

# *Writing Spaces*

## Assignments & Activities Archive

### Discourse Communities Manual Presentation

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## Discourse Communities Manual Presentation

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### Overview

In this activity, which will take around 3-4 weeks, students are tasked to research one discourse community (e.g., college club, job, volunteer organization) that they have never joined or recently became a member of. They need to pick out the 6 elements of the organization including:

1. goals
2. membership process
3. utilization of specialized language
4. tools and technologies used for communication
5. purpose of these tools and technologies
6. determining if any of the tools and technologies are effective genres (textual responses to a recurring situation that is recognized by all group members).

To collect data, they will first interview one member who has been in the organization for at least a month. Furthermore, they will also examine publicly accessible documents and websites to further research the six elements. Using this data, they will first write a 600–800-word essay discussing why they chose their community. They will highlight the methods used to collect data and identify where and with whom they will share this essay with. Secondly, they will create a presentation (e.g., poster, Instagram Post, etc.) that visually outlines the six elements of their community. This assignment can assist non-members in learning more about the organization and support

members in evaluating if their organization is effectively meeting the criteria of a discourse community. Ultimately, teachers can run this assignment in any writing classroom setting, especially when helping students develop their research and presentation skills.

### Time Commitment

3-4 weeks

### Materials

Students need access to a laptop and/or device to connect to the internet and type their ideas onto Microsoft Word and Google Docs.

### Assignment Process

- Students will first learn about the six characteristics of a discourse community: goals, communication, purpose of communication, genres, language used, and membership. They will read “Understanding Discourse Communities” by Dan Melzer to better understand these characteristics. Students will come to class and consider what they learned from Melzer’s reading.
- Next, students will analyze one example of a discourse community to better understand these six overall characteristics. The first community to be studied is the New England Patriots Assistant Coaching Staff. Students will be shown this [YouTube Video](#) and must identify all characteristics they can. Then, the instructor will discuss what 6 characteristics can be identified from the video.
- Third, students will read pages 283-292 of “Read the room! Navigating social contexts and written texts” by Seeley, Sarah, Kelly Xu, and Matthew Chen. On these pages, the authors give three examples of discourse communities:

TikTok, an Ecology Lab, and a Medical Oncology Lab internship. In addition, students will also review pages 192-195 in “Creating, Using and Sharing Information in Research Communities” by Cassie Hemstrom and Kathy Anders since they introduce a podcast group discourse community.

- Afterwards, students will begin to brainstorm previous discourse communities they were involved with. To aid students, instructors will first share communities they have been a part of including previous jobs and clubs. Then, students will break up into groups of 2-3 and answer the following questions to generate discussion:
  - What are the goals of the organization/club/job you had been in previously?
  - How do people in the group stay in touch?
  - What is the purpose behind these communication practices?
  - Any specialized language used in the club that is not used the same way by other organizations?
  - How does one become a member of the group?
  - How does your organization/club/job share information with outsiders? (Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, etc.).
- To better understand what a “genre” is, students will read “Navigating Genres” by Kerry Dirk (Dirk). A helpful definition of genre for students to learn is *textual responses to recurring situations that all group members recognize and understand*. Students will be placed into groups where they will randomly be assigned a genre like **emails, proposals,**

**reviews**, etc. As a group, they will need to answer the following questions:

- Who uses the genre?
  - What is it about?
  - Where is the genre used?
  - When is the genre used?
  - Why is it used?
- Now that students better understand what a discourse community is, students will need to identify one community they would like to research and write about. The only caveat to getting approval is to choose a community that they have never been a member of or had only recently joined. It should be something other than a community they were in for multiple years, like the ones found in high school.
  - Once students have chosen their topic, they will be assigned "Introduction to primary research: Observations, surveys, and interviews" by Dana Lynn Driscoll (Driscoll) to learn more about the art of interviewing and curating research questions. This is to prepare students for their interview of one member of the discourse community to determine the six characteristics of the organization. Some sample questions they can ask include:
    - What are the shared goals of the community? Why does this group exist? What does it do?
    - What tools/technologies do members use to communicate with each other (meetings, phone calls, email, text messages, newsletters, reports, evaluation forms, etc.)?

- What are the purposes of each of these tools/technologies of communication (i.e., to improve performance, make money, share research, etc.)?
  - Which of the above tools/technologies of communication can be considered genres (textual responses to recurring situations that all group members recognize and understand)?
  - What specialized language (lexis) do group members use in their conversation and genres (name some examples—ESL, on the fly, 86, etc.)? What communicative function does this lexis serve (i.e.: why say “86” instead of “we are out of this”)?
  - Who are the “old-timers” with expertise? Who are the newcomers with less expertise? How do newcomers learn the appropriate language, genres, and knowledge of the group?
- After students have interviewed one participant, students are encouraged to look at other types of data collection (researching websites, social media pages, etc.) before beginning to write their final documents.
  - Finally, students will take all their research from the interviews and other sources to produce two final documents. The first will be a 600–800-word essay detailing why they chose this discourse community, talking about the methodology they used to collect the data, and explaining who they would share their information with. The second task will be to craft a creative project to display the data they have collected, using any medium from a website to TikTok videos, Instagram posts, infographics, and more. With their chosen medium, students will present the six characteristics of their discourse community visually. To learn more about

visual design, they will read “Understanding Visual Rhetoric” by Jenae Cohn (Cohn).

## Learning Outcomes

Students engaging in this activity/assignment will:

- Learn more about the concepts of discourse communities and genres
- Practice qualitative research techniques and principles
- Develop their decision-making skills
- Help outsiders and insiders become more knowledgeable about the discourse community

## Learning Accommodations

- Students can complete the interview in a multitude of ways:
  - In-person interview (e.g. Zoom, Phone, etc.).
  - Asynchronous interview (e.g. email, text message, etc.).
- The word limit of 600-800 words can be adjusted, need be, for students struggling to meet the word limit.

## Works Cited

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