually surprised by and open to such reinventions.

The research proposal offers a different set of rhetorical challenges for these practicing and emerging professional writers. Their histories as writers include the production of numerous library research papers. Few if any, however, have experience proposing a plan to do qualitative research involving human participants on a cutting-edge topic or existing problem in a professional field or workplace that cannot be completed in a short period of time. Students struggle to come to terms with the range and limits of a genre in which they propose but will not complete research. While a genre that requires them to plan and begin research but not to finish it—a proposal—is widely recognized in the academy and the workplace, it is a strategy alien to students entering

a master's program. To make the strange seem familiar, I encourage students to select topics that reflect their individual workplace interests or career goals so that they can perceive the intersection of workplace and academic literacies. And so, one aspiring technical writer proposes to reinvent the genre of user manuals. A commercial fiction writer proposes investigating the effects editorial feedback and critique groups have on publishing creative writers. Another aspiring writer questions whether graduate writing programs turn students into publishing professionals. An aspiring poet and fiction writer turns her proposal into a book prospectus. Out of their personal and professional interests, these writers pose questions that drive their inquiries; the generic constraints of "proposal" fade into the background.

In peer review workshops, the writers discuss conventions and deviations in their works-in-progress and justify to one another their rhetorical choices. They wonder at the variety of their documents and at the fact that in this discourse community "different is okay."

Certainly, in the future they will have to function in workplaces where the tension between individual vision and community expectations makes "different" riskier. But I believe that from my writing classroom community they will take away the experience of genre as a social construct that is negotiable and responsive and that they will continually reenact that understanding with other writers in other settings or discourse communities.

In the four years since the master's in professional writing began at Kennesaw State, I have taught the introductory "Issues and Research Methods" course seven times. Initially, students viewed the readings and writing assignments as too "academic" in light of their practical expectations. Perhaps that first cohort's perception was more helpful feedback than I considered it at the time it was given. It may have spurred me to enact negotiable, collaborative assignment shaping in subsequent classroom communities, so that I now continually re-view writing assignments through my graduate students' eyes.