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# INTRODUCING GENRE AND TRANSFER AWARENESS IN FIRST-YEAR WRITING

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INTRODUCING GENRE AND TRANSFER AWARENESS  
IN FIRST-YEAR WRITING

An Essay Submitted to the  
Office of Graduate Studies  
College of Arts & Sciences of  
John Carroll University  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

By  
Sarah Continenza  
2019

This essay of Sarah Continenza is hereby accepted:

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Advisor – Thomas Pace

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Date

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Author – Sarah Continenza

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## **Introduction**

College was never easy for me. I was a tiny ship shakily sailing on the roaring waves of a university that blindsided me, engulfed me, and almost swallowed me whole, but I made it through and ended up boarding the boat for round two – graduate school. As someone with a natural flair for the comedic and dramatic when it came to prose, I made the choice to return to John Carroll University to pursue my Master’s Degree in English. I wanted to become a more proficient writer skilled in various genres, and make a difference in the workplace. As a store director at Sephora who hires and trains employees, a significant part of my profession focuses on implementing feedback to enhance workplace service and company provided learning tools in the retail space. Trainings provided by my team and me help to improve employee and customer experiences, ranging from meetings to workshops to keep education alive in stores and for clients. The reason I wanted to go back to school stemmed from my desire to strengthen my writing and facilitation skills. I wanted to learn how to write and teach across multiple contexts, from local stores to eventually a corporate position where I could partake in creating the learning and development tools used across the entire company.

Writing for various genres and across contexts did not come easily for me as an undergraduate student, and I did not feel as though I experienced enough exposure in my courses and previous work experience to continue to flourish in my career. I occasionally cling to “what ifs:” what if I was more participatory when instructors taught about the ins and outs of writing in first-year composition courses? I barely remember if and how my instructors coached me on these aspects of writing. This reflection led me to ask if

instructors explicitly address genre and transfer awareness in first-year writing courses to prepare students for writing in other curricula and in the workplace. Is this too tall of an order for a small plate—or, an even more vehement ocean for a pint-sized boat? As a student, I never thought about genre and transfer in such detail as I do now, and merely contemplate my own challenges in the first-year composition classroom. Though as a working professional who thinks about writing as a process of learning, I wonder, what about *them*? What does a first-year writing instructor do to prepare students to write in other contexts?

Scholarship in composition studies since at least the 1980s has debated the purpose and value of the first-year writing course from varied perspectives, ranging from hopeless to progressive. Sharon Crowley, in her essay “The Perilous Life and Times of Freshman English,” claims that first-year writing is a “black hole,” and a course that “swallow students up” (11). David Bartholomae, on the other hand, in his essay “Inventing the University,” sees the first-year writing course as an opportunity for students to cut through this confusion and become more “conscious” and “aware” of the particulars of academic discourse (17). In their study, “Rethinking Genre in the First-Year Composition Course: Helping Student Writers Get Things Done,” Carl Lovitt and Art Young describe the first-year writing course as “foundational,” and examine the question of the expectation of first-year writing courses, which is to prepare students for writing that will be expected of them in their major and careers (113). The debate around the purpose and value of first-year writing illustrates that the first-year composition classroom is a vital place for students to learn about writing and how to transfer the skills developed in the course to other contexts.

Even though Bartholomae, Lovitt, and Young suggest that first-year writing students gather numerous skills in first-year composition (FYC) to learn about writing that will assist them in their coursework and other situations, other researchers that focus on the role of genre in writing instruction make dissimilar claims. They argue that it is the workplace, rather than the classroom, where individuals learn or re-learn skills to write for various genres and transfer their writing to future situations. In *Genre: An Introduction to History, Theory, Research, and Pedagogy*, Anis S. Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff provide a critical overview of various genre studies that have shaped the field of rhetoric and composition's understanding and approach to genre. Their work on genre research in the workplace examines methodologies to genre from several critics with an overarching argument that writers in the workplace have a goal separate from writers in the classroom. They suggest that since there is no motive to rank or grade the workplace writer, writers need to be coached and immersed into the workplace to learn new genres. Specifically, they note that they examine genre "in ways we hope will be useful for new and experienced teachers and researchers who are interested in locating and exploring the scholarly and pedagogical possibilities of genre" (8). I agree with much of what Bawarshi and Reiff argue here, especially in terms of understanding the differences between academic and workplace genres and the need for students to learn additional writing skills when they leave the classroom. However, I am suggesting that genre and transfer awareness need to find a more pronounced place in first-year writing courses in a fashion to help prepare students to write for multiple future situations.

The goal for this essay, therefore, is to explore the role of genre awareness and writing for transfer, arguing for its more overt position in EN 125's curriculum at John

Carroll University. I claim that teaching genre awareness in the first-year writing classroom is important because it enhances students' rhetorical competencies and helps transfer their writing skills to other contexts, including the workplace. In making this argument, I draw from the research of Amy Devitt, whose work on genre pedagogy argues that all writing courses should address genre awareness and, by teaching about genre in the classroom, students gain access to tips and tricks to recognize features of genre. I also drawn on the work of Kathleen Yancey, Liane Robertson, and Kara Taczak whose studies on transfer in *Writing Across Contexts: Transfer, Composition, and Sites of Writing* provides a workable framework for answering the "transfer question" and how to support students when writing for new tasks in new settings (2). My hope for this project is to propose a plan for instructors to incorporate in their syllabus, which includes my recommendations for a more explicit focus on genre and transfer awareness in EN 125. By offering suggestions to first-year writing teachers, my objective is for instructors to consider my ideas in their classrooms so their students may experience instruction *and* immersion writing tactics that they can transfer to other courses and backgrounds.

### **Literature Review:**

Recent scholarship on genre and transfer awareness in first-year-writing courses tend to focus on three areas: one, research that provides an instructional model for genre and transfer awareness in composition courses; two, an examination of the goals for first-year writing; three, an analysis of student and workplace writers' effectiveness or ineffectiveness to transfer their skills across disciplines and to future situations. While this essay ventures to examine genre and transfer awareness in EN 125 at JCU, doing so

first requires consideration of the appropriate work that debates genre and transfer in composition courses.

Much of the recent scholarship on genre provides instructional models for genre and transfer awareness in composition courses. In their book *Genre: An Introduction to History, Theory, Research, and Pedagogy*, Bawarshi and Reiff present a historical overview on genre and describe key concerns and theories of the subject, exploring possibilities and problems for using genre to teach writing within different disciplines. Specifically, the book's second half examines a wide range of genre research conducted in university settings, in the workplace, and in public contexts. The chapter on genre research in the workplace, for instance, includes historical studies of scientific articles, a range of studies that examine genres in social and professional contexts, and in new media (10). Genre research in the workplace in Part 2 of the book includes studies claiming that writers learn and re-learn genres in the workplace. I want to include this book not to disprove those studies, but to show through my own research and recommendations for instructors how a more overt focus on genre and transfer awareness could instill cognizance in students so they may learn about writing, to write in the classroom, and to write in multiple future situations. The rest of the sources in this review concentrate on research about genre and transfer that could assist instructors in preparing their students to write for various genres and across contexts.

Another study that addresses the role of genre in all writing courses, Amy Devitt's essay "Genre Pedagogies," plays a significant role in my own research on how instructors could teach students about genre awareness. In her essay, Devitt argues that all writing courses use genres and every student writes. She defends the necessity for teachers to

understand the nature of genres and provides suggestions on ways to incorporate instruction on genre into the classroom, showing that exposure to exercises on genre and writing about various genres prepare students to write for other backgrounds. Her pedagogical approach, or genre model as I call it, offers three suggestions that she argues has values and limitations for different students and settings: teaching particular genres, teaching genre awareness, and teaching genre critique (147). Devitt insists that writing courses should use pedagogies to lead students to awareness and critique, while claiming that combining all three genre approaches creates instruction that goes beyond genre and supports the goals for composition courses. Devitt's study provides support for students to act in and beyond situations they will encounter during and throughout their lives, and her research shows students can learn about genre studies. In short, her essay is central to my project, because I claim that if instructors follow components of her genre model, students may experience a more explicit understanding of genre awareness in FYC.

Another recent study that examines the goals of FYC is Elizabeth Wardle's "Mutt Genres and the Goal of FYC: Can We Help Students Write the Genres of the University?" Wardle begins her essay by exploring recent arguments made by researchers of genre theory, which claims that inevitably, writers must learn and re-learn genres when entering other disciplines. She cites researchers of genre theory who argue against FYC as a course where students could learn how to write and transfer their knowledge of writing across contexts. They claim, Wardle notes, that transfer to varied situations is not easily accomplished (766). In her essay, Wardle provides an overview of the difficulties on teaching genres out of context and describes the results of a study she conducted in a composition program. Her study illustrates real problems that instructors encountered

when facing goals of teaching students to write the specialized genres of the academy (767). Wardle concludes her argument by debating that her research ought to lead us to re-examine the goals of FYC. She suggests that teachers should no longer teach students *to* write, but either teach students to transfer knowledge, or teach students *about* writing in the university (767). She also asks “how successful are our FYC courses at accomplishing these things [about teaching academic genres]? Are they even goals for FYC courses?” (771). To answer these questions, Wardle studied students and teachers in second-semester FYC courses at a university and examined goals of the program, which included students’ preparation to write in their chosen disciplines and how students achieved university level skills in reading and writing (772). Wardle’s essay encompasses a significant role in my project because she examines how the goals of FYC lead students to become stronger writers in later courses and shares her own suggestions to redesign the course. Her essay and research provides a model for me to consider genre and transfer awareness from FYC to other contexts, including the workplace.

In addition to the diverse research on the role of genre in writing instruction, recent scholarship on transfer focuses on how instructors teach transfer and how students learn techniques in FYC to write across contexts. The authors in this section of the review focus on how students respond to and use their personal and previous knowledge to assist them with transfer, and challenge students to link their personal experiences to academic writing and embrace challenges with their writing in the classroom.

In their study, *Writing Across Contexts: Transfer, Composition, and Sites of Writing*, Kathleen Blake Yancey, Liane Robertson, and Kara Taczak consider current efforts in the classroom designed to encourage transfer awareness and introduce an

innovative understanding into the role and magnitude of prior and personal knowledge in students' ability to transfer writing knowledge and practice to new settings. They investigate the transfer question and ask specifically: "how can we support students' transfer of knowledge and practice in writing; that is, how can we help students develop writing knowledge and practices that they can draw upon, use, and repurpose for new writing tasks in new settings?" (2). They designed the Teaching for Transfer course [TFT] that assists with students transferring writing knowledge and practice in ways other composition courses do not (2-3). In the first part of the book, Yancey, et al. reveal their extensive research around the transfer question and report their findings: prior knowledge of various types plays a decisive role in students' successful transfer of writing knowledge and practice (5). Based on the research, they develop three models for students through their use of prior knowledge as they encounter new writing tasks: one, the assemblage model in which students graft new composition knowledge onto earlier understandings of composition; two, the remix model in which students integrate prior and new writing knowledge; and three, the critical incident model in which students encounter an obstacle that helps them re-theorize writing in general and their agency as writers (5).

By examining and implementing components of Yancey, et al.'s work on transfer into my own research for this essay, I will offer my recommendation for a more overt focus on transfer in EN 125, and argue that elements of Yancey, et al.'s study are workable in the FYC classroom to bring transfer awareness to students more explicitly. In this book, Yancey, et al. explore the student writers' link between their personal experience and academic experience so they may understand the goals for transfer. They

insist that the purpose of transfer is for students to feel supported and to be able to write for new tasks and new settings beyond FYC. They say, “information about what students might bring with them from high school to college, in terms of writing practice and knowledge can be helpful to curriculum designers” (13). Yancey and her colleagues insist prior knowledge and experience is crucial. This book is significant for the essay because it provides a theoretical foundation for how to consider the role of transfer in EN 125 as well as introduce a more overt focus on transfer in FYC.

In addition to Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak, other scholars on transfer have examined the link between the students’ prior and personal knowledge and experience with writing inside and outside of the classroom, exploring how these skills assist with transferring writing to other disciplines. For example, in their essay, “Affect, Experience, and Accomplishment: A Case Study of Two Writers from First-Year Composition to Writing in the Disciplines,” J Paul Johnson and Ethan Krase follow the academic journey of two student writers and also strive to answer the transfer question. In their essay, Johnson and Krase explore writing in FYC to writing in the disciplines and include a case study that argues students succeed as writers across contexts if they focus on existing skills and find connections between personal and academic writing to embrace the challenges of transfer (2). Their research correlates with the work done by Yancey, et al., and shows students must draw on writing experience from prior knowledge or their personal lives to achieve success with transfer. Johnson and Krase ask two questions: one, can students improve their writing abilities in FYC; and two, can they find, create, and connect their personal writing to their academic writing (2). For instance, they note that personal experience and goals, instructional experience in the classroom, and

individual accomplishment lead to significant growth and success when students are writing in multiple future situations. Most explicitly, Johnson and Krase address these claims in their case study that follows Kate and Mary, two students who enrolled in different sections of FYC with different readings, different instructors, different goals for their writing, and different majors—Kate majors in biology, and Mary majors in teaching. This research follows their journey through FYC to writing in other disciplines. Johnson and Krase share that Kate and Mary demonstrated improvement in all areas of writing. Kate’s written work shows strong understanding of her audience, context, and purpose while Mary’s written work shows expertise with writing for various genres. As a result, Johnson and Krase conclude that “the cases presented here bring into meaningful focus a complex set of factors—some individual, others institutional—that can result in the productive development of student writing ability” (3). Johnson and Krase’s essay is important because it demonstrates that transfer of rhetorical knowledge can occur if instructors address the role writing in supporting student self-discovery. In doing so, Johnson and Krase argue, students can be taught transfer awareness in the first-year writing classroom.

Overall, the scholarship included in this review on genre and transfer awareness provides a workable framework for FYC instructors to incorporate in EN 125 at JCU. Again, I do not intend to use the scholarship to disprove the research conducted in academic and professional contexts, but to show a different perspective from the lens of the FYC instructor. I claim that with a more overt focus on genre and transfer in EN 125 at JCU, students could learn new genres and re-learn how to write upon entering the workplace, but also incorporate assignments on genre and transfer awareness from FYC

courses to writing in multiple future situations. The scholarship also displays the importance for structure when learning about genre and transfer awareness — all students have different learning patterns, but the goals for student writers are the same, which is for them to learn about writing in the FYC classroom, and to write across other contexts as well.

### **Methodology**

To learn more about how students can use genre awareness to help them transfer their writing skills to subsequent rhetorical situations, I analyzed John Carroll University's *EN 125 Handbook* and the *EN 125 Teacher's Guide*, as well as conducted a small-scale survey of college writing instructors to gather qualitative data regarding the teaching of genre and transfer. I drew from the handbook and the teacher's guide for two reasons: one, to prepare my survey questions and, two, to learn about the role genre and transfer currently play in the EN 125 curriculum. This section of my research provides a description of the study I conducted.

For my project, I conducted a small-scale study to gather information from EN 125 instructors to learn about the role of genre and transfer in EN 125. A small-scale study is useful since it limits my project's focus to a manageable scale and timeline, allowing for completion of my research project as well as the possibility for continued investigation. I began the process of creating my survey by first identifying my audience, which are FYC instructors of EN 125 at JCU. I received a list of 29 EN 125 instructors from my project advisor, Dr. Thomas Pace. The instructors I emailed include current and previous instructors of EN 125, ranging from full time faculty, part time faculty, and

Graduate Assistants. I asked the instructors three questions: one, in EN 125 or other courses you may teach, how do you address the role of genre when teaching writing; two, when designing writing assignments for your students, do you specify the genre of writing required—if so, what genres do you assign and why, and if not, why not; three, how do you address the process of transferring writing skills across genres from your writing course to other courses students may encounter—if you do address transfer, please provide a brief overview of how you do so, and if not, why not?

My goal for the survey was to identify central patterns in the survey responses to assist with my recommendations centered on each question I asked the instructors. For the first question, which addressed genre awareness, I looked for key words in the responses such as “genre,” “awareness,” “unit,” “design,” “assignment,” and “class discussion.” Based on Amy Devitt’s pedagogical genre approaches and attention to student writing exercises in relation to genre awareness, I also looked for key words such as “writing instruction,” or “writing exercises.” From these observations, I would identify the first pattern. For the second question, which addressed assignments, I did not look for key words but instead, surveyed the list of projects instructors shared that they assigned students so I could determine if there was unity in assignments based on the projects in the *EN 125 Teacher’s Guide*. From these observations, I would identify the second pattern. For the third question, which addressed transfer awareness, I looked for key words in the responses such as “transfer,” “awareness,” “future,” “writing situations,” and disciplines. Based on Yancey, et al.’s research on transfer and 3 models of transfer, I also looked for key words such as “conversations,” “communication,” and “connection.” From these observations, I would identify the third pattern.

Over the course of twelve days, seven instructors responded with 21 responses recorded. Twelve responses were included in the survey results portion of the project. For this survey, I received an IRB exemption. The reason I am including only 12 out of 21 responses is: one, I want to keep this project to a manageable length; two, I chose to record the responses that most explicitly or inexplicitly address feedback on the role of genre and transfer awareness in EN 125 so I can provide a fair analysis of the results to offer my recommendations. The nine survey responses I am not including either resulted in minimal responses from instructors that were not as relevant to my research as the others were or merely elaborated or echoed their responses from a previous question in the survey.

Two limitations in my study that I experienced are: one, the number of survey responses I am including in my results is relatively small (representing 28% of instructors emailed) two, the responses to the Qualtrics survey are anonymous, and I am unable to conclude from the feedback if status [part time or full time instructor vs. graduate assistant] or if tenure in role as an EN 125 instructor plays a significant factor in the responses. Based on the survey feedback I include in the results, I would like to state that I am offering a recommendation for a more overt focus on genre and transfer in EN 125 at JCU based on a set of the overall responses. I acknowledge that continued investigation on this project will require additional and considerable research, more detailed feedback, and a wider variety of responses from EN 125 instructors.

## **Survey Results**

The following section provides an overview of the results gathered from the survey. Here, I identify three patterns that emerged from the survey. After reviewing the survey responses, recording the most relevant feedback, and providing the responses in the results below, I grouped the feedback into three themes or patterns. I based the patterns on Devitt's study on genre pedagogies and Yancey et al.'s research on transfer summarized in the literature review. These survey responses suggest attention to the study of genre awareness and transfer in EN 125, but not an explicit focus. One, I reveal from the responses recorded how most instructors address genre, but they do so mostly in the context of other assignments, of assigned readings, and of general class discussion; two, I reveal from the responses recorded how not all instructors address genre awareness in the same assignments in EN 125; three, I reveal from the responses recorded how instructors share the importance of addressing transfer, but most of them note that the message around the value of transfer does not land for all students.

From the first set of responses recorded, I deduce that instructors in EN 125 focus on genre to some degree. Their replies show that the majority of the instructors assign readings and engage the students in classroom discussion, but do not concentrate on genre as a central focus in their course. Specifically, one instructor noted that he or she does not "dedicate a unit or lesson to genre, but it certainly comes up," and that he or she will "explain the idea of each essay as "genre" of writing" and that he or she discusses "the different attributes of that "genre" but that awareness is "not a central piece to my course design." In this first survey response the instructor explains genre to his or her students. As I continued reviewing the surveys, I discovered the other instructors place emphasis on the readings they assign students when focusing on genre awareness. When I

looked at a second instructor's response, he or she focused strictly on the assigned readings that he or she provided to students that related to genre awareness. For example, the instructor noted the class "reads a chapter in the writing textbook that I use that discusses the concept of "genre" as well as what it means." The instructor revealed that he or she introduces both reading and discussion to the classroom. On the subject of discussion around genre awareness in the classroom, a third instructor shared: "early in the semester I will discuss the characteristics I expect to see in their writing (and in model texts)" and that, "later we discuss genre in relation to things we are reading and then connect back to writing." In addition to communicating how they engage their EN 125 students with various reading assignments, the instructors invite the class to discuss genre and share insights with their peers and the instructor. One instructor provided detail on how he or she addresses multiple genres with their students. The instructor said that he or she "introduces a wide variety of assignments (summary/response, analysis, critique, argument, and personal narrative) and define "texts" in the broadest term possible." Overall, all the instructors that responded to survey about how they address genre awareness concentrate on the topic of genre to some extent in their classroom. Some revolve class discussions around genre, some assign readings on genre, and some assign more specific genres for students to analyze and discuss in EN 125, all address genre to some degree.

This concentration on genre in EN 125 aligns with Devitt's suggestions for teaching genre in the classroom. Many instructors from the survey focus on genre awareness to an extent. However, as Devitt highlights in her study, in addition to reading and discussing genres, she prompts her students to write about various genres to

challenge them to become more aware of genres through the writing process. This overt focus on genre awareness is a key difference that instructors did not share in the survey responses. In other words, Devitt examines particular genres in her courses and teaches students specifically how to be more aware of genre differences. In doing so, she provides a workable framework for instructors in EN 125 so they may engage their students in collaborative participation, classroom learning, *and* writing exercises based on these three models. Devitt notes that, “combining all three approaches creates a pedagogy that goes well beyond genre and supports lofty goals for our composition courses,” which is to help students in the classroom and in future situations (147). To conclude my analysis on the first survey question pertaining to instructors’ feedback, genre awareness maintains a presence in the EN 125 classroom, though may not be overtly addressed.

From the first set of responses recorded, I deduce that not all instructors address genre awareness in the same assignments. For example, when asked about projects that teachers assign to students, one instructor shared, “especially for the third and fourth essay of the course [the argumentative research paper and the personal narrative]” focus mostly on genre awareness. The first instructor revealed that he or she assigns students an argumentative research paper and personal narrative as an assignment to address genre awareness, and I did notice that a second instructor also shared that he or she assigns students an argumentative research paper and personal narrative to introduce genre awareness in EN 125, but provided other projects that he or she assigns to introduce genre awareness. The second instructor said he or she assigns a “rhetorical analysis, opinion piece, research essay, and narrative,” and that, “as stated earlier, we discuss the characteristics of the piece and what should go into writing that piece.” In addition to

these genre assignments, a third instructor revealed that he or she focuses strictly on the research paper. He or she “focus on argument as the students prepare to write a research paper.” Finally, one last instructor also revealed a focus on argument, but he or she concentrates on other assignments as well. He or she “focus on arguments; sometimes the focus is on the plot, sometimes on setting, and sometimes on characters. Students are encouraged to include personal opinions and experiences [in their writing] when applicable.” Overall, I discovered that out of the three survey questions, these particular responses included varying feedback — the instructors mostly reference argument or the research essay, but do not provide the same assignments that overtly focuses on genre awareness. Instead, they provide several projects to assign to their students.

This focus on genre on behalf of the instructors connects to Devitt’s argument about genre in her essay, “Genre Pedagogies.” Here, Devitt considers the students’ goal to learn about genre awareness and engagement with their own writing. In her essay, I observed that when she cites her own work with students on genre instruction, awareness, and critique, the projects or exercises she assigns to her students visibly address genre to continue to develop their awareness around multiple genres. Devitt writes that when she teaches her students about genre awareness she offers a simplified process which includes collecting samples of the genre, identifying the larger context, identifying patterns, and analyzing what the patterns reveal about the larger context (152). She reveals that her students can assign this process to any genre they encounter or that interests them which includes analyzing birth announcements, nutrition labels, scouting reports, and movie reviews (152). The second pattern that emerges from the survey that claims not all instructors address genre awareness in the same assignments reinforces Devitt’s argument

about the importance of teaching particular genres. Specifically, she argues that choosing specific genres to include in a writing course matters because the genres chosen favor and develop certain perspectives more than others (148). For example, the narrative assignment promotes an individual and chronological perspective, and work-related genre assignments add value to one's world view. Choosing specific projects to assign students that focus on a genre, this will develop their skills further and allow them to become masters of particular genres.

From the first set of responses recorded, I deduce how instructors address transfer. Specifically, the instructors noted that while they concentrate on the role of transfer in their courses, they revealed that not all students understand transfer's purpose in FYC. All of the instructors who participated in the survey acknowledge transfer's value and address the topic of transfer with their students to some extent. For example, one instructor expressed that he or she explains to their students how "each genre of writing could be transferred to their major—most of them are in Boler [School of Business] so it's more of a discussion of how they might use it again." In addition to disclosing how conversations around transfer sound with their students, a second instructor elaborated on discussions around transfer awareness in the classroom. He or she shared, "we discuss types of writing that they might encounter in university and how each writing we do can be used in the future." A third instructor expressed issues students experience with transfer awareness in FYC. He or she said that students "come to college with a very narrow definition of the "English paper," and in order to apply learning and skills beyond the classroom, they must become more agile writers and communicators." This instructor also disclosed that, "I try to help the students see that the skills they are learning in EN

125 transfers to any writing they do, including informal writing like emails. Some of the students “get” that but many of them don’t. Two instructors continued to focus on how the dialogue around transfer awareness sounds in their courses. A fourth instructor stated that he or she “incorporates language about courses across the disciplines into our conversation, asking students about the types of writing assignments that they will be completing in other classes and bring in what I know about other disciplines.” And finally, one more instructor said that he or she tries “to prompt it [transfer] through more practical conversations.” In general, most instructors report that they address transfer in EN 125, but students do not always understand the extent of transfer’s purpose.

The results from the survey suggest that the course does not address transfer as overtly as it should. In their work on transfer, Yancey, et al., as well as Johnson and Kruse place value on the connection between students’ previous and personal experience to transfer how and how this association improved their academic writing writing over time. For example, Yancey, et al. note that recently, a more explicit focus on transfer began to flourish in classroom research. Similarly, Johnson and Kruse argue that support and instruction from teachers become more of a responsibility in the classroom as writing projects take on increasingly sophisticated topics (1). So, while transfer finds a place as a topic of discussion in EN 125, instructors could more explicitly concentrate on the subject by allowing students to address previous writing experiences and connect them to their understanding of how they can utilize their writing skills in new and different surroundings.

This small scale survey provides a broad overview to the various techniques instructors in EN 125 currently address in their classes pertaining to genre and transfer

awareness. Specifically, instructors whose responses were included in these results tend to assign various reading assignments and engage the class in discussion when it comes to genre awareness. Likewise, instructors address transfer in general terms but not in any overt, specific way that allows students to use prior experience to examine how their writing skills transfer from one context to another.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the results of my survey and on recent scholarship on genre and transfer, I propose two recommendations to support a place for genre and transfer awareness in EN 125's curriculum: one, the program should include a more overt focus on genre; and two, the program should include a more overt focus on transfer, both of which build on already-existing assignments in the standard EN 125 syllabus.

The *EN 125 Teacher's Guide* provides four major projects for instructors to assign students to guide them through the semester. The first assignment, Project #1: What Do They Have to Say? introduces students to academic writing. Students begin to learn how to write an academic summary based on another writer's ideas and provide a well-organized three to four-page summary of one of the essays they read for this unit from the course reader. The second assignment, Project #2: What Do You Have to Say? builds on the academic summary from Project #1, in which they include and discuss library research. The students write a well-developed, four to five-page paper that states an argument about an issue from their research and reading, supported with evidence. The third assignment, Project #3: Formal Research-Based project is a five to seven-page paper that has students pick a research topic or question based on the course material.

Students write an annotated bibliography (four to six items) and paper proposal (one to two pages) and base their project on the proposal and bibliography. The final assignment is Project #4: Academic Literacy Narrative. For this project, students write a narrative on their understanding of writing over the course of the semester and integrate that narrative with research on the kind of writing performed in their major. This project can be a stand-alone three to five-page paper, or students can use this narrative as their final portfolio letter (three to five pages) (63-64).

While these assignments make overtures toward genre awareness and transfer of rhetorical knowledge, based on my short survey I recommend that instructors incorporate more explicit genre awareness in Project #3 and incorporate a more explicit focus on transfer in Project #4. The chief goal for these recommendations is to create increased awareness of genre and transfer in FYC at JCU that will strengthen student writing in other courses and multiple future situations.

#### *Recommendation One: Focus on Genre*

My first recommendation is to take Project #3 and incorporate more attention on genre awareness in the assignment. I suggest instructors model the focus on Amy Devitt's pedagogical genre teachings, or the genre model. I advise that in addition to various assigned readings and class discussion, instructors could create interactive writing exercises as part of the focus for their students to learn about writing, various genres, and genres of interest.

To begin, I suggest instructors prepare students for Project #3 by assigning them articles or literature to read that encompasses several genres, since they revealed in the

survey that exposing students to quite a few genres remains standard practice in their classrooms. Once students complete the assigned reading and share insights with the teacher and the class, the instructor could introduce Devitt's model, which begins with step one, teaching particular genres. This first step allows students to understand different perspectives of genre. Devitt argues that "teaching a particular genre applies to all composition instruction: embedding the writing in meaningful tasks, not just classroom exercises; sequencing the activities and scaffolding learning; and not dominating during modeling and collaborative composing" (150). Step two focuses on teaching genre awareness and discusses how students can collect a sample of a genre, identify the larger context of the genre, identify patterns, including sentence structure, format, style, and analyze what the patterns reveal about the situation (152). Devitt shares how students in her classroom can pick a genre they enjoy reading and writing about, which generates dialogue between instructors and their students. She states that good questions for instructors to ask are: one, what sorts of communication does the genre encourage and constrain; two, who can and cannot use the genres; three, are its effects dysfunctional beyond their context; four, what are the values and beliefs within this practice; five, what are political and ethical implications? (155). The final step emphasizes teaching genre critique and expands on step one and two, which affords an opportunity for students to become further acquainted with particular genres. I argue that instructors borrow the components from this model to teach a variety of genres that students show interest in now, or for future writing.

Once the instructor introduces all three steps to their students, they could lead a collaborative discussion and create a brief writing exercise for each section of the genre

model. For teaching particular genres and based on what genres students read, the instructor could start a dialogue and ask students what they notice about the particular genre they review, what they enjoy or do not enjoy about the genre, and advise them how to write about the experience. For teaching genre awareness, instructors could have their students re-read the assigned genre and analyze the patterns of the piece to observe if the class could identify the greater picture or the effects of the writing. The instructor could ask students questions to inspire conversation and understanding such as have you written something like this before inside or outside of the classroom; or, where do you anticipate you will write something like this again? For teaching genre critique, the instructor could pair students together or place them in groups based on writing interests or major, prompt them to discuss or write down implications of the genre and encourage them to reveal their insights with the class. By introducing this learning structure as a part of the assignment, I argue that the exercises on genre awareness in the EN 125 classroom could provide students with a clearer understanding about reading and writing for various genres. By following the model, they could continue to utilize the skills throughout the FYC course.

This new focus would be a revision of the already-existing Project #3. This inclusion of genre in Project #3 would allow students to reflect on genres they read and discuss in EN 125, teaching them specifically how to apply that understanding of genre to their research paper. I suggest that the instructors focus explicitly on the three types of genre within Project #3: the proposal, the annotated bibliography, and the research paper. I recognize that there are a variety of research papers that pertain to various disciplines and that the structure of the research essay looks different for each student. However, the

purpose for revising Project #3 is to demonstrate how genre awareness leads students to make better-informed choices as writers when asked to write an assignment that requires research, and my investigation on genre indicates the need for a more explicit focus on genre awareness in the assignment. Once students learn about the purpose of genres and pick their topic of interest for the research paper, they could share their proposal and annotated bibliography with the instructor or peers, identify patterns of the genre found in the project. Lastly, they could consider the implications of what they are writing and how the two genres [proposal and annotated bibliography] for the larger research paper would tie the work together so they can begin and navigate their ideas through their research paper.

*Recommendation Two: Focus on Transfer*

My second recommendation is to take Project #4 and incorporate more attention on transfer in the assignment. Project #4 currently addresses transfer implicitly but a more explicit focus would help students understand the role of transfer and how to begin transferring writing skills from one context to another. My recommendation would be to model this assignment on Yancey, et al.'s studies on the three models of transfer [assemblage, remix, and critical incident].

As addressed in the literature review, Yancey, et al.'s three models of transfer link back to the student writers' connection to their personal *and* academic experiences and previous exposure to writing (5). In their study, Yancey, et al. provide framework to the background of their study and share its development in layers: layer one examines the concept of transfer itself; layer two traces transfer; layer three supports students'

knowledge of writing; layer four looks at two students from research Yancey, et al. cite who make visible the challenge of transfer (6). To provide more detail, revelations from this study include assessing the individual writer and their willingness to transfer, an analysis of what writing skills or writing awareness a student carries from high school outside of the classroom, and focusing on writing such as emails, journaling, even texting and how those identifiable experience assist with writing for transfer.

I recommend that instructors prepare students for the assignment on transfer with an introduction to two freewriting exercises, prompting students to record thoughts in a journal about a time when a previous experience with writing or, a personal experience outside of the classroom influenced their writing in their FYC course. The students could take some time to complete the first part of the exercise in the classroom, and share their observations with their peers and teacher to prompt a discussion. Based on the response from the students, the instructor could introduce the work of Yancey, et al. and engage the class in a separate discussion on the transfer question, the three models of transfer, and the impact of transfer on the students' writing. I also suggest the instructor introduce the second part of the freewriting exercise in which they ask students the same question from the beginning of the lesson. However, the variation in the exercise would be that the student completes this activity outside of the classroom on their own time. The instructor could consider the function of this exercise to prompt the students to discover if their answers change and, to see if different patterns or strengths emerge from their writing. When the course reconvenes to focus on transfer further, instructors could have the students read aloud their responses from the second exercise and compare the writing quality between the two exercises and engage the class in discussion. Do students shift

writing skills from previous assignments in the FYC course to their present day writing? If they understand the purpose of the exercise or observe how the exercise impacts their writing and connects to the larger picture—which is writing for various contexts—I suggest that the instructor continues the focus as an open forum for dialogue between them and the students. If students indicate trouble with and do not understand the purpose of transfer, the instructor could revisit Yancey, et al.'s research on the subject and explain the value of how personal experience and writing *and* writing in academic settings grant students the ability to write across contexts.

In addition to the freewriting activity and class discussion, I suggest that instructors continue to encourage students to write inside and outside of the classroom to keep them engaged about the process of writing and transfer. They could experiment with this type of writing over the course of the semester and continue to share feedback on the process with their peers and instructor. Teachers in EN 125 could examine the progression of student writing, and anticipate where they would experience challenges with writing in or beyond the FYC course. For example, if a student expresses hardships with their writing skills or style in FYC during discussions around the subject of transfer, the instructor could ask if their students are creative or overly communicative inside and outside of the classroom? Or, do FYC teachers recognize these obstacles as a challenge for the student writer and, how does this present itself in their writing or project assignments? By understanding the students' desires and goals inside and outside of the classroom, the instructor could design a universal assignment but also accommodate the individual needs of their students.

This new focus would be a revision of the already-existing Project #4. This new assignment would be different because it would allow students to reflect on the coursework and writing completed in EN 125 and teach them specifically how to reflect on prior experience, on current experience in EN 125, and on how students can transfer those learned skills to future writing projects. Also, Project #4 ties to the assignment on genre. For instance, students could discuss various genres that pertain to their major or areas of interest and possibly discuss the findings in their portfolio letter as part of the assignment. The goal for the revised Project #4 challenges students to expand upon other work, freewriting, or revelations on writing they produce in class and serves as a final project that connects to previous assignments.

### **Conclusion**

This project has shown the first steps on how to address genre awareness and the transfer of writing skills in FYC. By sharing my own struggles and what was missing from my experience as a student in my FYC course, I wanted to explore and show how students could learn about various genres and be aware of how to transfer writing skills in EN 125 from one context to another. Drawing from recent work in composition studies, from the analysis of current EN 125 pedagogy, and from a small pool of survey responses of current and previous EN 125 instructors, this project has shown that revising two of the current EN 125 assignments to more overtly teach genre and transfer could afford students the opportunity to write in other disciplines and in future situations. “Although this work was limited in scope, it has provided important directions for future study. My next steps should include a larger sample population, more targeted questions based on

the outcomes of this initial study, and demographic information on the study participants. With additional research, my goal is to offer more distinctive recommendations for an overt focus on genre and transfer awareness in the future for FYC courses. EN 125 instructors should not hesitate to address genre and transfer awareness more overtly than they currently do, and they should teach student writers specific ways to adapt these strategies not only in EN 125 but in other college settings and beyond. Overall, I have shown that focusing on components of Devitt's genre model and Yancey, et al.'s response to the transfer question in the two assignments could create a challenging student environment for students in the course in which they can continue to learn about writing across contexts, and eventually, the workplace.

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