

Teaching Rhetorical Analysis to Promote Transfer of Learning

This strategy has the potential to help students develop the rhetorical awareness and meta-knowledge about writing that can help them transfer their learning about writing to new contexts and tasks.

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In the spring of 2008, I piloted an assignment sequence in my Advanced Composition for Teachers class that I called the rhetorical analysis project. This assignment sequence may provide a model for teachers concerned with fostering the transfer of learning—helping students learn to think about writing in ways that improve their work in contexts beyond an English or composition class. Although I designed this sequence for upper-division English majors who planned to become middle or high school English teachers, the features of the project that research suggests most strongly support transfer can be applied in a variety of situations. Because it seemed that the students wrote effectively in response to this project and that they achieved the goals set for them, I decided both to investigate that impression further and to share the assignment and its consequences more widely, drawing on interviews with former students and examinations of their writing.

By *rhetorical analysis*, I mean examining not only *what* authors communicate but also *for what purposes* they communicate those messages, what effects they attempt to evoke in readers, and how they accomplish those purposes and effects. Rhetorical analysis often involves the study of rhetorical appeals (ethos, pathos, and logos), the purposes and aims of symbolic communication, and the structure of arguments (Lindemann, 2001). Because we analyze texts that are written to *particular* audiences for *particular* purposes, rhetorical analysis enhances students' awareness of the salient characteristics of audiences to which authors must attend. Conducting rhetorical analysis with students on newspaper articles, speeches, advertisements, and textbooks can provide important insights for them about how language works in everyday life. Other authors have written about using the analysis of literary texts similarly, in terms of helping students learn the writer's craft (c.f. Calkins, 1994; Prose, 2006).

Students' reflections about this assignment a semester after completing it suggest that rhetorical analysis can begin to answer a lingering question for teachers of writing (and many other subjects): How do we help our students continue to use these skills beyond the assignment for which we teach them? In other words, How do we teach writing skills that will transfer?

Research on Transfer and Writing

Almost any discussion of learning implies a focus on transfer of learning because our goal as teachers is not only to improve students' performance in the immediate moment of instruction but also to help them develop skills that they can take to future classes and experiences outside of school. Yet, in an article reviewing research on transfer, Perkins and Salomon (1992) distinguished transfer from what they call ordinary learning by pointing out that "talk of transfer is always at least implicitly contrastive; it assumes learning within a certain context and asks about impact beyond that context" (§ 3). Of particular relevance to my argument here, Perkins and Salomon further distinguished what they called "low road transfer," in which learners are able to apply skills in very similar circumstances, from "high road transfer," in which learners abstract significant principles and apply them to new and very different situations—what others might call strategic knowledge (e.g., Olson, 2007). In terms of high school writing instruction, then, preparing students for low road transfer to pass state exams involves having them practice exam-like writing in exam-like situations so that they can readily perform in those contexts. High road transfer instruction involves teaching students to make decisions about writing in different contexts with state exams being only one context in which students might write.

Researchers in composition attempting to explore the value of first year college composition courses (FYC) have explicitly considered transfer of learning, investigating the extent to which the teaching in such courses transfers (or generalizes) to students' writing in other courses. These scholars have been remarkably consistent in their findings that meta-awareness of writing leads to transfer. For instance, although Bergmann and Zepernick (2007) reported that students "actively reject the idea that what they learned about writing in high school or in first year composition (FYC) courses could be applied to the writing that they were asked to do in courses in other disciplines" (p. 124), the researchers found such rejection stemmed from students' sense that writing in English classes—including composition classes—differed from writing in other disciplines, and students valued the disciplinary approaches to writing more.

To resolve that tension, Bergmann and Zepernick (2007) suggested that composition courses should focus "less on teaching students how to write than on teaching students *how to learn to write*" (pp. 141–142). This conclusion resonates with findings from Greene (2001), who studied students writing in a history of science class, and Wardle (2007), who followed students from her first year *Intro to Writing Studies* course through their coursework two years after her course. Wardle found that

One ability students seemed to consistently generalize [her word for transfer] from one writing task to another...was meta-awareness about writing: the ability to analyze assignments, see similarities and differences across assignments, discern what was being required of them, and determine exactly what they needed to do in response to earn the grade they wanted. (pp. 76–77)

And Beaufort (1999), who studied the writing of college graduates in the workplace, explained that those writers who were successful in the research setting had brought this meta-awareness of writing to their work situation, allowing them to adapt to the different kinds of writing their jobs demanded.

Less explicitly, research into effective techniques for teaching writing in secondary school also explores the question of transfer in describing or evaluating "effective" writing instruction. For instance, Graham and Perin (2007b) used meta-analysis to consider experimental and quasi-experimental research on the impact of different techniques of teaching writing. They found that one of the most effective techniques involves teaching students writing strategies, which they described as "steps necessary for planning, revising, and/or editing...for accomplishing specific types of writing tasks" (p. 15). This meta-analysis complements findings by Saddler and Graham (2007), who reported that writing knowledge correlates with writing performance among fourth graders, and by Hillocks (2008), who stated that instructional "treatments with the largest gains...all focus on teaching procedural knowledge, knowledge of how to do things" (p. 320). Such findings create a parallel between research on writing instruction for adolescents and for college students: Knowing strategies and

knowing when to use them lead writers to success in new writing situations.

The meta-awareness of writing that research suggests leads to generalization or high road transfer of skills from one context to others is also the aim of the rhetorical analysis instruction I describe here. I briefly detail the rhetorical analysis project and how I prepare students to complete it, discuss students' responses to it, and make connections between students' responses and the above research on transfer and writing.

The Assignment in Context

Students completed this assignment approximately two thirds of the way through a 15-week course, Advanced Composition for Teachers, which is designed for upper-division English majors who intend to pursue teaching credentials after they graduate.

To address preparation requirements for subject matter competency in California and to help students carefully examine how writing is used outside of the academy, I designed an assignment for which students would analyze three texts on the same topic in different genres—one nonliterary prose, one combining visual and verbal symbols, and one literary—and compose an argument about the way the issue was discussed in these texts. Once they composed their arguments, they found a popular magazine in which they could make their arguments, selected an article in the magazine that suited their vision of what they wanted to say, and revised the original argument using the article as a rhetorical model or mentor text (see Figure 1 for the complete assignment).

Well before I handed out the prompt for this assignment, I helped students develop analysis and

Figure 1 Complete Directions for Rhetorical Analysis Project

Task

Popular magazines often tackle challenging issues, whether they do so through personal essays, articles that report on the issues, analyses, or political comics. Choosing a popular magazine and an issue that interests you, write a short article (5–7 pages) in the style of that magazine that reflects how that issue is discussed in public life. To do so, you will analyze three texts related to the issue.

- 1) Choose one imaginative text (e.g., play, poem, short story, novel).
- 2) Choose one combination visual/verbal text (e.g., advertisement, comic strip, graphic novel, movie, website).
- 3) Choose one “non-literary” verbal text (e.g., academic essay, newspaper article, op-ed piece, workplace document [memo, business report, shareholder’s report, job application, resume]).

The argument you make will likely focus more on the representation of the issue than on the issue itself (for example, you might write about how people *talk about* educational inequity rather addressing inequity yourself), citing commonalities and differences in the ways that different media address it.

Process Hints

- Find an issue you care about; the essay will be easier to research and write if you do. Think about imaginative texts, workplace documents, articles, or comic strips that have struck you as significant, as focusing on issues that matter to you.
- Then, find sources that meet the above criteria. You will likely already have at least one of the texts in your possession if the issue matters to you. Think about the texts you have kept around as important.
- Once you have assembled your three texts, analyze each in terms of its rhetoric, considering the rhetorical purpose of the genre, the particular audience of each piece, the particular purpose of each piece, the “message” of the piece, and how it accomplishes its rhetorical purpose and conveys its message. What makes it effective at doing both for its particular audience?
- Compare and contrast your analyses, coming to some conclusions about how the issue is discussed in these different media and/or for different audiences.
- Compose your argument, noticing the similarities and differences in both message and rhetorical purpose and creating a thesis statement that draws on that comparison to make a claim about how the issue is discussed.
- Choose a target magazine and select an article whose style you like and feel will allow you to make your argument effectively.
- Make a copy of the article and use it as a rhetorical model (or mentor text) to revise your argument.

writing skills by practicing reading rhetorically and exploring genre and style, purpose and audience. Two parallel strands of activities led to the final draft of the rhetorical analysis project: (1) in-class, analysis-oriented activities and (2) writing assignments that applied what the students learned in class to their own writing. All of the writing prior to the rhetorical analysis essay was low-stakes writing—short, experimental, and worth relatively few points. The class met twice a week for an hour and 15 minutes each session, and in addition to this work students read and discussed Lindemann’s *Rhetoric for Writing Teachers* and articles on teaching. (See Table 1 for lists of the analysis and writing activities that preceded the rhetorical analysis project.)

Progressing through the variety of texts we were considering also necessitated some discussion of genre, using the definition of genre proposed by Miller (1984) and widely taken up in composition: “typified rhetorical [or social] action” (p. 151). For instance, we agreed that advertisements were trying to sell audiences something and that part of the goal of most comic strips was humor. For longer texts, we

practiced chunking texts into sections and creating descriptive outlines in which we identified the content and rhetorical purpose of each of the chunks of an argument (cf. Elbow & Belanoff, 1989), examining how authors began and ended pieces.

As Table 1 makes clear, students not only read and analyzed a variety of genres but also wrote short pieces in a variety of genres. This experimentation with genre and purpose complemented the work they were doing analyzing purpose and strategies. We also examined and experimented with style by using sentence combining and sentence imitation to consider syntactic structure and by composing setting descriptions of our classroom and then revising those descriptions to match the styles of Steinbeck or Hemingway, using paragraphs written by each author as models.

When I handed out the assignment on March 5, I helped students imagine the particulars of this task by modeling my process of composing an argument based on a *Boondocks* comic strip, the Hughes (1967) poem “Dinner Guest: Me” from *The Panther and the Lash: Poems of Our Times*, and a scholarly article, “‘Reading All That White Crazy Stuff’: Black Young Women

Table 1 Lists of Parallel Analytic and Writing Tasks Preceding the Rhetorical Analysis Project

Analysis activities	Writing activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Rhetorical triangle (writer, reader, subject) ■ Rhetorical triangle (<i>ethos, pathos, logos</i>) ■ Rhetorical analysis of Barack Obama speech ■ Discussion of beautiful sentences from students’ writing ■ Rhetorical analysis of advertisement ■ Grammatical analysis of “Jabberwocky” ■ Christensen paragraphs ■ Rhetorical analysis of comic strip ■ Rhetorical analysis of setting description ■ Descriptive outlining and chunking texts ■ Workshop on one of the texts for rhetorical analysis ■ Discussion of choosing rhetorical models—audience and purpose ■ Paragraph scramble to prepare for matching a rhetorical model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Narrate a learning experience. ■ Narrate your writing process. ■ Evaluate yourself as a writer based on past writing. ■ Set your own writing goals (writing assignments to this point based on Coe and Gutierrez, 1981). ■ Compose two writing prompts (for imagined future students). ■ Write an argument about how writing should be taught. ■ Model descriptions of our classroom on other setting descriptions. ■ Write a narrative or short play that conveys the argument you made about how writing should be taught. ■ Write a comic or advertisement about how writing should be taught.

Unpacking Whiteness in a High School British Literature Classroom” (Carter, 2007) that discusses the interactions led by a white teacher that marginalized her black female students. I handed out copies of these three texts and talked through a quick analysis of each, discussing how the language and the visuals of the comic strip contributed to making it both humorous and poignant and how the juxtapositions, rhymes, and line breaks in the poem created a conflict between the content and the reader’s experience of the poem. My comparison showed how these strategies served to highlight the argument of the texts that many whites find it difficult to truly understand racism. When I made connections between these texts for students, I talked about rhetorical strategies that addressed racism without labeling well-meaning individuals racists. I also handed out my rhetorical model, a column called “Annals of Medicine” from the *New Yorker*, and showed students how I created my own text that I called “Annals of Composition.”

Table 2 shows the various topics that each student examined, the genres analyzed, and the kinds of texts used for models. Jake’s (all names are pseudonyms) choices are listed in the last row of the table.

How the Students Responded

Of the 10 students enrolled in the class that semester (an unusually small group for this class), 6 participated in interviews for this article, and another responded to my questions by e-mail. To create the case described below, I also examined Jake’s writing, comparing

the various drafts with each other and his rhetorical model.

Students described recognizing the complexity of the rhetorical analysis project and working very hard at it, but they also valued it for that complexity. For instance, looking over the assignment, Sara made a comment, which several students echoed, about “feeling slightly overwhelmed by all the metacognition involved with the writing process.” And Jake put it best, describing the amount of work that went into the project: “It probably took longer than any assignment I’ve ever done, but I mean that in the best possible way.” As Wardle (2007) found, students needed to see an assignment as challenging to consciously apply the writing skills they had learned to the task.

Despite or perhaps because of their initial reaction and the hard work they had to put into it, students generally expressed satisfaction about the project once they had completed it. Two used superlatives in describing it, Elaine naming it “the project I’m really the most proud of in my college experience” and Alex calling it “the most enjoyable piece I had written in that class.” And while they all found it to be challenging, that challenge added to their satisfaction. As Jake put it, “It’s really, really satisfying the way it all clicked in the end.” All of the students were able to find discussions of their topics in a variety of texts, and all were able to find model (or mentor) texts in magazines for which they could compose their final articles.

In the following sections, I profile one student in particular, Jake, citing his interview and writing.

Table 2 Each Student’s Choice of Topic, Genres Analyzed, and Model Text

Topics	Genres analyzed	Model texts
Political views of Christianity in America	News article, comic strip, song lyrics	<i>First Things</i> article
Same sex marriage	News article, comic strip, poem	<i>Game Informer</i> article
Asian American identity	News article, film, short story	<i>Time</i> magazine article
Cloned food	Web article, political cartoon, short story	<i>Time</i> magazine article
Domestic violence	Web article, informational leaflet/flyer, poem	<i>Newsweek</i> article
Autism	News article, advertisement, poem	<i>Parents</i> magazine article
Music downloading	News article, comic strip, satirical article	<i>Vice</i> magazine article

When he took this class, Jake was a fourth semester student who had begun his college career at the university. An English major, he considered himself a successful student though he self-identified a bit as a slacker at the time of the class.

“I Learned How to Rewrite at So Many Different Levels”

Jake wrote about representations of music downloading and the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) and analyzed a self-described punk comic strip, *Nothing Nice to Say* (www.mitchclem.com/nothingnice); an opinion piece from the *Los Angeles Times*, “File ‘sharing’ or ‘stealing?’” (J. Healy, 2008, February 18); and an article from the parody newspaper *The Onion*, “RIAA Bans Telling Friends About Songs” (November 30, 2005). He described struggling with finding a topic but choosing his mentor text almost at the same time:

I had a tough time finding a topic at first cause you said to do something that we’re passionate about...so that took me a little while, then I was reading a music blog that I always read, and they had a lot of news articles because at that time there was a lot of news about anti-piracy and music which is what my topic was on, and so then I was like, Oh, OK. So once I had figured that out, it all kind of fell in place.

Jake described how he used his rhetorical model: “I made sort of an outline [of the rhetorical moves made in the model article], and I was like these are the things I need to make sure to do, and the rest will fall into line.” This outline guided his development of the structure of his final piece. He made sure to include a section of his own paper equivalent to each section of his model so that his argument proceeded in the same fashion. He supplied his own content and inflected the rhetorical moves made by his model text to serve his own purposes.

Jake’s work on this assignment involved a great deal of rewriting, as noted when he said, “I learned how to rewrite at so many different levels.” During rewriting, his style changed less than the content. The writing style—one that felt very natural to him—and the choice of topic made it worthwhile for him to rewrite. He said that, before this essay, he had “never rewritten anything, like changing ideas and stuff.”

He explained that, previously, revision had just meant correcting a few grammar and spelling errors, maybe changing a few words, a common enough approach to revision among students (Conner & Moulton, 2000; Sommers, 1980) even though more recent research on revision shows that many students approach it in more sophisticated ways (e.g., Myhill & Jones, 2007). Although Jake found the process challenging, he also found it enjoyable and confidence building, and through it he learned a great deal more about rhetoric and analysis.

To illustrate the development of his ideas through the process of rewriting, here is a comparison of the sentences that most nearly state Jake’s argument from his first and final draft. In the first draft, Jake takes a very general view of the pieces, one that his analysis contradicts:

Most pieces about the issue do not reach a new audience, or generate any new facts. The audiences that the authors write for already agree with them. The problem is everyone that is opposed to the RIAA’s actions create incomplete arguments in opposition. The pieces I’ve looked at are biased and contain no counter-argument.

Perhaps because of this main claim, Jake develops his analyses of the three pieces somewhat shallowly, ignoring parts of the texts that contradict his overall claim. Through the drafting process and workshops both with peers and me, he discovered those contradictions and came to a more subtle analysis. In his final draft, he writes,

Publications concerning these issues try to broaden their audiences’ perspective. The ways in which the audience’s perspective is altered varies, depending on which demographic is being targeted.

Note his focus on audience in his revision, in term of “the demographic being targeted.” When he had to confront the contradictory messages in the texts, he learned to deepen his focus on purpose and audience, a depth that is reflected in this more nuanced claim. His final draft proceeds by considering two audiences to whom the texts he examines are directed—“a young, liberal audience” and “a more general audience”—the differences in assumptions writers can make about those audiences, and the

Just as they differed in how they chose their topics, students differed in how they selected their rhetorical models.

impact of those differences on the texts themselves. This process of analysis and careful consideration of audience and purpose is part of what Jake learned from the project: “When I read now, I look at the author’s intent. It’s become part of my independent reading process.” And he explained how this reading applies to his own revision: “I look at, What is this sentence supposed

to mean?” In particular, he described applying this interrogation of his work to a “zine” he is writing for his own pleasure.

Although students varied in how easily they chose their topics, with Jake finding it more difficult than most, they all did as I hoped they would: They drew their topics from encounters in their daily lives. These encounters varied from the most casual—choosing a topic noticed reading newspapers—to very personal—choosing a topic based on traumatic personal experience. As I suggested to students, finding topics they were passionate about would make it easier for them to identify sources to analyze because they would either have those sources close to hand or know readily where to find them. As Jake suggested, once he thought of the topic, “it all kind of fell in place,” and he knew where to find the sources to analyze.

Just as they differed in how they chose their topics, students differed in how they selected their rhetorical models. For several students, composing the argument came first, and then they struggled to find, as Elaine noted, “What article is going to fit me?” For Jake, the mentor text came almost at the same time as his choice of topic. He chose to emulate the writing of an article in a magazine he regularly reads, and he was not concerned about matching the style of writing because “I write like that anyway.” This option, to select a rhetorical model at different stages and for different purposes, became important for students. It also provided a kind of built-in differentiation. Not only could students choose their own topics and rhetorical models, but they could also do so for their own purposes.

All of the students, however, used the strategies they learned in class to analyze their mentor texts to model their revisions. Although some wrote

descriptive outlines on the source text, and Jake made a separate outline to help him compose, they all saw the benefit of figuring out the organizational strategies of their mentor texts and used those strategies to guide their revision.

“It’s Changed the Way I Look at a Lot of Things”

Students claimed from their perspective a semester after the class that this project was worthwhile and that it made a lasting impression on them. Although students took a different emphasis—Jake on rewriting for meaning, other students on voice or the kinds of arguments that are appropriate for different audiences in different contexts—all are thinking about their writing more rhetorically after the project than they were before it.

For instance, Elizabeth, Franklin, Davis, and Sara all highlighted the change in the way they look at their own writing. Elizabeth, who made the comment “It’s changed the way I look at a lot of things,” talked specifically about how she analyzes her own writing: “I’ll wonder even though they’re my words, how are they coming across. How will people take them?” And Franklin responded, “As far as improving as a writer, the project helped me immensely because I saw the weaknesses within my writing; I saw the strengths.” Students’ willingness to apply what they learned to look at in their own writing *after* the class, as Jake described doing with his zine, points to the effectiveness of this sequence in fostering transfer.

Their work analyzing how texts function and modeling their writing on a published text led students to think more critically about their own writing and to consider that writing in light of how it communicates. Sara may have made this point most explicitly when she noted that, as a result of this project, she became “an objective writer who can use the rhetorical tools consciously and effectively whereas before I may have used them still, but more with intuition and less with intention.” Sara’s comment points to precisely the kind of meta-awareness composition researchers have suggested can help students apply what they have learned about writing beyond their composition classes (c.f. Beaufort, 1999; Bergmann and Zepernick, 2007; Greene, 2001; Hillocks, 2008; Wardle, 2007).

Alex likewise commented that the project helped him: “I really grew as a writer and as a critical thinker.” Yet he also made a comment more similar to Jake’s about learning to rewrite, that he learned more about the *process* of writing a paper he feels happy with from this project: “I just turned a paper that I finished this weekend, and I kind of took that process from [the rhetorical analysis paper].”

Implications

The comments made by the students convinced me that the project was a success. A mentor of mine during graduate school at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Brad Hughes, used to ask tutors in the writing center, “Are we working on the *writing* or the *writer*?” His implication was that our job was to help the writer improve for the long-term, not just improve the individual paper. That students’ work on this project had an impact on them as readers and writers beyond the class means that it did what I intended.

Of course, it is worth emphasizing the factors that limit the generalizability of these results. These are the self-reports of a small number of students, all of them English majors, who were reflecting on their learning in interviews with their prior instructor. Much broader research is necessary before there is any certainty that rhetorical analysis leads to transfer for all students.

Despite those reservations, my former students’ comments and research on transfer suggest the following features of this project may lead to transfer and are worth emulating in other classes:

- **Rhetorical analysis**—In general, students need to learn how texts function, particularly texts that attempt to persuade. What seemed to work for my students was to develop this analysis from commonsense notions of purpose, audience, and effectiveness, adding explicit rhetorical knowledge in the course of practicing this analysis. It also helped to practice regularly using informal writing and to examine a variety of texts and text types. Doing this regular practice across genres helped students to abstract rhetorical principles that they could later apply on their own. Descriptive outlining is a

particularly powerful form of rhetorical analysis to use with longer texts to help students understand how structure works and how rhetoric functions across a text.

- **Modeling**—Composing a variety of text forms and using modeling with low-stakes writing to experiment with genre, style, and syntax helped students apply their developing rhetorical analysis to their own writing. I would argue that it was especially important for students to end the sequence by revising their own writing to match a rhetorical model. This more complex application of the techniques both challenged students, requiring that they *apply* their knowledge, and motivated them to see how writing functions in real-world contexts. Such a conclusion also builds on arguments for authentic writing in high school and middle school classes (e.g., Kixmiller, 2004; Lindblom, 2004; Lindemann, 2001). More authentic tasks motivate students and lead to greater transfer of learning.
- **Explicit attention to process**—Because of the complexity of the final task, we had to be very mindful of the steps in the process—generating ideas and collaborating to support each other’s writing, drafting, and revising. This very explicit and conscious attention to process is what transferred for some students. Graham and Perin (2007b) report that such explicit attention to process is among the most powerful strategies for improving the writing of secondary students.
- **Flexibility**—The freedom to choose, both topics and rhetorical models, was very motivating for students. As students chose both their topics and their models for different reasons, choice also provided an opportunity to differentiate.

Although it may seem that such intensive integration of reading and writing instruction is appropriate only to small college classes, other programs that promote such integration are being taught successfully in high schools around California. Olson and Land (2007, 2008) reported the results of studies of an integrated reading/writing program taught to English-language learners in California secondary schools.

Not only did they find that teachers could implement the curriculum, but they found it had a significant impact on students' writing. And a task force of the California State University has developed an *Expository Reading and Writing Course* for high school students to prepare them for college reading and writing, which has been both popular among teachers who have used the materials and successful at improving the writing of their students (Knudson, Zitzer-Comfort, Quirk, & Alexander, 2008). This program, like the sequence I describe here, involves students in both reading and writing as processes and encourages them to think about rhetoric in both the texts they read and those they compose.

These strategies can be applied in more literature-oriented classes. For instance, when students write their responses to literature or their persuasive essays, they can choose their own venues for which to revise their arguments. The process of composing ideas first and then revising them for a different audience seemed to be important for students' learning and helped them see the writing as authentic. As Jake noted, "It felt like real writing more than any assignment I've ever had before." And it is this process of choosing an audience, examining a text written for that audience, and revising for that audience that helps students develop the understanding of writing they can apply to future writing assignments.

I did not intend for this sequence to teach students "basic" composing skills. These are upper-division English majors who intend to become English teachers. Yet the rhetorical sensitivity and concern for meaning that appear in my students' comments suggest that this kind of sequence may provide an alternative to the formulaic writing that has seen a resurgence in the classroom perhaps in response to state testing. Hillocks (2003) noted that the criteria for state exams often demand five-paragraph essays. He claimed that such expectations on high-stakes exams lead to over-emphasizing that kind of writing in classrooms. In Illinois, Hillocks and his team "found over 70 percent of the Illinois teachers interviewed were hammering away at the five paragraph theme" (p. 69). Given widespread testing and the similarities among such tests, it is reasonable to infer that similar proportions of teachers around the country focus

on the five-paragraph theme. Although such a focus may prepare students for the state exam, it does not prepare students for the variety of writing tasks they will face in the world, as Beaufort's (1999) participants found. In fact, reviewing research on the effectiveness of writing instruction, Hillocks (2008) cited a study by Yeh, which found that middle school students explicitly taught a strategy for generating an argument as opposed to a formal structure for arguments significantly outperformed students taught a form for generating content.

On the other hand, state exams are themselves real writing situations, as Lindblom (2004) pointed out. If teachers are judged by how well their students succeed on these assessments, and students face the prospect of not graduating from high school as a result of their performance on these examinations, English educators must take seriously the idea of preparing students to write those essays must be taken seriously. What rhetorical analysis and text modeling offer is the option for students to see what teachers already know, that exam writing is only one kind of writing, with its own set of expectations, and that students may choose to meet those expectations in testing situations. With the kind of sequence I have described, teachers help students take control of their writing and make choices about how they will write in school and beyond.

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