

## **Overview:**

IRW is the notion that reading and writing are two interconnected processes of making meaning through language. The IRW course is neither a writing course in which students read, nor a reading course in which students write, but rather a course in which students learn and use practices of literacy to become better readers through writing and better writers through reading. It's a pedagogy that redefines students as writers (and, as such, as vested readers) and, to some extent, redefines the professors as readers and fellow writers.

One of the main goals of an IRW course is to bring students into conversation with texts-- published texts and also, importantly, texts of their own—in order to coax students to see themselves as readers and writers within a larger context and give them concrete experiences with the dialogic and transactional nature of reading and writing and to see themselves as possessing authorial voices within these conversations.

Here are some key ingredients to an IRW curriculum:

### **Metacognition and rhetorical awareness:**

Often times students infer that the apparent ease with which some people read and write are innate talents, rather than skills that are built up through hard work over time. To illustrate for students the reality that literate people are made and not born, in IRW classes, we emphasize that all writers (including ourselves) struggle with writing, and that difficulty and struggle are natural, and often productive, facets of the writing process.

When student writers examine the rhetoricity of both published texts and their own texts, they see the “behind-the-scenes” work of writing—not only what texts mean, but how that meaning is made. Not only is this the work that professional writers do, it's also a proven strategy (along with metacognitive reflection) for transfer of writing skill.

EXAMPLES: Difficulty paper assignment (attached); triple-entry journal (attached) *can be used for published text or for peer/self review*; rhetorical analysis worksheet (attached) *can be used for published text or for peer review/ essay planning*.

### **Building upon extant competencies:**

In IRW, we view our students as individuals entering our classroom with rich and complicated histories and sets of skills with both language and literacy. Kutz, Groden and Zamel suggest that a reading and writing course help students to discover and to build upon the competencies they already possess. Many students, especially in developmental courses, and *especially* those who struggle with reading, will feel like they're “failures” at literacy tasks, which can make them give up before they begin. For this reason, we begin with existing skills and successes.

EXAMPLES: Literacy Narrative assignment (attached); Course eBook (presentation); “Portrait of a Word” assignment (attached)

**Supported autonomy:**

As readers and writers (instead of “mere students,”) the writers in IRW courses should be given some autonomy over, not only the texts they read, but also the questions they answer and the essay topics on which they write. "As students perceive that teachers respect them enough to provide genuine choices," Guthrie and Wigfield write, "students increase their effort and commitment to learning. Supported autonomy is a scaffolded affair—and should always include, not only choices, but clear goals for students. For example, grading criteria should be made clear and legible, though grading rubrics may be decided upon with student input. This kind of supported autonomy helps the student see themselves as practitioner—one who notices and participates in the “rules” of good writing, redefining their own writing goals as they progress.

EXAMPLES: Christenbury Questioning Circles (attached); “Against School” assignment (presentation); “How to Choose a Mentor Text” by Kim Liao (attached).

## Difficulty Paper assignment. (low-stakes)

### Part One (homework:)

After reading and annotating “Against School,” write an Open Lab post of approximately 300 words in which you reflect upon “Against School.” What, *particularly*, did you find confusing, irritating, boring or otherwise difficult? Please note: I want you to BE SPECIFIC. Quote from the text directly. That is, if you were particularly dumbfounded by a particular passage quote that passage, and explain WHY you found it confusing. If the vocabulary was difficult, quote a particularly difficult passage, and try to figure out what Gatto might have been trying to say. Explain WHY you found his particular word choices difficult. Dig deeply! My point in asking you to do this is that usually the places you struggle the most are the places you are doing your best thinking. I want you to stay there a while, even if it’s to explain to me why you don’t understand!

### Part Two (in class:)

*We discuss the difficulties people had with the text itself, but also the difficulties people had with the reading process. Did they get tired? Hungry? Keep checking their texts? Confused by vocabulary? We then discuss strategies for dealing with these process difficulties. We also discuss the text itself and the insight they may have gleaned from difficult passages. In class, students write a plan for re-reading.*

### Part Three (homework:)

Using your plan for re-reading as a guide, re-read (and annotate) “Against School.” When you’re done, write an Open Lab post of approximately 250 words about what you learned from rereading. Again, be specific, quoting from the text!

Quote (Remember to use page #!)	Summary of the quote	Response to the quote
<p>In this column, you will put a quote that you find interesting or confusing, or maddening. In the case of the comic book, make sure you clarify who is speaking and describe the scene briefly.</p>	<p>In this column, you will explain <u>in your own words</u> what you think the writer is trying to say. Think of it as translating for your reader, who may not have read the comic.</p>	<p>Why is this quote important? Why have you chosen it? What do you want your reader to know or notice?</p>
<p><i>The X-men watch TV while a newscaster asks " After all, Charles, is it even fair to call mutants ' human?' The generic term for them is, I believe, ' Homo Superior,' which relates to a different species altogether"</i></p> <p><i>Page 5</i></p>	<p><i>Humans without powers are trying to differentiate themselves from the mutants, setting up a dangerous divide between " us" and " them."</i></p>	<p><i>Even in the comic book world, this divide between " us" and " them" is dangerous, leading to violence against the X-men. There are any number of corresponding situations in contemporary life in which human beings have done the same thing—black vs. white, gay vs. straight, man vs. woman, rich vs. poor, jew vs. gentile (not jewish). This othering is dangerous.</i></p>

**Who is the SPEAKER? What do we know about this person? How do we know it?**

**What is the OCCASION? When and where did it occur?**

**Who is the AUDIENCE? What group of people is the speaker trying to talk to? How do you know?**

**What is the PURPOSE of this piece? What is the writer trying to accomplish?**

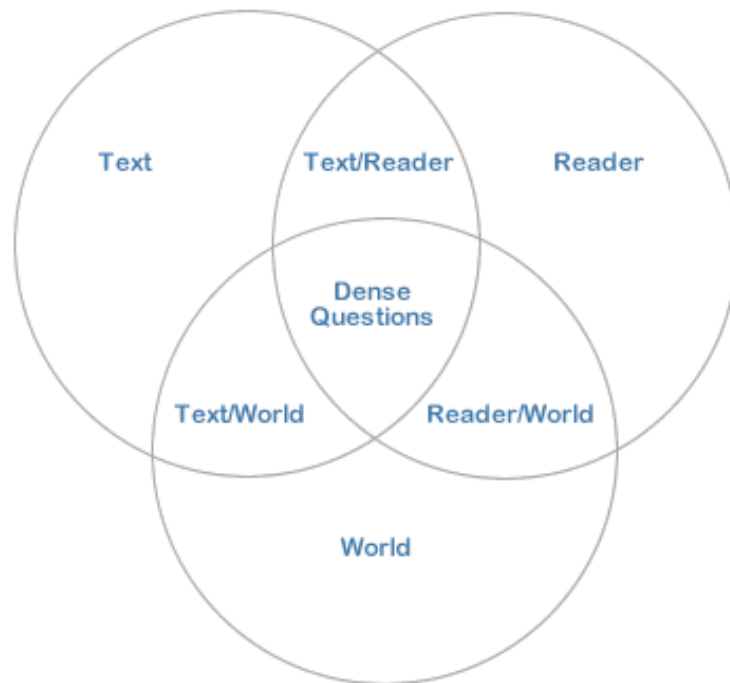
**What is the TONE of this? How can you tell the writer's feelings by the words or phrases (or other clues?)**



**Other thoughts on this piece? And by the way, what's your NAME?**

***SOAPSTONE WORKSHEET***

## Christenbury Questioning Circles



### **SIMPLE QUESTIONS:**

**TEXT** question: Who are Harry Potter's two best friends?

**READER** question: Do you believe in magic?

**WORLD** question: How does American media present those who say they have magical powers?

### **SHADED QUESTIONS:**

**Text/ Reader:** How do Harry Potter's friendships compare to your own friendships?

**Reader/ World:** How do your beliefs in magic compare to American culture's views of magic?

**Text/ World:** How does life at Hogwart's differ from life in an American high school?

### **DENSE QUESTIONS:**

How do your culture's beliefs of people with magical powers compare to the way Muggles in Harry Potter view wizards? What can this tell us about what it means to be an outsider?

If you were to imagine an ideal magical educational experience, would it be like Harry Potter's experience at Hogwart's? In what ways would it differ? In other words, what does the

Hogwart's fantasy tell us about how Rowling and many of her fans imagine the ideal education and how does that differ from yours?

Write one each of the following questions about GOD LOVES MAN KILLS:

SIMPLE QUESTIONS:

Reader:

Text:

World:

SHADED QUESTIONS:

Reader/ Text:

Text/ World:

Reader/ World:

DENSE QUESTIONS:

Now, write TWO dense questions, keeping all three factors: Reader, World and Text, in mind:

# Choosing a Mentor Text (Kim Liao)

## What is a “mentor” text?

A “mentor” text is a model text, geared towards the same audience, which you can use to help you consciously make rhetorical moves as you craft your popular article. Professional writers use mentor texts all the time to familiarize ourselves with a genre and understand the most effective rhetorical approaches that authors make to reach their audiences.

## Should my mentor text be about the same topic I want to write about?

Actually, no – it doesn’t have to be. Your mentor text should be the kind of article you’d like to write, using a style and tone that you admire. The mentor text should either be published in the same publication that you want to write for, or a comparable publication with a similar audience.

## What will I use my mentor text for?

You can turn to this article for guidance about style, tone, and structure. Feel free to do a Rhetorical Analysis of your mentor text using the same questions from the Rhetorical Analysis Sheet we used in class, to get at why your mentor text is effectively reaching its audience, and how you can do the same.

## When should I choose my mentor text?

I recommend choosing your mentor text AFTER you have:

- 1) Selected your topic for the popular article (including the issue and your stance on it),
- 2) Chosen the magazine or digital publication that you want to write for, and
- 3) Identified the discourse community who you are speaking to.

I recommend choosing your mentor text BEFORE you:

- 1) Begin your research, and
- 2) Begin your writing, brainstorming, and outlining process. The mentor text can help guide these choices in a conscious way!

## Which publication should I choose for my article?!?!

**Picking a publication is often tricky, so I’m listing a bunch below that you might want to check out. Here are some questions to consider as you pick a print or digital publication to (hypothetically) pitch your article:**

- 1) Who is the audience of this publication? What age, gender, cultural background, or other demographic factors contribute to this publication’s readership?
- 2) Are readers part of a specific cultural group, have a certain level of education, special interest



group, or other discourse communities? What overlapping communities do readers belong to?

3) Why might this audience be interested in your article's topic and stance? What are you contributing to the conversation that would impact this audience? What would happen if your audience responds favorably to your argument? Might they take a particular action in their community or support an action, build awareness, or communicate your views to others?

**Here are some popular publications that might be fun and rewarding to check out. Be sure to analyze their audiences before choosing a publication, and feel free to research all manner of print and digital publications beyond this list:**

New York Times  
Wall Street Journal  
The Atlantic  
Buzzfeed  
Vice  
The Verge  
Rolling Stone  
Forbes  
The New Yorker  
Refinery29  
Vox  
Thrillist  
Bloomberg  
Edible Communities  
Lucky Peach

Entertainment Weekly  
Polygon  
Mental Floss  
Esquire  
Vanity Fair  
Bon Appetit  
Glamour  
GQ  
Vix  
Jezebel  
City Lab  
The Cut  
Eater  
HuffPo  
Wired