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RWS 796: Internship
Sept. 16 2016

Notes for Helping Students Draft 1st Papers

Note: I have been so concentrated on teaching my students the foundations of rhetorical thought/analysis that I have not concentrated enough on writing. I may need to step up my game slightly here...except that, having reviewed their first blog assignments, the students are impressive writers. They still live too much in summary land, which is why my focus has been so laser-like on understanding the concept of analysis. I think that in the second unit, I may shift that focus on how their analysis can be structured and organized. More to come in that arena...

That being said, for Paper #1, here's what we'll do:

A Peer Review Session: As any of my tutored (?) students can tell you, I'm a huge advocate of the Peer Review process – and I am taking this very seriously. Although I don't expect final drafts, outlines or notes will not be satisfactory (and won't count towards their grade.) Although I want them to be working closely with their peers, I will be reviewing drafts (although I won't require them to hand in their drafts.)

Is it a mistake to only focus on one draft? Should I have them think of it in terms of several draft versions?

Blog Reviews and Feedback: As I mentioned in class, I am really working with them on their weekly Wordpress Rhetorical Analysis blogs, because I want to make their analysis almost automatic. I have really emphasized that in RWS, critical

analysis and close reading are the most difficult parts of their task – if they’ve adequately dissected, examined, and explored a text, writing their papers can/should be the easy part (as almost an exercise in organization). I have often approached RWS writing as mechanical (and I’m a Lit major!) for the students, often using the metaphor of them as Writing Scientists.

I am sure I will know more about how pedagogically effective my philosophy of our committed focus on the blogs after the first paper...and will plan to adjust accordingly.

Breaking Down Paper Tasks and Assignments (?): As mentioned above, I am a little anxious that I haven’t concentrated on the writing side enough – and (I’d love to discuss this in class) I may devote classes (or significant parts of my classes) to the writing for each section. We could review what the intro should look like, how to organize body paragraphs, and what is expected in the conclusion. I might be able to come up with a couple of interesting activities and tasks to do this...I have divided them into teams (for competitive and cooperative reasons) and I think those groups might be useful for these types of tasks.

This might be very helpful for them, especially in their first paper.

I will look forward to other’s thoughts on this and how others are approaching supporting students in the drafting process. I also wonder if I need to emphasize the writing as a process philosophy – my students are definitely making a bit of a transition from their high school style of drafting, quickly copy editing, and then moving on. (Are there ways to incorporate their blogs with this? Could I have them revise their blogs to see them not as completed pieces but rather as dynamic texts?)

Obviously, I still have some questions to ask, and ideas to explore.