Front Matter: Table of Contents, How to Use This Book, and General Introduction

Author: Shane Abrams, Portland State University
## Table of Contents – Readings

### Chapter One

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<tr>
<td><strong>“Innocence Again”</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>by Chris Chan</td>
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The sea decides what it wants me to see: turtles popping out of the seabed, manta rays gracefully floating alongside, being in the middle of the eye of a barracuda hurricane, a coral shelf as big as a car, a desert of bleached corals, the emptiness of the seabed with not a fish in sight, the memorials of death caused by the December 26 tsunami—a barren sea floor with not a soul or life in sight.

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| **“Comatose Dreams”** |      |
| by Kiley Yoakum       |      |

She opened her eyes and tried to find reality. She was being tortured. Her feet were the size of pumpkins and her stomach was gutted all the way up her abdomen, her insides exposed for all to see. She was on display like an animal at the zoo. Tubes were coming out of her in multiple directions and her throat felt as if it were coated in chalk.

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| **“The Devil in Green Canyon”** |      |
| by Franklin                     |      |

The thick under growth has dwindled to small rhododendron bushes and clumps of bear grass. The frequently gusting wind has caused the trunks of the trees to grow into twisted gnarled forms. It is almost like some demon walked through the trail distorting everything as it passed. Foxglove and other wild flowers find root holds in warm sunny spots along the trail. Breaks in the thick forest provide snapshots of distant mountains: Mt. Hood is among the snowcapped peaks that pepper the distant mountains.

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Table of Contents – Readings (continued)

Chapter Two

“Under the Knife”  
by Joey Butler

_The doctors informed me beforehand of the potential complications that could arise from surgery. Partial paralysis, infection, death, these words echoed throughout the chasms of my mind. Anxiety overwhelmed me; I was a dying animal surrounded by ravenous vultures, drool dripping awaiting their next meal. My palms were a disgusting swamp of sweat that gripped hard onto the white sheets that covered me._

“Breathing Easy”  
by an anonymous student author

_Even though my parents had never been blatantly homophobic in front of me, I grew up in a conservative religious community that was fiercely cisheteronormative. My eighth-grade health teacher kicked off our unit on sex education with a contemptuous, “We aren’t going to bother learning about safe sex for homosexuals. We’re only going to talk about normal relationships.”_

“Visions”  
by an anonymous student author

_We decide to hold a pipe ceremony in order to establish connectedness and unite with one heart and mind. To pray and get to know each other. We went down to the beach and lit a fire. It was a clear, warm night. The stars were bright. The fire was crackling and the shadows of the flames were bouncing of the clear night sky. I took my shoes off and felt the cool soft sand beneath my feet and between my toes._

Chapter Three

“Slowing Down”  
by Beth Harding

_He could still drive—he just needed help starting the ignition. But now, once we’d get to where we were going, I’d try not to walk too fast. It had begun to occur to me that maybe walking ahead of him was kind of disrespectful or insensitive. In a way, I think that I just didn’t want him to know that my legs worked better than his._
Table of Contents – Readings (continued)

**Skills or Rhetorical Modes Showcased**

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**“Untitled”**
by Katherine Morris

*I was the kid who was considered stupid: math, a foreign language my tongue refused to speak. I was pulled up to the front of the classroom by my teachers who thought struggling my way through word problems on the whiteboard would help me grasp the concepts, but all I could ever do was stand there humiliated, red-faced with clenched fists until I was walked through the equation, step by step.*

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**“Parental Guidance”**
by Derek Holt

*One day my dad told us someone broke into our garage and stole all the gear. The window in the garage was broken except it appeared to be broken from the inside. He didn’t file a police report. My middle school surf club coach tried to get my surfboard from the pawnshop but it was too expensive and the pawn shop owner wouldn’t give it back. I felt betrayed.*

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**Culminating Assignments**

**“The Pot Calling the Kettle Black...”**
by an anonymous student author

*I had just stepped off a squealing MAX line onto a broken sidewalk slab, gnarled from tree roots, when I felt my phone buzz rhythmically.*

“I need you to come to the hospital. Mom had a little accident.” My dad’s voice was distant and cracking, like a wavering radio signal, calling for help.

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**“All Quiet”**
by Carlynn de Joya

*As a seven-foot bleeding wood crucifix looked on, we sipped the punch prepared by the sisters.*

“Hey Mr. Clark, what was the name of that cult leader in sixties?” I asked. Amber punched me. We all giggled.

“You mean Jonestown?” He paused. His voice grew stern. “Now ladies—behave.”

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“Blood & Chocolate Milk”  
by Maia Wiseman  
“It’s time for some more medicine, does your mouth hurt?”

“A little bit,” I said as best as I could with numb lips. The words came out muffled and strange. Gauze thick with blood and saliva was tucked over the wounds from the excavation. My mouth had become a foreign landscape with mountains of gauze and slippery rivers of blood. My tongue tried to ignore the upset.

**Chapter Four**

“Drag the River”  
by Ryan Mills

*Parked at milepost 6, the grease fire night pulled the river toward the delta.  
The water ran low;  
the trees performed their shakes.*

“Richard Cory”  
by Edwin Arlington Robinson

*And he was rich—yes, richer than a king—  
And admirably schooled in every grace:  
In fine, we thought that he was everything  
To make us wish that we were in his place.*

“A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning”  
by John Donne

*So let us melt, and make no noise,  
No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move;  
‘Twere profanation of our joys  
To tell the laity our love.*
Table of Contents – Readings (continued)

Annotation of “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning”
by Shane Abrams

“Close Reading Roundtable”
featuring Kamiko Jimenez, Annie Wold, Maximilian West,
and Christopher Gaylord

In the beginning, I really like how he listed Eric Garner, Renisha McBride. He kind of went through a timeline of injustices, and I really like how he left out the fluff. Getting to the facts and being straight-up isn’t something we really do with younger folks.

Chapter Five
“Maggie as the Focal Point”
by Beth Kreinheder

Not only do I agree with Benjamin’s stance on “Recitatif”, but I also disapprove of my own critical analysis of “Recitatif.” I made the same mistakes that other scholars have made regarding Morrison’s story; we focused on racial codes and the racial binary, while completely missing the interstitial space which Maggie represents.

“Pronouns & Bathrooms”
by an anonymous student author

The trans community recommend that schools and administrators acquire updated gender-inclusive documentation and update documentation at the request of the student to avoid misrepresentation and mislabeling. When you use the student’s preferred name and pronoun in and out of the classroom you are showing the student you sincerely care for their well-being and the respect of their identity.
“Education Methods: Banking vs. Problem-Posing”
by an anonymous student author

Freire begins his argument by intervening into the conversation regarding teaching methods and styles of education, specifically responding in opposition to the banking education method, a method that “mirrors the oppressive society as a whole” (73). He describes the banking method as a system of narration and depositing of information into students like “containers” or “receptacles” (72).

“You Snooze, You Peruse”
by Kayti Bell

While some schools have implemented later start times, this article argues for a more unique approach. Several high schools in Las Cruces, New Mexico have installed sleeping pods for students to use when needed. They “include a reclined chair with a domed sensory-reduction bubble that closes around one’s head and torso” and “feature a one-touch start button that activates a relaxing sequence of music and soothing lights” (Conklin).

Chapter Six

“Songs”
by an anonymous student author

America sings a different tune. America is the land of opportunity. It represents upward mobility and the ability to “make it or break it.” But it seems there is a cost for all this material gain and all this opportunity. There seems to be a lack of love and emotion, a lack of the ability to express pain and all other feelings, the type of emotion which is expressed in the songs of Mexico.

“Normal Person: An Analysis of the Standards of Normativity in ‘A Plague of Tics’”
by Ross Reaume and an anonymous student author

Sedaris’ father attempts to “cure [Sedaris] with a series of threats” (366). In one scene, he even enacts violence upon David by slamming on the brakes of the car while David has his nose pressed against a windshield. Sedaris reminds us that his behavior might have been unusual, but it wasn’t violent: “So what if I wanted to touch my nose to the windshield? Who was I hurting?” (366).
Table of Contents – Readings (continued)

“Analyzing ’Richard Cory’”
by Marina

The use of the first-person plural narration to describe Cory gives the reader the impression that everyone in Cory’s presence longed to have the life that he did. Using “we,” the narrator speaks for many people at once. From the end of the third stanza to the end of the poem, the writing turns from admirable description of Richard to a noticeably more melancholy, dreary description of what those who admired Richard had to do because they did not have all that Richard did.

Culminating Assignments

“To Suffer or Surrender? An Analysis of Dylan Thomas’s ‘Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night’”
by Mary Preble

Thomas presents yet another oxymoron by saying “Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears” (Thomas 659). By referring to passionate tears as a blessing and a curse, which insinuates that the speaker does not necessarily believe death itself is inherently wrong, but to remain complicit in the face of death would be. These tears would be a curse because it is difficult to watch a loved one cry, but a blessing because the tears are a sign that the father is unwilling to surrender to death. This line is especially significant as it distinguishes the author’s beliefs about death versus dying, which are vastly different.

“Christ Like”
by an anonymous student author

After they sit and talk for a while, they have dinner. This dinner resembles the last supper, especially when the narrator says, “We ate like there was no tomorrow” (7). He also describes how Robert eats and says “he’d tear of a hunk of buttered bread and eat that. He’d follow this up with a big drink of milk” (7). Those aren’t the only things he ate, but the order in which he ate the bread and took a drink is the same order as the sacrament, a ritual created at the last supper.
Table of Contents – Readings (continued)

“The Space Between the Racial Binary”
by Beth Kreinheder

Roberta’s hairstyles are stereotypes that conflict with one another; one attributing to a black woman, the other to a white woman. The differences in hair texture, and style, are a result of phenotypes, not race. Phenotypes are observable traits that “result from interactions between your genes and the environment” (“What are Phenotypes?”). There is not a specific gene in the human genome that can be used to determine a person’s race. Therefore, the racial categories in society are not constructed on the genetic level, but the social.

Chapter Seven

“Effective Therapy through Dance & Movement”
by Samantha Lewis

When dancing, whether it is improvised movement or learned choreography, the body is in both physical and mental motion, as many parts of the brain are activated. The cerebrum is working in overdrive to allow the body to perform certain actions, while other areas of the brain like the cerebellum are trying to match your breathing and oxygen intake to your level of physical exertion. In addition, all parts of the limbic system are triggered.

“We Don’t Care About Child Slaves”
by Jennifer Vo-Nguyen

Aged 16 at the time, Hieu explained that a woman approached him in his rural village in Dien Bien, the country’s poorest province, and offered him vocational training in the city. He and 11 other children were then sent to the city and forced to make clothes for a garment factory in a cramped room for the next two years. “We started at 6AM and finished work at midnight,” he said. “If we made a mistake making the clothes they would beat us with a stick.”
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<tr>
<td>by Tim Curtiss</td>
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<td><em>Cutting meat out of your diet will improve your individual health, but more importantly, it will improve the health of the earth. Some critics might argue that eating just one burger can’t raise the entire Earth’s temperature. The simple answer is, it doesn’t. However, making the conscious decision to eat meat on a day to day basis adds up to a slew of health problems accompanied by a large personal carbon footprint.</em></td>
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<td>Chapter Eight</td>
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<td>“School Vouchers: Bureaucratizing Inequality”</td>
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<tr>
<td>by Shane Abrams</td>
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<td><em>Since Besty Devos’ nomination for U.S. Secretary of Education, the discussion surrounding school choice has gained significant momentum. Socioeconomic inequality in this country has produced great discrepancies in the quality of education that young people experience, and it is clear that something must be done.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>“Pirates &amp; Anarchy”</td>
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<tr>
<td>by Kathryn Morris</td>
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<td><em>Political polarization continues to freeze up the government, rendering them ineffectual. Worse, elected officials appear more concerned with ideology and campaign funding than the plight of the common man, leaving their own constituents’ needs abandoned.</em></td>
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<td>“A Case of Hysterics”</td>
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<tr>
<td>by Hannah Zarnick</td>
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<td><em>In modern medicine, however, the treatment and diagnosis of female medical issues continues to be vague and potentially harmful due to lack of knowledge. Does the concept of female hysteria have continuity today?</em></td>
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“Wage Transparency and the Gender Divide”
by Benjamin Duncan

Pay secrecy has long been the norm in most of Western society, but it comes with an information imbalance during any salary negotiations. Lately, wage transparency has gained some legal foothold at the national level as a tool to combat gender wage disparity for equal work. Is pay transparency an effective tool to close the gender pay gap, or will it only succeed in making colleagues uncomfortable?

Chapter Nine

“What Does It Mean to Be Educated?”
by Celso Naranjo


This article is a meta-analysis of Scared Straight and similar crime deterrence programs. These programs were very popular when I was in high school and are still in use today. The analysis shows that these programs actually increase the likelihood for crime, which is the opposite effect of the well-meaning people that implement such programs.
### Table of Contents – Readings (continued)

**Skills or Rhetorical Modes Showcased**

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<td>by Kathryn Morris</td>
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<td>The economy of piracy in Somalia is addressed in this article. From the economic vacuum of a failed state leaving citizens to turn to desperate measures, to the eventual organization of piracy into burgeoning industry, perfect conditions existed for the normalization of criminal acts. The article goes on to elaborate on the costs to other industries in the region, to the social structure of Somalia, and the cost in lives lost. Finally, the author makes suggestions for counter-piracy strategies.</td>
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<td>by Hannah Zarnick</td>
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<td>The <em>Yellow Wallpaper</em> is an important narrative from the early 1900s that illustrates the delusional medical procedures placed onto women. Gilman herself experienced what was called the “rest cure,” which in essence confined women who were diagnosed with Hysteria or nervous diseases in a room to do nothing, limiting their “stressors.” They were forced to eat copious amounts of food to gain weight, and they were allowed no company.</td>
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“Planting the Seed: Norway’s Strong Investment in Parental Leave”  
by Christopher Gaylord

Children continue to reap the benefits of paid parental leave even into their adult years. A team of researchers examined the long-term impacts of maternity leave in Norway since the country’s introduction of paid, job-protected leave time ... [and] found that “reform had strong effects on children’s subsequent high school dropout rates and earnings at age 30, especially for those whose mothers had less than 10 years of education” (Carneiro). Thus, increased time at home with children—especially time during which mothers can relax without fear of sacrificing their income—can lead to success in the child’s life.

“Pirates & Anarchy: Social Banditry Toward a Moral Economy”  
by Kathryn Morris

When resources are unfairly distributed across society, citizens lose faith in the system of government. They see it as their right to take action outside the law because the government in charge of that law has shirked their responsibilities to provide security and a moral economy (Ibid. 1388). When the scope of the world narrows to eating or starving, when there is no one coming to save the day, when there is no other way out, when all that is left is survival, those are the moments that pirates are born.
“The Hysterical Woman”  
by Hannah Zarnick

Aside from flaws in women’s reproductive health care, there is also a well-documented gap in the treatment of pain between men and women. Of the 25% of Americans suffering from chronic pain, women make up a disproportionate majority (Edwards). Not only are women more likely to suffer from chronic pain, but that pain is more likely to be categorized as “emotional,” “psychogenic,” or “not real.”

Culminating Assignments

“The Advertising Black Hole”  
by Jessica Beer

While the amount of money that is spent on food advertising for children seems exorbitant to most, it is not necessarily the amount of money or the advertising in itself that is the problem for many Americans; instead, it is the type of food that is being promoted with such a heavy hand. Soda, fruit snacks, donuts, cereal, granola bars, Pop-Tarts, frozen meals, sugary yogurts, cookies, snack cakes, ice cream, and popsicles are some of the most branded items for children at grocery stores. Most of the things listed are not adequate snacks or meals, and yet it is proven that children want them the most due to their appealing containers.
### Table of Contents – Readings (continued)

#### “A Changing Ball-Game”
by Josiah McCallister

*A player’s brand is inextricably linked to their footwear nowadays, perhaps more than the teams they play for and their on-court prowess. DePaula points out that shoe deals are actually negotiated in much the same way that free agent contracts are hashed out.* … *[During] the same offseason that LeBron signed a one-year contract with the Cleveland Cavaliers, he signed a lifetime deal with Nike worth more than half a billion* (Strauss).

#### “Vaccines: Controversies and Miracles”
by Ezra Coble

*Getting vaccinated is not an absolute healing technique; rather, it is for reducing the chances one will get a disease. It is much like wearing pads while riding a bike: your chances of injury goes down, but there is still a chance of getting hurt. As for vaccines, the chances of getting the flu after being vaccinated is usually reduced by 40-60% (“Vaccine”).*

### Additional Readings

#### “LZ Gator, Vietnam, February 1994” excerpt from “The Vietnam in Me”
by Tim O’Brien

*“With a little weed and a lot of beer, we would spend the days of stand-down in flat-out celebration, purely alive, taking pleasure in our own biology, kidneys and livers and lungs and legs, all in their proper alignments. We could breathe here. We could feel our fists uncurl, the pressures approaching normal.”*
“My Favorite Place”  
by Cristian Lopez

*I pay and take my receipt and make my way to the next counter. A smoky and rich, sweet-caramel breeze wafts up from the espresso machines, racing to my nose, almost strong enough to caffeinate me instantly. I wait patiently for my coffee, zoning out to the sound of milk being aeriated and the crushing sound of iced beverages being blended.*

“Running Down the Hill”  
by Robyn Vazquez

*White ash started falling out of the sky like snowflakes, covering everything—covering cars, benches, tables. You’d touch it and have this weird film all over you.*

“21”  
by Patrick Roche

15. My mother cleans up his vomit in the middle of the night  
And cooks breakfast in the morning like she hasn’t lost her appetite.  
15. I blame myself.  
15. My brother blames everyone else.  
15. My mother blames the dog.

“Story of an Hour”  
by Kate Chopin

*She could see in the open square before her house the tops of trees that were all aquiver with the new spring life. The delicious breath of rain was in the air. In the street below a peddler was crying his wares. The notes of a distant song which some one was singing reached her faintly, and countless sparrows were twittering in the eaves.*
### Table of Contents – Readings (continued)

Excerpt from *My Bondage and My Freedom*  
by Frederick Douglass

It is easy to see, that, in entering upon the duties of a slaveholder, some little experience is needed. Nature has done almost nothing to prepare men and women to be either slaves or slaveholders. Nothing but rigid training, long persisted in, can perfect the character of the one or the other. One cannot easily forget to love freedom; and it is as hard to cease to respect that natural love in our fellow creatures.

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“*Between the World and Me: An Important Book on Race and Racism*”  
by David Saifer

“This isn’t a sociological or political text. In the book Coates renders his confusion, his questions, his grief, his anger and his joys with literary clarity, and with a depth that can’t be captured in a dry, “objective” discussion of the issues.”

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“Untitled” (A text wrestling analysis of “Girl” by Jamaica Kincaid)  
by Cassidy Richardson

Kincaid made the choice to make her poem into one large paragraph and use semicolons to separate the mother’s advice and commands (without ending the sentence) in order to convey that all of the items on the mother’s list are related in the sense that, when they are applied together, the sum of these actions and behaviors equals what societal and gender norms say it means to be a well-behaved woman.

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<td>Thesis</td>
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<td>Evidence (Quote, paraphrase, summarize)</td>
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“Untitled” (A text wrestling analysis of “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” by Ursula K Le Guin)
by Tim Curtiss

However, Le Guin’s society may more closely resemble our society than first thought. The child, found in the basement tool closet of one of the town’s buildings, is described by the author as “feeble-minded” or “born defective” (Le Guin 5). It is kept there solely for the sake of the town’s happiness, enabling citizens in the streets above to reap joy from the festival. This compares to today’s society in the sense that people rush through life paying no attention to the needy or homeless, only seldom stealing a glance to reassure themselves that they do indeed have it better.

“Moonlight (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack)”
by Calum Marsh

The first piece in the film, bubbling up nearly 10 minutes in, is “Little’s Theme”—a gentle, vaguely mournful minute of piano and hushed violin that begins as young Chiron stares into his lap in the booth of a fast-food restaurant, keeping every thought and feeling submerged. When the piece returns in the second act—Chiron now several years older, looking no less deeply inhibited as he sits sullen in his high-school classroom—the key is pitched way down, from D major to B major.

“Inauthenticity, Inadequacy, and Transience: The Failure of Language in ‘Prufrock’”
by Shane Abrams

Prufrock frames his failure to adopt an archetype using a strikingly dehumanizing synecdoche: “I should have been a pair of ragged claws / Scuttling across the floors of silent seas” (73-74). Prufrock finds it more fitting that he be separated from the species than to continually find himself inadequate to the measure of social roles.
“Why Our Feminism Must Be Intersectional”
by Jarune Uwujaren and Jamie Utt

“Using conservative estimates, between 25% and 50% of women experience gender-based violence (sexual violence, intimate partner violence, street harassment, or stalking) in their lifetime.

But to cite that number without disaggregating the data hides the ways that multiple oppressions compound this violence.

For instance, women (and men) of color are more likely to experience these forms of violence than White women or men and that wealth privilege can help to insulate some women from some forms of violence.”

“Economics and Obesity”
by Catherine Sterrett

While food deserts do contribute to obesity, the main economic cause is more likely the price of healthy, nutritious food. A healthy diet is too expensive to be accessible to low-income people and families, even if they do have access to a supermarket.

Nutritious foods like fruits and vegetables, while healthy, are low in calories. Unhealthier foods have high amounts of calories for a much lower cost, making them extremely appealing to families on a budget.
“Student Veterans and Their Struggle with Higher Education”  
by Bryant Calli

*It’s not that I’m not proud of it, or even that I am ashamed of anything I have done; it’s because I don’t want to feel any more singled out than I already do. I also find that people either have strong feelings against the military or simply have no understanding of what myself or other veterans have gone through. I try to avoid hearing questions like, “Did you know anyone who died?” or, “Have you killed anyone?” After spending years always surrounded by military personnel and within a unique culture, it is very difficult to relate to and want to be around college students.*

“Our Town” from *This American Life*  
by Ira Glass and Miki Meek

*“It was really striking talking to them—how the arrival of these Latino workers blew the minds of the local workers, turned their world upside down. But the Mexican workers didn’t have any of that. They didn’t have a lot of emotions about their white coworkers, didn’t spend a lot of time thinking or worrying about them.”*

“The Unfinished Battle in the Capital of the Confederacy” from *Code Switch*  
hosted by Shereen Marisol Meraji and Gene Demby

*“A few people have pointed out—notably, historian Kevin Cruz—the irony of the alt-right descending on Charlottesville, ostensibly to defend the statue of Robert E. Lee, but creating this universe in which the statues are so radioactive that it almost sped up their being taken down in a lot of places.”*
### Table of Contents – Readings (continued)

**Excerpt from Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America**
by Barbara Ehrenreich

"Seems its marble walls have been “bleeding” onto the brass fixtures, and can I scrub the grouting extra hard? That’s not your marble bleeding, I want to tell her, it’s the worldwide working class."

**Research Concepts**
- Inquiry-based research
- **Interacting with Sources**
  - Thesis (Claim of phenomenon)
  - Evidence (primary sources)

---

**Gaycation**
- starring Ellen Page and Ian Daniel

*Every day since the attack, vigils have been taking place all over Metro Orlando. Tonight we are standing with the community of Davenport, an Orlando suburb, as they mourn two of their young women.*

**Research Concepts**
- Inquiry-based research
- **Interacting with Sources**
  - Evidence (primary sources)

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**Sweet Crude**
- directed by Sandy Cioffi

*"We don’t know what we are going to leave for our children, because the oil company wants to stay and operate. They don’t care about the human beings who are here; all they care about is the money they make."*

**Research Concepts**
- Inquiry-based research
- **Interacting with Sources**
  - Thesis (Claim of phenomenon)
  - Evidence (primary sources)
“Why Boston’s Hospitals Were Ready”
by Atul Gawande

Talking to people about that day, I was struck by how ready and almost rehearsed they were for this event. A decade earlier, nothing approaching their level of collaboration and efficiency would have occurred. We have, as one colleague put it to me, replaced our pre-9/11 naïveté with post-9/11 sobriety. Where before we’d have been struck dumb with shock about such events, now we are almost calculating about them.
How to Use This Book – Instructors

First, I’d like to thank you for adopting this book (or at least considering it) for your class. I know the nightmare that textbook adoption can be, and I hope this serves your students’ needs as a primary textbook or a supplementary material.

This text was inspired by my first year as a Graduate Teaching Assistant at Portland State University. I walked into a classroom of first-year students, transfer students, international students, and returning students, all of whom had shelled out $70 for textbooks required by the department. As I planned each lesson, I had this figure in my mind: sure, it wasn’t the most expensive part of college, but my students would feel ripped off if I didn’t use the anthology and instructional handbook that they had been required to purchase.

Both of those books fell quite short. As with any anthology, the selected texts were great, but the scope left a lot to be desired. As with any textbook, the instruction was solid but had different priorities than I had. Nevertheless, I still felt obliged to teach them.

In contrast, this text is free. On the student side, this is great news, but it’s also great for us as teachers. You can use this book in its entirety, or use none of it. You can pick and choose model texts, or you can teach exclusively from one section. Because there is no cost associated with this book, you should feel no obligation to use it in a way that students “get their money’s worth.”

In addition to this advantage, this text afforded me a handful of other opportunities. First, as a digital product, it increases accessibility for students with disabilities. Additionally, because you can use it anywhere with an Internet connection, it is more readily available to non-traditional or distance learning students. Next, because it is zero-cost, it reduces the barrier to access for students entering college, especially from low-income backgrounds.

These characteristics are representative of broader trends in Open Educational Resources (OER), but I’d like to think that other things set this textbook apart: predominantly, I envision this book as a space to advocate for a student-centered writing pedagogy that at once embraces expressivist and social constructivist paradigms of rhetoric. This isn’t the first time a book has pursued this goal, but I consider my approach a valuable contribution to buoying the perception of value in student writing.

Student-Centered Writing and Learning Communities

Before going any further, I want to acknowledge one major goal of this text: to advocate for student-centered pedagogy that fosters learning communities. Most of the texts that make this a reader-rhetoric are actual student work that I’ve encountered over my career as a teacher.
This is a deliberate choice which responds to a problem that I have observed: the texts in anthologies are almost always and almost exclusively by professional writers. While this sets, perhaps, a higher standard, it also trains students to think that polished, publishable, and impactful writing is not accessible to them—that it is a different echelon of creativity and mastery. It teaches them that they should imitate the people who write well with the understanding that their writing will never be quite as good.

By the same logic that representations of people of color, different genders, different ability statuses, and so on are important to those who experience oppression, representing student writing in this book allows students to envision themselves in the role of author. This text showcases outstanding student work as evidence that students are very capable of producing beautiful, moving, thorough, thoughtful, and well-informed rhetoric.

To this end, I have edited student work as minimally as possible, foregoing stylistic and some mechanical issues. The use of student writing, in addition to its primary objective of representation, also relates to this book’s focus on writing as process, not product. We’ll discuss this further in the General Introduction, but I want to give you fair warning that the student essays included here would not meet some readers’ standards of “perfect.” They exemplify some strategies very well, but may fall short in other domains. Therefore, it’s important to regularly remind students that no text is perfect; no text is free of bias or ideology. The texts might spark discussions; they might serve as exemplars for assignments; they could even serve as focus texts for analysis. Regardless, though, I encourage you to read critically with your students, unpacking not only the content but also the construction of the rhetoric itself.

Professional authors and teachers know that a piece of writing is never actually finished—that there are always ways to challenge, reimagine, or polish a text. I encourage you to teach both professional and student model texts with this in mind: ask your students, What does this author do well, and what could they do better? In what ways are they fulfilling the imperatives of the rhetorical situation, and what advice would you give them to improve? To support this critical perspective, each text included in the main sections of the book is followed by a “Teacher Takeaway”: ideas from college professors reacting to the work at hand. While these takeaways are not comprehensive, they offer a starting point for you and your students to interpret the strengths of a model text.

I see student-centered curriculum as necessarily invested in what I call learning community. No matter how much support I provide for my students, their opportunities for growth multiply exponentially with the support of their classmates and college resources (like a Writing Center or research librarian).

I build a good deal of time into my classes for community-building for a handful of reasons:
• **Writing doesn’t exist in a vacuum.** Almost all writing involves an exchange between a writer and their audience. Even on the professional level, the best writing is produced collaboratively, using feedback from a cohort of trusted peers. However, many of our students have been trained to believe that their schoolwork is their business and no one else’s—or, at best, that their sole audience is the red-pen-toting teacher. Instead, this text emphasizes collaboration to model real-world writing situations.

• **Writing is hard.** Writing is hard because learning is hard: growth only occurs under challenging circumstances. Additionally, whether our students are writing a personal narrative or a research essay, they are putting themselves in a position of vulnerability. While the concept of an entirely “safe space” is largely a myth, it is important that they feel supported by their classmates and their instructor to ensure that this vulnerability is productive.

• **Communities are, to some extent, horizontal.** The vertical power dynamic that plagues many college classrooms, where the all-knowing teacher deposits knowledge into their ignorant students, must be dismantled for true learning to take place. Students need to be able to claim the knowledge and skills they build in the classroom, and they can only do so if they feel they have a stake in the mission and operation of the class.1

• **Communities have shared goals and values, but also diversity within them.** Each member might have a different path to those goals, might have different needs along the way, might have additional individual goals—but there’s value in acknowledging the destinations we pursue together.

• **Learning communities are not just communities of learners, but also communities that learn.** I’ve taught awesome classes, and I’ve taught classes that I dreaded attending. But all of those classes have had one thing in common: they were never exactly what I expected. It is crucial to acknowledge that no matter how much planning we do, our communities will have unanticipated strengths, needs, successes, and failures. Communities that learn adapt to their internal idiosyncrasies in order to make shared goals more accessible to everyone. Furthermore, the skills and concepts for building community that your students learn with carry them forth to shape their future communities.

I will take a moment to clarify: the concept of the learning community is not simply a classroom management technique or a pedagogical suggestion. Rather, I find the learning experience inherent in building and sustaining a community to be inextricable from learning about composition. Developing writers have more to offer one another than any textbook could. Although this book seeks to provide pragmatic and meaty instruction on writing skills, it is from this core assumption that I operate:

Writers write best among other writers. Learners learn best among other learners.
Rhetorical Situations

In this book, I also encourage a deep consideration of writing as a dynamic response to a rhetorical situation. I think we can all acknowledge that different circumstances, different audiences, different subjects require different kinds of writing. This variability demands that we think more expansively and critically about genre, language, style, and medium. It also requires us to acknowledge that there is no monolithic, static, singular model of “good” writing, contrary to what some traditionalists believe—and what many of our students have been trained to believe.

The realization that “good” writing cannot be essentialized is not groundbreaking in the field of rhetoric: indeed, we have known for thousands of years that audience and purpose should influence message and delivery. However, it often is groundbreaking for students today who have learned from both hidden and explicit curricula that certain dialects, styles, or perspectives are valued in academia.

Shifting the paradigm—from “How do I write right?” to “How do I respond to the nuanced constraints of my rhetorical situation?”—requires a lot of unlearning. As your students try to unpack more and more complex rhetorical situations, support them by deliberately talking through the constituent elements of the rhetorical situation and the preferred modes and languages utilized therein. The question I use to turn my students focus to the rhetorical situation is, How will the subject, occasion, audience, and purpose of this situation influence the way we write?

Why this focus? My emphasis on rhetorical situations is twofold:

- **To sharpen and complicate students’ thinking.** On a more abstract level, I advocate for critical consumption and production of rhetoric as a fundamental goal of composition instruction. If we, as educators, want to empower our students as thinkers and agents within the world, we must equip them with the habits to challenge the texts and ideas that surround them.

- **To prepare students for future writing situations.** On a more pragmatic level, I don’t think it’s possible to teach students all of the ways they will need to know how to write in their lives—especially not in a single college term. Instead of teaching rules for writing (rules which will invariably change), I argue for teaching questions about writing situations. Students will be better prepared for future writing situations if they can analyze a rhetorical situation, determine how that situation’s constraints will influence their writing, and produce a text that is tailored to that situation.

Keep in mind that many of your students don’t think about (or have been taught to actively not-think about) language as dynamic and adaptable, so you will need to provide scaffolding that gradually initiates them into the interrogation of rhetorical situation. Reflect on your own experiences writing: how did you learn to carefully choose a vocabulary and perspective that
engages your audience? When did you realize that your purpose would determine your style, length, or content?

I also encourage you to gesture to the many forms that rhetoric takes. Although you are likely using this book for a class with “Writing” in the title, another primary goal of this book is to advocate for critical consumption and production of rhetoric in all its forms. *EmpoWord* is centered on the nonfiction essay form (in order to satisfy the typical academic requirements of foundational college courses), but very little of the writing, reading, speaking, and listening our students do is in traditional essay form. You can contribute to their critical encounters with all kinds of media and rhetoric that permeate their lives.

**Assignments and Activities**

Depending on your course schedule and your pedagogical priorities, the content of this book may be too much to teach in one term. I imagined this book as my ideal curriculum: if I could move at a breakneck pace, teach everything I wanted perfectly and efficiently, and expect quick and painless work from all of my students, my course would probably follow this text directly.

However, this has never been and will likely never be the case. Teaching is a game of adaptation: we must be flexible, responding to our constraints and our students’ particular needs. To that end, I encourage you to pick and choose the units, assignments, and activities that you find most valuable. I also encourage you to tailor those units, assignments, and activities to your particular class by adding parameters, providing supplementary materials, opening up discussions, and locating assignments in the sociogeographical place in which you find your class. You can also zoom in on certain chapters and create your own corresponding assignments, curriculum, or activities: for instance, if you wanted students to write a purely descriptive essay, rather than a descriptive personal narrative that includes reflection, you could teach from the chapter on description, expand it using your own materials and related resources, and modify the culminating assignment appropriately.

All that said, another major goal of this text is to provide support to developing instructors. Especially if this is your first experience teaching, you are more than welcome to use this text to structure and develop your syllabus, conduct activities, and prepare assignments. Rely on this text as much as you find it useful.

One major insight I have gained from teaching this book in its pilot version is that students learn more when I block out time to discuss the activities after they have been completed. Each activity in this text is designed to help practice a discrete skill, but developing writers don’t always make that connection right away: be sure to allow for time to debrief to explore what the students can take away from each assignment. Doing so will allow the students to translate skills more easily. Furthermore, they will also reveal learning that you may not have anticipated, providing for rich in-class discussion.
Navigation

This textbook is organized according to the following general formula:

Section Topic
  Section Introduction
  Chapter on a Rhetorical Mode or Skill
    Instruction
    Activities
    Model Student Work
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  Chapter on a Rhetorical Mode or Skill
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    Model Student Work
  Culminating Assignment
    Rubric
    Guidelines for Peer Workshop
    Model Student Work

Under “Additional Readings,” you will find more sample work by both student and professional authors. “Additional Recommend Resources” includes direction to some of my favorite supplementary materials.

You can take a more specific look at either Table of Contents. (The second provides detail on the readings included.)

Key words and concepts are formatted like this the first time they appear, and they are defined briefly in the Glossary. Near the beginning of each chapter, you will find a table of vocabulary, like the one to the left, for terms used in that chapter.

You should feel free to bounce around between Chapters and Sections as you feel it is appropriate to your course.
Feedback

As with any piece of writing, I acknowledge that this textbook will never really be “finished”: it could always be better. I wholeheartedly welcome your feedback—on content, format, style, accessibility, or otherwise—as I continue ongoing revisions to this text. Please do not hesitate to contact me with your criticism, positive or negative, at shaneabrams.professional@gmail.com.

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How to Use This Book – Students

Welcome, students! Whether this textbook has been assigned for your class or you’ve discovered this book on your own and are teaching yourself, I hope it is an accessible and enjoyable resource to support your learning about writing, rhetoric, and the world.

Although your instructor may provide more specific information on how they want you to use this text, I will provide a bit of guidance to help you acclimate to it.

Student-Centered Writing and Learning Communities

First and foremost, I want to acknowledge one major goal of this text: to center the student learning experience among a community of learners. Most of the exemplar texts included here are actual student work that I’ve encountered over my career as a teacher. Almost always, the texts in anthologies are exclusively by professional writers. While this sets a high standard, many of my students tend to think that polished, publishable, and impactful writing is not theirs to create. Instead, this text showcases outstanding student work as evidence that you, and other student authors like you, are very capable of producing beautiful, moving, thorough, thoughtful, and well-informed rhetoric.

Furthermore, the use of student writing relates to this book’s focus on writing as process, not product. We’ll discuss this further in the General Introduction, but I want to give you fair warning that the student essays included here would not meet some readers’ standards of “perfect.” They exemplify some techniques very well, but may fall short in other domains. These student authors, just like professional authors, realize that a piece of writing is never actually finished; there are always ways to challenge, reimagine, or polish a text. As you read model texts, whether they are written by students or professional authors, you should ask yourself, What does this author do well, and what could they do better? In what ways are they fulfilling the imperatives of the rhetorical situation, and what advice would I give them to improve? To support this critical perspective, each text included in the main sections of the book is followed by a “Teacher Takeaway”: ideas from college professors reacting to the work at hand. While these takeaways are not comprehensive, they offer a starting point for you to interpret the strengths of a model text.
As I see it, the best educational experiences happen in what I call learning community. No matter how much support one teacher can provide for their students, your opportunities for growth multiply exponentially with the support of your classmates and college resources (like a Writing Center or research librarian).

It’s important to consider your writing class as one very particular learning community. Doing so acknowledges that:

- **Writing doesn’t exist in a vacuum.** Almost all writing involves an exchange between a writer and a reader. Even on the professional level, the best writing is produced collaboratively, using feedback from a cohort of trusted peers. You may have been trained to believe that your schoolwork is your business and no one else’s. This text emphasizes collaboration instead: we can be more successful, confident writers with the support of the readers around us.

- **Writing is hard.** Learning, and especially learning to write, demands a certain amount of vulnerability. By working from a place of shared vulnerability, you will discover ways to ensure that vulnerability is productive and maintain a certain degree of safety and support through a challenging process. My students are often pleasantly surprised by how much more meaningful their learning experience is when approached with an investment in shared vulnerability.

- **Communities are, to some extent, horizontal.** The vertical power dynamic that plagues many classrooms, where the all-knowing teacher deposits knowledge into their ignorant students, must be dismantled for true learning to take place. You need to be able to claim the knowledge and skills you build in the classroom, and you can only do so if you feel you have a stake in the mission of the class.

- **Communities have shared goals and values, but also diversity within them.** Each member might have a different path to that goal, might have different needs along the way, might have additional individual goals—but there’s value in acknowledging the destinations we pursue together.

- **Learning communities are not just communities of learners, but also communities that learn.** No matter your expectations for your writing course, our communities will have unanticipated strengths, needs, successes, and failures. Communities that learn adapt to their unique makeup in order to make shared goals more accessible to everyone.

Why does this matter to you? Because building and sustaining a learning community is a valuable experience which will serve you as a writer, a student, and a citizen. Furthermore, living writers have more to offer one another than any textbook could. Writers write best among other writers. Learners learn best among other learners. Although you will learn writing skills from this book, engaging in a learning community will allow you test and sharpen those skills.
At the same time, your future writing situations, whatever they may be, will be among complex discourse ecologies—specific groups of readers and writers with specific tastes, interests, and expectations. In this way, working within a learning community teach you to more actively evaluate your rhetorical situation.

Rhetorical Situations

In this book, you’ll notice a focus on rhetorical situations, which are explained more thoroughly in the General Introduction. Put simply, the act of writing is a response to a rhetorical situation, and no two situations are the same. Think about the differences and similarities between the following kinds of writing:

- A letter to your grandmother about your first semester in college
- An editorial advocating for immigration reform
- An e-mail to a craigslist user about the futon you want to buy
- A flyer for a Super Smash Bros. tournament in the Student Union

Different circumstances, different audiences, and different subjects require different kinds of writing. These differences ask writers to think critically about genre, language, style, and medium. More importantly, it means that there is no one method for creating “good” writing, no one-size-fits-all, step-by-step guide to success, despite what some of your previous teachers may have claimed.

Because you and each member of your learning community has a vastly different future ahead of you, it would be impossible to teach you all the ways you will need to write throughout your lives—especially not in a single college term. Instead of learning rules for writing (rules which will invariably change), it is more valuable to learn the questions you should ask of your future writing situations and produce texts that are tailored to those situations.

In this book, you will explore and work within three rhetorical situations. (The beauty of the rhetorical situation, of course, is that no two writers using this book will have the exact same constraints; nevertheless, you will share similar experiences.) Because many college composition programs value the nonfiction essay form, this textbook focuses on three different kinds of essays: a personal narrative, a textual analysis, and a persuasive research essay. The goal of writing these essays, though, is not to become a master of any of them. Instead, the goal is to practice interrogating the rhetorical situations and tailoring your work to be more effective within them.

As you learn more about rhetorical situations, think about the many forms that rhetoric takes. Although you are likely using this book for a class with “Writing” in the title, another primary goal of this book is to encourage the critical consumption and production of rhetoric in all its forms. Very little of the writing, reading, speaking, and listening you do is in traditional essay
form, so the learning experiences included in this book and your class should be applied to the other sorts of reading, writing, speaking, and listening you do throughout your life: how can you bring the same thoughtfulness to a Facebook status, an online news article, a class syllabus, a conversation in the dining hall, or a Socratic discussion in class?

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1 This is, of course, a call out to Paulo Freire and the school of popular/critical pedagogy and social justice education. While it’s beyond the scope of the book to consider the intersection of critical pedagogy and writing pedagogy, the two are inseparable for me.
Place-based education is the pedagogical manifestation of the mantra, “Think Globally; Act Locally.” It informs what I consider to be the most relevant pedagogy and curriculum. It also draws from the important movements of decolonizing and Indigenous pedagogies. As your students work through this text, try to find ways to make it relevant to the local community: students can complete a micro-ethnography in a place unique to your location; students could choose research topics that are relevant to the local scene; students could analyze op-eds from the local newspaper. To learn more, I encourage you to seek out texts by David Sobel, Vine Deloria, Daniel Wildcat, Matthew Wildcat, and Steven Semken, among others.
General Introduction

In a 2012 article published by The Washington Post’s “Answer Sheet” section, curated by Valerie Strauss, John G. Maguire decries the failure of college writing students and their instructors. The article, “Why So Many College Students Are Lousy at Writing—And How Mr. Miyagi Can Help,” explains that many students “enter college as lousy writers—and … graduate without seeming to make much, if any, improvement.”3 The problem? College writing classes don’t teach good writing. The article scorns those writing courses which cover “rhetorical strategies, research, awareness of audience, youth civic activism—everything except the production of clear sentences.”4

Maguire’s article advocates for a return to old-school instructional methods—specifically, teaching style and mechanics so that college grads can produce clear, readable sentences. Maguire concludes with a reference to a 1984 film, The Karate Kid. (If you haven’t seen it, the film is an underdog story about an outcast teenager learning martial arts from a caring but mysterious karate master, Mr. Miyagi.) Maguire asserts, “I’m a teacher, and I know what Mr. Miyagi did — he tricked the kid into learning. He got him to do important behaviors first, and didn’t reveal where they fit into the overall skill until later.” He continues,

[Colleges] should offer new writing courses that assume students know nothing about sentences and train new sentence behaviors from the ground up. Be repetitive and tricky—fool the kids into doing the right thing. Create muscle memory. Think “wax on, wax off.” The kid’s goal was to win the karate contest. The student writer’s goal should be mastery of the readable style.5

So, according to Maguire, more teachers should “trick” students into learning grammar and style, only to reveal to the students at some faraway time that they knew how to write all along.

In case you can’t already tell, I am very resistant to this article. I introduce it not because I have an axe to grind, but rather because I find it demonstrates essential misconceptions about writing that many people share. I have taken to teaching this text on the first day of class to show my students what they’re up against: teachers, readers, parents, The Washington Post reporters, and many, many others who assume that (a) there is one “correct” kind of writing, and (b) today’s students have no idea how to execute it.
I refer to the perspective in the Strauss and Maguire text as the complaint tradition, and it’s probably something you’ve encountered plenty of times. With every generation, some older folks can’t wrap their minds around how terrible the following generation is. *Those kids can’t write, they spend too much time on their phones, back in my day we used to play outside and movies only cost a nickel.* It’s easy to write Maguire off right away here, but let’s unpack a couple of key quotes to better understand what we’re working against.

“[Colleges] should offer new writing courses that assume students know nothing about sentences and train new sentence behaviors from the ground up. Be repetitive and tricky—fool the kids into doing the right thing.”

Beyond the fact that such an assumption is simply rude, it also overlooks the fact that students actually already know a lot about using rhetoric—they do so on a daily basis, just not necessarily in the same register, style, or medium that Maguire wants. Designing a course and basing a teaching style on the assumption that “students know nothing” would be a toxic and oppressive practice. As a student, you have dedicated yourself to learning, meaning you acknowledge that you don’t know everything. But this is a far cry from “knowing nothing,” and what you do know is not inherently less valuable than what Maguire knows.

Furthermore, I do not believe in “repetitive and tricky” teaching that pretends to know what’s best for students. Don’t get me wrong, I love *The Karate Kid,* but teaching grounded in deceit reinforces the toxic power dynamic mentioned above. It assumes that teachers know best, and that their students deserve no power in their learning environment. Teachers are not “better than” or “above” students: we have had certain experiences that position us to offer help, but that doesn’t give us license to lie to you.

Most importantly, though, I believe that pedagogy should aim to be transparent. In order for you to claim the knowledge and skills you gain in a learning community, you need to see how you’re building it, be invested in why you’re doing certain work, and respond to feedback on your thinking and writing processes.

So Maguire and I have our differences on teaching philosophy; we disagree on the nature of the teacher-student relationship. If it ended there, we might ‘agree to disagree.’ But Maguire also drastically misunderstands the characteristics of good writing.
“The student writer’s goal should be mastery of the readable style.”

Not unrelated to his beliefs on teaching and learning, Maguire’s belief in a monolithic goal of “readable style” is loaded with problematic assumptions about:

a) what the student writer’s goals are, academically, personally, and professionally,
b) whether “mastery” is a reasonable goal for a foundational college course, and
c) what “readable” style is.

A) Your learning community—you and the people around you—have drastically different futures ahead of you, both in school and beyond. To assume that you all want the same thing out of your writing class is myopic.

B) You will learn plenty about writing in this book or in your class. But let’s be realistic: even professional writers rarely consider themselves masters. Writing, like any art or skill, requires ongoing, lifelong practice and refinement. You will not be a master after 10, 14, or even 28 weeks—but you can always grow and improve.

C) What counts as “clarity” or “quality writing” is never static: it is always shifting as you enter new rhetorical situations. In short, “good writing” depends on who’s reading, who’s writing, why they’re writing, when and where they’re writing, and what they’re writing about. “Good writing” means differently to different people in different places and different times.

Rhetorical Situations

Throughout this text, you will be challenged to respond to different rhetorical situations through the act of writing. In other words, you will try to learn more about what “good writing” says and does in different contexts: What makes for a good story? An insightful analysis? A convincing argument? Why does it matter that we write where and when we do? What do different readers want out of a piece of writing?

By exploring and writing within different situations, you will learn skills for specific rhetorical modes, sharpen your critical literacy, and—most importantly—learn to adapt to a variety of writing circumstances that you will encounter both in and out of school. In other words, practice in different rhetorical situations will make you a more critical consumer and producer of rhetoric.
But let’s back up a second. What’s rhetoric?

You may have heard of a rhetorical question before—a question that someone asks you without expecting an answer. What’s the point of asking a question with no answer? To somehow impact the person who hears it, maybe by making them think about an issue in a different way.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, rhetoric is “The art of using language effectively so as to persuade or influence others, esp. the exploitation of figures of speech and other compositional techniques to this end.”

Very generally speaking, rhetoric refers to a set of strategies that authors use to connect to their readers. More often in this book, though, I use “rhetoric” to refer to any text that tries to do something to a reader, viewer, or listener. Vague, I know, but let’s consider some examples that require such a vague definition:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An essay on capital punishment</td>
<td>to convince a reader to form a particular opinion on the issue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A T-shirt with a Boston Red Sox logo</td>
<td>to rally team spirit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Levi’s advertisement in a magazine</td>
<td>to sell you Levi’s and to build a brand image.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A website for Portland Community College</td>
<td>to provide resources for students, faculty, and staff.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What other purposes do you think each of these texts might try to achieve?
An episode of *The Simpsons* tries to entertain, to tell a story, or to make social commentary.

The aforementioned rhetorical question tries to stimulate reflection.

A speech to the U.N. on the Syrian Civil War tries to garner support and humanitarian aid.

Each of these texts is rhetorical. Texts can be written or spoken; they can be images; they can be video; they can be digital or printed; they can exist for only a moment or for eons. What they try to accomplish can vary widely, from killing time to killing people.

A pattern might be emerging to you: you are perpetually surrounded by rhetoric, but you are not always aware of how it’s acting on you—no one can be. But by developing your rhetorical awareness, you can perceive and interpret texts more diligently, in turn developing skills to think more independently. For that reason, this book encourages you to be both a critical consumer and also a critical producer of rhetoric, specifically in the written form.

In this book, you will explore and work within three rhetorical situations. (The beauty of the rhetorical situation, of course, is that no two writers using this book will have the exact same constraints; nevertheless, you will share similar experiences.) Because many college composition programs value the nonfiction essay form, this textbook focuses on three different kinds of essays: a personal narrative, a textual analysis, and a persuasive research essay. The goal of writing these essays, though, is not to become a master of any of them. Instead, the goal is to practice interrogating the rhetorical situations and tailoring your work to be more effective within them.

Because the writing you will do throughout your life will take drastically different forms, you should learn to ask the right questions about the writing you need to do. Instead of learning rules for writing (rules which will invariably change), it is more valuable to learn the questions you should ask of your future writing situations.
and produce texts that are tailored to those situations. Whenever you create a new piece of writing, you should ask, *What will make my writing most effective based on my rhetorical situation?*

Every text comes into being within a specific rhetorical situation and reflects the characteristics and values of that situation. Although there are many ways to break down a rhetorical situation, I use the acronym SOAP for **subject, occasion, audience, and purpose.**\(^1\) These are distinct elements, but they often overlap and inform one another. Let’s take a closer look:

| **Subject:** The subject, put simply, is what you are writing about. It’s the topic, the argument, the main concern of the rhetoric you are producing or consuming. Every text has at least one subject; sometimes, a text will have both an implicit and explicit subject. |
| **Occasion:** Every piece of rhetoric is located in time and space. The term *occasion* refers to the sociohistorical circumstances that prompt the production of a piece of rhetoric. What is it that makes you write? How does your moment in culture, geography, and history influence your writing? Every text has an occasion; sometimes, that occasion is clearly stated, and other times we have to infer. |
| **Audience:** The target audience for a piece of rhetoric is the person or group of people for whom you’re writing. Although many people will encounter certain texts, every piece of rhetoric is designed with a certain audience in mind. Every text has at least one audience; sometimes that audience is directly addressed, and other times we have to infer. |
| **Purpose:** As I mentioned above, every piece of rhetoric tries to accomplish something. We can state this purpose using an infinitive verb phrase, like “to entertain,” “to persuade,” “to explain.” Every text has at least one purpose; sometimes that purpose is obvious, and sometimes it is insidious. |

Identifying these elements is only step one. What matters more are the implications that each of these elements carries. For each text you create, you should ask *What is my subject? What is my occasion? Who is my audience? What is my purpose?* But you should also ask *How do each of those answers influence the way I will write?*
For instance, the subject of the story of your weekend might change when you’re telling your grandma instead of your friends. Your language will change as your audience changes: if you’re writing a story about giraffes for a classroom of third graders, you’d better use different word choice than if you’re writing a meta-analysis of giraffe population metrics for the Executive Board of the Oregon Zoo. Similarly, you can imagine that writing a blog about standardized testing would be different in 2003 from the same writing in 2017.

Throughout this book, I encourage you to think critically about these rhetorical situations because there is no one version of “good writing.” There is only rhetoric that is effective in its situation. Any such rhetoric is crafted through process.

**Writing as Process**

Good writing is a lot of different things, and those things are largely dependent on rhetorical situation. But how exactly do we produce effective, situationally appropriate writing with an always-moving target?

The answer lies in the difference between writing as **product** and writing as **process**. The word “writing” itself can be both a noun and a verb: a **piece** of writing, or the **act** of write-ing. Although your process will eventually lead to a product, I emphasize awareness of process to more deliberately think through the techniques and ideas that you encounter leading up to that final product in that specific situation.

> “It is good to have an end to journey toward; but it is the journey that matters, in the end.”
> - Ursula K. Le Guin

Take a few minutes to think about your own writing process. From the moment a writing project is assigned to the moment you turn the paper in and wash your hands of it completely, what happens? What are the ingredients you’ve found necessary to a successful recipe, so to speak?

Your answer might include the things you see on posters in high school English classrooms—pre-write, research, draft, revise, etc. —but it also likely includes some other factors—procrastination, dance breaks, coffee, existential dread, snacks, etc. You should especially account for the things that make your process unique. One great example is your environment: some writers prefer silence in the library; others listen to music at their desk; still others like working in a coffee shop with conversational hum in the background.

As you challenge yourself with new writing experiences, experiment with your process. By this point in your academic career, you’ve probably already found something that works pretty well for you, and you should give yourself credit for that. But it doesn’t mean you can’t enhance
your process. If you’re someone who usually outlines before a draft, try a free-write or a mind-map—or just jumping right into the draft. If you usually listen to music, try a different genre. If you usually fall prey to procrastination, try to bust out an early draft, give yourself a day or two off, and then come back to it.

For all the differences in individual processes, every effective writing process is iterative: unlike the neat diagrams on posters in high school English classrooms, writing requires you to circle back, repeat steps, bounce around in sequence. It demands that you write, rewrite, rerewrite. It asks you to make revisions on every scale of your drafts. Like building muscle, improving your writing (as product) and your writing (as process) require repetition, dedication, and labor over time.

In summary, remember these three key ideas:

1) **SOAP and the rhetorical situation.**
   Writing is never “good,” “bad,” “right,” or “wrong” in and of itself: it can only be these things relative to the constraints of the rhetorical situation.

2) **Process.**
   Writing is more than just putting words on the page. It begins with a careful consideration of the rhetorical situation and proceeds through recursive idea generation, drafting, and revision. Writing is never truly finished.

3) **What to expect from the book.**
   *EmpoWord* will provide you the opportunity to experiment within different rhetorical situations to help you practice for future rhetorical situations. Alongside the work you do in class, the book will encourage you to work through complex writing and thinking processes to create rhetorically effective essays. These essays anticipate the kind of writing you will do both in school and beyond because they will give you the chance to practice asking the right questions of your rhetorical situation.

With these ideas in mind, I wish you Happy Writing!
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Vocabulary</strong></th>
<th><strong>Definition</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>audience</td>
<td>the intended consumers for a piece of rhetoric. <em>Every</em> text has at least one audience; sometimes, that audience is directly addressed, and other times we have to infer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>complaint</td>
<td>the recurring social phenomenon in which a generation complains about the way things have changed since their earlier years. Coined by Leonard Greenbaum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tradition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iterative</td>
<td>literally, a repetition within a process. The writing process is iterative because it is non-linear and because an author often has to repeat, revisit, or reapproach different steps along the way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learning</td>
<td>a network of learners and teachers, each equipped and empowered to provide support through horizontal power relations. Values diversity insofar as it encourages growth and perspective, but also inclusivity. Also, a community that learns by adapting to its unique needs and advantages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>medium</td>
<td>the channel, technology, or form through which rhetoric is constructed and communicated. Different rhetorical situations value different media, and different media value different kinds of rhetoric.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mode</td>
<td>the style and techniques employed by of a piece of rhetoric to achieve its purpose. Different rhetorical situations value different modes, and different modes value different kinds of rhetoric. Compare to genre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>occasion</td>
<td>the sociohistorical circumstances that prompt the production of a piece of rhetoric, determined by personal experiences, current events, language, and culture. Every text has an occasion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>process</td>
<td>a complex and multifaceted sequence that results in a product. As applied in “writing process,” non-linear and iterative. Contrast with product.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>product</strong></td>
<td>the end result of a creative process. Often shows little evidence of the process that created it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>purpose</strong></td>
<td>the intended result of a piece of rhetoric. Can be stated using an infinitive verb phrase (“to entertain,” “to persuade,” “to explain”). Every text has at least one purpose, sometimes declared explicitly, and other times implied or hidden.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>rhetoric</strong></td>
<td>a combination of textual strategies designed to do something to someone. In other words, ‘rhetoric’ refers to language, video, images, or other symbols (or some combination of these) that informs, entertains, persuades, compels, or otherwise impacts an audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>rhetorical situation</strong></td>
<td>the circumstances in which rhetoric is produced, understood using the constituent elements of subject, occasion, audience, and purpose. Each element of the rhetorical situation carries assumptions and imperatives about the kind of rhetoric that will be well received. Rhetorical situation will also influence mode and medium.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>subject</strong></td>
<td>the topic, focus, argument, or idea explored in a text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>text</strong></td>
<td>any artifact through which a message is communicated. Can be written or spoken; digital, printed, or undocumented; video, image, or language. Every text is rhetorical in nature. See rhetoric.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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General Introduction Endnotes

3 Strauss.


4 Maguire.

5 Ibid., emphasis added.


7 Strauss and Maguire.

8 Ibid.
9 It’s worth noting that most singular definitions of “good writing” are deeply entrenched in racist, sexist, and jingoist prejudice. This is not news to the National Council of Teachers of English, who originally published “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” in 1974, nor to Asao B. Inoue who recently published an outstanding textbook on the matter. Maguire missed that memo, I suppose.


11 Also worth consideration are mode and medium, which are often closely related to SOAP, but not explored in-depth in this book. This acronym comes to me courtesy of Daniel Hershel.

12 Granted, these examples are also in different rhetorical modes, but you get the point.