**Unit 1:**

**Assignment 1**

This assignment sequence is intended to help create conditions for you (the student) to reflect on the reading and writing skills that enable you to access selective postsecondary environments like that at City Tech and to develop ways to repurpose these skills into the specialized literacy practices you'll need to succeed in your majors.

To that end, our first reading, James Gee's "What is Literacy?" explores acquisition and learning and literacy. If we here at City Tech are expecting you to obtain or, become literate in, the academic discourse conventions of our school, then as a way to understand this process it might help to look at the acquisition and learning of discourses of your past. Please read and annotate Gee's essay, underlining anything that interests, confuses, intrigues, and/or surprises you, that reminds you of something else you've read or experienced or thought about, or that seems to be important in some way, even if you're not sure why. A PDF of Gee's essay can be found below on the Course Content page. I expect you to print it off, annotate it, and bring it to class Monday.

When you have finished, review your annotations and use them to compose a summary of what you take Gee to be saying; you'll submit these to Blackboard no later than 8 PM Sunday night. Please have your reflection journals Monday as we will be doing our first Reflective Writing in class.

**Assignment 2**

As the work we did in class today demonstrated, readers do not all read the same way; that is, they do not underline or annotate the same passages, nor do they always agree on what points are most important or how to interpret these points. Min-Zhan Lu and Bruce Horner, two composition researchers who have studied reading and writing practices, suggest that when we pay attention to our usual habits of marking texts, we can see our habituated reading strategies. To broaden readers' practices beyond what they are expecting to see, Lu and Horner describe a method they call "reverse underlining," the practice of reading again, especially as a means to see what we left unmarked (and thus might not have actually "seen") the first time. They suggest that "reverse underlining can help us make connections and draw new conclusions by moving us back and forth between the parts of a text that make immediate sense and the parts that at first appear to be tangential, irrelevant, or confusing" (Lu & Horner).. For our next class, re-read the Gee essay, this time using a different color pen or a different marking pattern (if you used an underline marking the first time around, you could use brackets or parenthesis, etc.) to annotate the chapter, and pay particular attention to the places in his text which you left unmarked in your initial reading.

When you've finished re-reading, look back through Gee's text to compare your two sets of annotations, then write responses to these questions: How would you characterize the passages you marked the first time? What factors might have contributed to your initial decision to leave them unmarked? Likewise, what similarities are there among the passages you marked during your second reading? What might account for these patterns? What do you now understand about the Gee text that may have at first appeared to be tangential, irrelevant or confusing? As you reflect on sections you may not have annotated during your first reading, what do you now understand as valuable about those sections? How do they further expand and/or complicate the sense you are making of the reading?

**Assignment 3**

As a way of continuing our work in discourse theory, I would like you to print off, read, and annotate James Baldwin's "If Black English Isn't a Language Then Tell Me What Is?" As was the case with James Gee's "What is Literacy?" Baldwin's essay is relatively short, but full of meaning. So please, take it slow. Read and annotate carefully.

When you finish, set Baldwin's essay aside momentarily, and return to Gee. On page 19 of "What is Literacy?" Gee outlines five rules of a discourse. Pick the rule that resonated with you most during your first readthrough. In a Word document or this Blackboard text box, type the first sentence of the rule and the corresponding number (for example: "1. Discourse are inherently 'ideological'"), using it as a *frame* for what will follow. Return to your annotations on Baldwin and write a *response* to "If Black English Isn't a Language Then Tell Me What Is?" in light of the rule chosen by you from Gee. So, if you chose Rule No. 1 ("discourses are inherently ideological") you might want to respond to the text by discussing how Baldwin's primary discourse of Black English is "ideological," how this discourse might have shaped the way he thought and saw, and interacted with the world. This activity will feel familiar to you because of our work today in class.

These should be about a page in length.

Submit these by midnight Sunday via Blackboard.

**Assignment 4**

Part of the purpose of this First Year Writing course is to help you acquire the academic discourse conventions of CUNY. To participate in the discourse of CUNY then, is to, as Gee puts it, have “control” over the discourse; or, simply to become literate in it. To get there, as both the Course Syllabus tells us, and the work we have done in just the first two weeks has shown us, will require adopting a more acquisition based model of learning than perhaps you’ve been accustomed to in past writing courses. As a way to begin this process, I would like you to write your first paper in the closest approximation of the discourse that comes most naturally to you: your primary discourse. As Gee reminds us, the primary discourse is that developed in the “primary process of enculturation,” the way you speak with family and friends, the way you speak at home. I not only encourage you to use personal pronouns (I, we, us), but incorporate other words and ways of speaking that are familiar to you that may feel “inappropriate” for the classroom setting into your work. (Two things: if your primary discourse is not English, then I will ask that you write in English for evaluation purposes. Feel free to “code-switch,” including words and phrases from your primary language when necessary.)

For tonight, I would like you to get “control” of the secondary discourse of writing in your primary discourse. Remember, as Gee says, the primary discourse is the “oral mode,” or speech, and so while what I’m asking you to do may seem “natural” it is, as Dryer reminds us, still “unnatural,” because it is writing. And writing, for everyone, is a secondary, learned discourse. Please write a double-spaced page on the most interesting line of inquiry from Gee or Baldwin. As we discussed in class, Gee's and Baldwin's texts appear to have many theses, or lines of inquiry. Choose one or two that are most interesting to you and write about why this line of inquiry or inquiries interests *you*(added emphasis on the “you.”) Again, these should be written in the best approximation of the written version of your primary discourse.

Be sure to print these out and bring them to class Wednesday.

**Assignment 5**

For tonight’s assignment, I want you to read and annotate the paragraph or two that your colleague wrote about your line of inquiry today. As usual, focus on whatever intrigues, interests, and confuses you; look at ways that you and your colleague may have differed in your understanding of the line of inquiry from Gee & Baldwin, and/or the ways in which you understood the line of inquiry in similar ways. When you have finished, **bold** the line of inquiry identified by your class mate, and center it at the top of a new, fresh document. Let this line of inquiry shape a double-spaced page length discussion of your *secondary discourse*. Please print these out and bring them to class on Wednesday.

The work of Assignments 4 and 5 in developing lines of inquiry will lead us to the work of Assignment 6: finding a frame, a way into your Literacy Narrative, a “thesis” or “controlling purpose,” if you will. It’s not enough for the academic discourse conventions at CUNY to simply tell a story about your primary and secondary discourse. It needs a critical approach in order to meet the requirements of academic writing here at CUNY.

**Assignment 6**

Assignments 4 and 5 have been working toward building a frame for your Literacy Narrative. In Assignment 4 I asked that you frame a discussion of Gee in your best approximation of the written form of your primary discourse, and in Assignment 5, I was interested in you framing an exploration of your secondary discourse in a line of inquiry taken from Assignment 4. Now, after our work in class today, we are ready to attempt a draft of the literacy narrative.

For Wednesday, write a draft of the literacy narrative. Remember, “narrative” is just a fancy word for story, and “literacy” as defined by Gee is “the control over a secondary discourse.” In short then, this assignment is the “Story of My (Your) Control Over a Secondary Discourse” (wow, what a terrible title; now you see why we call it a “literacy narrative.”) You can think of this paper in three parts:

1)     The story between your primary and secondary discourse. Simply put, what might be the connection between the two? (Odds are, there are many.)

2)     A framing technique from Gee or Baldwin that helps to give the paper a controlling purpose. As we discussed in class, this is often first seen in the Introduction of a paper.

3)     Written in the best approximation of the written (and therefore secondary) form of your home (primary) discourse.

Please submit these to my e-mail by Tuesday @ 8PM as an attachment. I will bring in anonymous samples on Wednesday.

**Final Literacy Narrative Due\*\***

**Unit 2:**

**Assignment 7**

This assignment sequence is intended to help create conditions for you (the student) to reflect on the reading and writing skills that enable you to access selective postsecondary discourse communities like that at CUNY and to develop ways to repurpose these skills into the specialized literacy practices you’ll need to succeed in your majors.

 To that end, our first reading, Charles Bazerman’s “Speech Acts, Genres, and Activity Systems: How Texts Organize Activity and People,” provides one way to understand how writing (understood very broadly to encompass all inscriptions) works within institutions. Read pages 366-375, stopping just before the section “Methodological Issues” begins on 375, annotating the book just as you did the Course Description. Remember, the aim of annotation is not to come to some conclusion but rather to provide a record of your thinking as you read.

When you have finished, review your annotations and use them to compose a **summary** of what you take Bazerman to be saying; you’ll email your summary to me by Tuesday at 7 PM (We’ll discuss a selection of these summaries in our next class.)

After you’ve emailed a copy of your summary to me, review your annotations and write a paragraph or two to explain why you think you might have made the annotations that you did and how those reasons might have shaped the summary you initially wrote. Bring this reflection to class. You will work with it in conjunction with the anonymous summaries that I will circulate in order to consider how different practices of annotation may have led to different summaries.

**Assignment 8**

As the work we did in class today demonstrated, readers do not all read the same way; that is, they do not underline or annotate the same passages, nor do they always agree on what points are most important or how to interpret these points. Min-Zhan Lu and Bruce Horner, two composition researchers who have studied reading and writing practices, suggest that when we pay attention to our usual habits of marking texts, we can see our habituated reading strategies. To broaden readers’ practices beyond what they are expecting to see, Lu and Horner describe a method they call “reverse underlining,” the practice of reading again, especially as a means to see what we left unmarked (and thus might not have actually “seen”) the first time. They suggest that “reverse underlining can help us make connections and draw new conclusions by moving us back and forth between the parts of a text that make immediate sense and the parts that at first appear to be tangential, irrelevant, or confusing” (Lu & Horner 50). For our next class, re-read the Bazerman essay, this time using a different color pen or a different marking pattern (if you used an underline marking the first time around, you could use brackets or parenthesis, etc.) to annotate the chapter, and pay particular attention to the places in his text which you left unmarked in your initial reading.

When you’ve finished re-reading, look back through Bazerman’s text to compare your two sets of annotations, then write responses to these questions: How would you characterize the passages you marked the first time?   What factors might have contributed to your initial decision to leave them unmarked? Likewise, what similarities are there among the passages you marked during your second reading? What might account for these patterns? What do you now understand about the Bazerman text that may have “at first appear[ed] to be tangential, irrelevant, or confusing”? As you reflect on sections you may not have annotated during your first reading, what do you now understand as valuable about those sections? How do they further expand and/or complicate the sense you are making of the reading?

Submit your responses to Blackboard by 7:00 PM Tuesday. Be sure to bring your copy of the Bazerman text with you to class as well as a copy of your work for this assignment.

**Assignment 9**

In our recent work in class, we have been exploring connections between the work done by writing as it takes shape in recognizable, recurrent forms (or “genres”) and the overall work accomplished by the larger “system of activity” in which that genre tends to appear (375). As you recall, Bazerman provides a few examples of these “systems of activity” near the end of our reading.

As we can see, what’s involved in “acting” or “doing something” is much more complex than our everyday language for describing action and intention suggests--more complex in that our actions always also involve other elements: tools, routines, other actors, social settings, and so on. Moreover, our intentions and actions (and the outcomes of those actions) are always shaped by those other elements as well. This is true even of our composing processes. For our next class, we’ll explore in more detail some of the background of Bazerman’s phrase “systems of activity.”

After reading and annotating Kain and Wardle’s “Activity Theory: An Introduction for the Writing Classroom” (275-281), choose one of Bazerman’s examples—or another example that occurs to you—and try to fit its components into the diagram provided on page 282 of our textbook. I suggest making a photocopy or two of that diagram and working on that, as you’ll likely want to be able to make additional blank copies available for later assignments in this sequence.) After you’ve completed your diagram, write a paragraph or two about what effect diagramming the activity system has had on your understanding of it; you might want to pay particular attention to how the act of diagramming helped you understand the role of particular genres in furthering the goals of the entire system.

Print out and bring these responses to class on Wednesday.

**Rhetorical Analysis of a Genre**

For your next assignment, you will build on today’s discussion to refine your understanding of the ways in which writing “organize[s] activity and people” (Bazerman). Drawing on your work in Assignments 2-5, choose an activity system or discourse community you know well (ideally, one in which you are or have been engaged) and then choose a genre that is one of the essential tools used to accomplish the activity of that system. Construct a text in which you first describe the “work” of that system or community in terms of the kinds of genres that tend to be found there. (You may also wish to draw on Kain and Wardle where useful.) Then, go on to explain in detail what someone must do in order to effectively participate in that system’s most important genres (that is, to write in such a way that what Bazerman calls “felicity conditions” will be met (370)). Finally, explain as fully as you can at this time how participating in the genre works within the larger goals of the activity system or discourse community.

You’ll send this text to me by 7 PM Tuesday via Blackboard. In our next class meeting, we’ll discuss an anonymous selection of these texts, both for their treatment of course concepts thus far, as well as for understanding what genres the texts for this assignment themselves could be said to be participating in.

**Unit 3**

**Assignment 10**

As a way to continue our work with activity systems and habits of mind, please read and annotate Deborah Brandt’s “Sponsors of Literacy” (44-62) for our next class. After you’ve read and annotated Brandt’s text, paying particular attention to places that might be interesting, confusing, intriguing, and/or troubling, that remind you of something else you’ve read this term, or that seem to be important in some way (even if you’re not sure why), write a couple of paragraphs in which you describe what you take Brandt to be arguing in her text and about people or institutions who have served as “sponsors” for you. You may also want to consider the extent to which your relationship with these sponsors was like and/or unlike those of the sponsors Brandt investigates. After you’ve written your paragraphs, spend some time framing at least two detailed questions that draw on and quote from Brandt’s essay and which you think will lend themselves to fruitful class discussion.

Email both your paragraphs and your questions on Brandt’s essay and her construct of “sponsorship” to me by 8 PM Sunday on Blackboard. Please also bring a hard copy of this assignment with you to our next class meeting.

**Assignment 11**

For the weekend, pick two questions from the post not answered in class. Write a detailed response to each question. For your response, locate a specific point in Brandt’s text to help “anchor” your answer. Each answer should cite a quote from Brandt in order to either 1) support your point, or 2) complicate/”reposition” the question in such a way so that your point can be made. When citing Brandt, make sure to use proper MLA format (no Works Cited page necessary).

Submit these to Blackboard no later than Tuesday at 7 PM. Bring a hardcopy on Monday, and be prepared to discuss.

**Assignment 12**

Part 1:

Please read through the questions and/or commentary I’ve given you on Assignment 10. When you’ve finished, pick two questions/comments that are interesting, seem potentially fruitful, noteworthy in some way, etc. and write a response to each.

Part 2:

For several weeks now, you have been exploring situations in which people move from one literacy practice to another—sometimes easily, sometimes with difficulty, sometimes not at all. You have also thought and written about your own struggles and triumphs moving from high school to college level writing. Please now think through my feedback on Assignment 10 and class discussion today and substantially reframe the controlling purpose (what some of you may refer to as a “thesis”) of Assignment 10 to *respond* to these two statements:

*--What are some key sponsors that have helped you enter the current activity system of your chosen discipline? You may find that some of what sponsored you to attend CUNY and major in your discipline was, like Lopez or Lowery, out of necessity; while, you may also find, like Branch, you were sponsored by your own interest. Take some time, and consider the different literacy sponsors in your academic life thus far, and how they may have sponsored you.*

--Describe what you believe writers in your discipline need to know or be able to do or to try to learn to do if they are to move from successful practice in one sphere of writing to another within an activity system of your chosen discipline. Furthermore, what is an essential genre of text (anything that conveys information from one person/group of people to another—does not have to be written word) in order to make this move or complete certain “work” within the system?

 The composing challenge here is to reframe your discussion of Brandt, and possible Gee, Bazerman, Kain & Wardle, and now, your own examples, into the role of evidence for a tentative controlling purpose. These will be, essentially, opening statements; for some of you these will be a paragraph, and others these will be two to three paragraphs. I’d like to see most of you aim for three quarters of a page to a full double-spaced page.

Feel free to use some of Brandt’s, Gee’s, Kain & Wardle’s, or Bazerman’s terms or to invent your own (as some of you already have in Assignment 10). You may want to use some of Brandt’s examples; you should also feel free to include examples from your own experience or from the experience of people you know. (Remember that Brandt and Bazerman are as much concerned with writing outside of formal schooling as they are inside it.) Don’t feel obliged to come up with some full and final explanation of what writers should do in all contexts; I’m asking you here to speculate on what might help them in the transitions. Submit the answers to the questions/comments and this opening statement to Blackboard by 10 PM tomorrow night.

**Assignment 13**

Please read and annotate Mahiri and Sablo’s article, “Writing for their Lives: The Non-School Literacy of California’s Urban, African American Youth” (134-156), then write a response in which you speculate on the sponsors that are probably important in the literate lives of the young people that Mahiri and Sablo write about. How does Brandt’s construct of a “literacy sponsor” hold up in this context? Bring a copy of Assignment 13 to class, as you’ll be working in small groups to compare these texts and generate ideas.

**Synthesis Essay**

In their conclusion, Mahiri and Sablo suggest changes schools might make to help students like Keisha and Troy find school writing beneficial. What do you imagine those changes might be like? While incorporating the feedback and new ideas you got from discussion today, revise Assignment 11 to respond to this question: How might we use what we’ve learned from Gee, Bazerman, Kain & Wardle, and/or Brandt to make sense of what Mahiri and Sablo find?

Email this reworked essay to me by Friday at 8 AM.