

Writing Spaces Assignments & Activities Archive

How to Write a _____ Like a _____
Keri Epps

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How to Write a _____ Like a _____

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Overview

As a writing instructor dedicated to researching and teaching rhetorical genres, I often struggle with how to facilitate students' learning of what makes a genre, how it circulates, and who it matters to. In short, designing scaffolded assignments around "genre" has seemed difficult in writing courses at the introductory and more advanced levels.

A turning point for me was the design of the included assignment, adapted from my colleagues Dr. Laura A. Aull and Professor Laura Giovanelli: "How to Write a _____ Like a _____." This assignment offers students the opportunity to occupy the position of a writer they want to be. In this position, students are encouraged to think through all the ways that person would need to write a particular kind of text for a reader or group of readers who value the genre and use it to incite action.

Specifically, in this assignment, students write a guide for new writers in the selected genre's discourse community and explain to the readers who the members of the discourse communities are, what they care about, and how the writing they do should reflect those core values. In writing the guide, students also must recall how media and modes intersect with genre in order to make the best design choices for their intended audience. Students have a lot of choice in deciding the genre and the medium in which they choose to compose/design their writing guide (some examples of guides students have created can be found at the *WRI 210: Writing Guides* website). The assignment offers students a space to research and perform writing in a rhetorical context that is low-risk, enjoyable, and meaningful.

Time Commitment

3-4 weeks

Materials

Proceeding assignments in the course help inform the writer about the genre for the chosen guide. The first is an annotated bibliography of sample texts from the chosen genre, and the second is a comparative analysis paper of trends that they noted occurring (or recurring) in the sample texts. The guide is the culminating project after students have conducted in-depth research and have read deeply in rhetorical genre theory.

Assignment Process

- Students will identify the genre of choice early in the semester to complete the annotated bibliography and comparative genre analysis.
- Students will then review the primary and secondary sources identified and analyzed in their annotated bibliographies to brainstorm what genre conventions they have concluded are most significant to learning this genre. To arrive at their conclusions, the students attempt to answer the following questions:
 - What are the essential writing conventions of the genre the readers need to know in order to communicate successfully within this discourse community?
 - What are some models/excerpts from models that you could include as illustrations for your reader in your guide?
 - What are the primary goals of your discourse community? How does the writing represent/reflect these goals?
 - What formatting and style (i.e., consider the medium and the modes it affords) will appeal to this audience?

- Next, choose the medium that is most appropriate for your guide and draft your guide. Consider including the following sections:
 - Overview (brief summary of what you've learned about the genre and the discipline).
 - Analysis of Examples (using some of the primary and secondary research you gathered, identify and analyze key excerpts that would be helpful to your audience; this section may be broken down into subsections on "research," "formatting," "style," etc).
 - Best practices for writing in the genre.
 - Conclusion/significance of the genre to the discourse community and how the genre moves the discourse community to action to meet their shared goals.
- Finally, compose a rationale and reflection for the guide you designed. Consider answering the following questions as you compose your reflective essay:
 - Purpose. How did you decide on the topic? What did you identify as the exigence or need for this kind of guide?
 - Genre and Medium. How did you decide the genre and medium in which to compose and distribute the guide? How did you rationalize that this format and outlet were the most appropriate for the audience?
 - Audience. Who does your guide help? What did you decide they would want to read/see versus not?
 - Structure and Format. How did you strategize your organization and framing of the final product? Why did you start it the way you did? Why did you end it the way you did?
 - Setting. What did you decide would be the most ideal place (physical or digital) for this text to be presented and distributed?

- Evidence. What evidence, including and in addition to your evidence used in the annotated bibliography, did you use to inform the information included in your guide?
- Other Possibilities. What worked well in this final guide? What do you think are some limitations? Are there other genres or media that you would consider using to supplement the guide? Why or why not?
- Course Goals and Outcomes. Lastly, and likely most importantly, how do you see this guide reflecting how you met the course goals and outcomes (as listed in the syllabus)? Which goals do you think you met best, and how did you reach them? Which ones do you think you will still need to work toward as you progress in your academic major or on your professional career track?

Learning Outcomes

Students engaging in this activity/assignment will:

- Identify and explain research and writing conventions in various academic field(s) in order to better adapt to “new” writing situations in other academic or non-academic contexts
- Analyze how and why certain genres or conventions shape knowledge-making and research practices in chosen academic field(s) using rhetorical frameworks that show how and why writing works in specific academic disciplines
- Practice your own writing as a process—as academic writers do—through invention, drafting, feedback, revision, and critical self-reflection, modeled after the academic publishing process of revise-and-resubmit

Learning Accommodations

- Material should be presented in multiple formats, including visual document design for the assignment description, oral instruction in the face-to-face classroom or through video for synchronous or asynchronous online activities.
- Projects should be delivered in two formats: in the student's medium of choice and delivered in an oral presentation to their peers and instructor during one or two class sessions.

Works Cited

WRI 210: Writing Guides.

<https://sites.google.com/view/wri210guides/home>.

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Further Reading

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