

Writing Spaces

Assignments & Activities Archive

Writing About Writing (WAW) Synthesis Essay Assignment

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Writing About Writing (WAW) Synthesis Essay Assignment

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Overview

This assignment comes out of my English 302: Advanced Composition course, a course that primarily services our English Education majors, and serves as an elective for all English majors and minors. Because of this audience, the assignment incorporates readings from *Writing Spaces* and/or *Bad Ideas About Writing* with the goal of having students understand how to synthesize source material and engage with topics related to the teaching of writing. In this assignment, students are asked to locate a topic from an essay in *Bad Ideas about Writing* or *Writing Spaces* and commit to further research on that topic. Because this course primarily serves future teachers, I ask them to read these sources to help them better understand pedagogical conversations in the field of Writing Studies. The assignment requires a full draft, final draft, and includes peer review and a writing conference with the instructor.

Time Commitment

4-6 weeks

Materials

Access to *Bad Ideas about Writing* and *Writing Spaces*, both of which are open educational resources (OER) textbooks. The podcast for *Bad Ideas about Writing* can also be used.

Assignment Process

- Students spend 2-3 weeks reading selections from *Bad Ideas about Writing* and *Writing Spaces* to learn more about

relevant and timely conversations in the field of Writing Studies. Students come to class prepared to discuss their readings. The instructor is welcome to bring in supplemental materials to help aid discussion (e.g. further readings).

- Students will share a topic they are interested in writing about that everyone has discussed in class. For example, one of my students wanted to write about how grammar instruction that isn't embedded in the writing process is a bad idea about writing. Students may propose topics during a class session. Below are other listed topics students have written on:
 - The importance of reading instruction within writing instruction
 - The concept of failure as a learning tool for writing
 - The importance of peer review in writing instruction
- Once topics have been selected and discussed with instructor approval, students will write a draft to submit prior to a writing conference. Students will also participate in a peer review workshop during a scheduled class time. A final draft will be turned in for instructor assessment.

Learning Outcomes

Students engaging in this activity/assignment will:

- Practice integrating knowledge from outside sources to create your own ideas and arguments
- Write an argumentative paper with a clear thesis statement that gives the paper focus

- Synthesize outside sources that present multiple viewpoints on an issue related to writing instruction
- Think critically about issues or concepts in Writing Studies and make a claim about that issue or concept

Learning Accommodations

- Students may choose to listen to the *Bad Ideas about Writing* podcast as a way to access that material in an audio format.
- Students will participate in a writing conference with the instructor over their synthesis essay. An in-class peer review workshop will also be scheduled so that students can get feedback on their draft from their peers.
- Material should be presented in multiple formats to include in-person instruction and asynchronous, digital delivery.

Assignment Description

One of the most taught written assignments is an argument paper where you take a certain position on an issue. For this assignment, I am asking you to create a synthesis paper where you present two different viewpoints to create a coherent and thoughtful argument. To do this, you will survey the chapters from *Bad Ideas About Writing* and/or *Writing Spaces*. This collection is unique in that it sets the grounds for practicing synthesis as many chapters are in conversation with one another regarding education in English and Writing Studies. From these readings, you will compose an argument around a specific issue in English or Writing Studies that incorporates the readings from *Bad Ideas about Writing* or *Writing Spaces* you selected. You will then use the “Further Readings” section(s) from the *Bad Ideas* chapter(s) to help you find other outside sources, and/or use library database access or Google Scholar to find further readings

that expand on your topic.

The goal is to compose a thoughtful argument around an issue proposed in your reading(s). You will also bring in other outside readings to support your synthesis paper as well. For example, some of the readings in *Bad Ideas about Writing* discuss what good writing is and offer various viewpoints on the matter with a section on further reading at the end of the chapter. In reading these selections, what viewpoints seem most valid, and why? What do you disagree with, and why?

I'm happy to talk through ideas with you about this paper. I'm familiar with the content of both texts and can help you narrow down topic ideas or discuss possible topics with you.

Purpose: to create an argument around a specific issue; to practice academic writing; to practice research skills.

Audience: Me, Dr. J, your peers, others in the class, those who may be interested in this topic.

Voice: academic, use terminology relevant to writing studies or writing education.

Support: Make sure to use at least 5 outside sources for supporting your claims and arguments. Some sources should be from our course readings in *Bad Ideas about Writing* and/or *Writing Spaces*. They may be sources we had previously read for class.

Organization: The paper should open up with an introduction that includes a thesis statement. From this thesis statement, you will further develop your argument through body paragraphs. Include a conclusion that leaves the reader with a meaningful reflection.

Format: Please follow all guidelines of MLA or APA style and citation. Minimum length for this assignment may be around 4 pages not including a title page (APA) or works cited (MLA) reference page

(APA).

Rough draft due to instructor: Insert deadline

Writing Conferences: Insert dates

Peer Review Workshop: Insert class date

Final draft due: Insert deadline

One Possible Structure:

- Introduction with thesis statement surrounding the issue you are examining in the field of writing studies. For example, you could take on the argument whether or not First-Year Writing (FYW) or Composition is necessary to university and college students. Give your reader a context of your argument that can help the reader understand what the paper will be about.
- Presenting arguments: This will be the majority of your paper, as you present the context of the discussion for and against what your issue is. What past arguments have been made? Make sure to cite sources using MLA or APA format.
- Take a position: Where do you land in this discussion? Why? make sure what you share here matches your thesis.
- Conclusion: Summarize the history and context of the previous arguments while still incorporating your own. Can you think of any future work to be done considering this argument? What questions might you leave a reader to ponder?

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