

# *Writing Spaces*

## Assignments & Activities Archive

### The Time Capsule: A Narrative Composition for Developing Social Support Systems

*Michele N. Zugnoni*

This activity guide is a selection from the *Writing Spaces* Assignment and Activity Archive, an open access companion resource to the Writing Spaces open textbook series.

To access additional selections, visit: <http://writingspaces.org/aaa>.

Assignment and activity selections © 2024 by the respective authors. Unless otherwise stated, these works are licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) and are subject to the Writing Spaces Terms of Use. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>, email [info@creativecommons.org](mailto:info@creativecommons.org), or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA. To view the Writing Spaces Terms of Use, visit <http://writingspaces.org/terms-of-use>.

All rights reserved. For permission to reprint, please contact the author(s) of the individual articles, who are the respective copyright owners.

## The Time Capsule

Michele N. Zugnoni

### Overview

The development of a social support system is one of the greatest factors in college student success. Without such a system, students experience a sense of isolation and loneliness (Tinto 4). 28.4% of college students report feeling socially isolated (“Loneliness, Resilience” 3). 64.7% of college students report having experienced loneliness (“Loneliness, Resilience” 1), while 39% report feeling lonely within the past 24 hours (Marken & Hrynowski para. 1). The time capsule assignment weaves together development of a social support system and narrative composition into what Yancey (1998) refers to as giving students a chance to “discover what [they] know, what [they] have learned, and what [they] might understand” (6).

The time capsule consists of five narratives and five peer-based comment sections. Students write, film or audio record narratives related to their college experience and/or aspects of their own identity. In class, students share those parts of the narrative they feel comfortable sharing. They then engage in discussion and leave a note on each other’s comment sections. In the process, students form social connections while also developing their personal and academic goals. They also develop skills in multimodal composition. After four years, around the time of college graduation, students are emailed links to their time capsules. During a time of change, they have the chance to remember the connections they’ve already made.

Students who have completed this assignment have noted that the class was their “safe place” and that the time capsule helped them form friendships and become comfortable engaging with peers.

### Time Commitment

Each narrative takes approximately 20 to 30 minutes to compose and about 15 to 20 minutes to discuss in class. Time commitment varies depending on the needs of the course. Some instructors might offer it as a course-long activity lasting for the duration of the quarter or semester, with a narrative due every other week. Other instructors might choose to group narratives together into a single assignment or else have students complete less than five narratives. A single narrative and class discussion still presents great opportunities for students to develop learning goals.

## Materials

Students require a forum to post their narratives and record their peer comments. One possibility is to have students create websites using such builders as Google sites, Weebly, WordPress, or Wix. Students also need access to a computer and, if they choose to create a video or audio narrative, a way to record.

## The Time Capsule Process

- Narratives can be composed in film, audio, or written format. Students may choose to write a 500-word narrative, or to compose a 3-minute narrative in video or audio format. Students will compose each of five narratives based on three required topics and two topics of their choice. Topics include:
  - **Required Topics**
    - Reflect on an activity, place, or group you've enjoyed on campus
    - Reflect on a “personal growth” practice you've adopted this quarter, such as a new way of studying or time for self-care
    - Reflect on what you hope to be doing in five years

and the steps you've taken / will take to achieve your goals

- **“Student Choice” Topics**
  - Activities I enjoy at school and/or home
  - My friendships at school and/or home
  - My role in my family and/or community
  - My favorite traditions and/or celebrations
  - What meaning does my name hold for me?
  - How I've been shaped by my experiences
  - My biggest influences
  - My favorite movies or TV shows; music or bands; books or authors
  - The class I'm most excited to take, or the class I've enjoyed the most and why
  - Student's choice
- Students meet with a group of 3 or 4 peers during the following class session. It's a good practice to mix groups so that students have the opportunity to work with different peers each time. In groups, students share the parts of the narrative they feel comfortable sharing, and then engage in discussions with their peers. Discussions are generally based on concepts that have come up during the pair and share.
- Finally, student peers write a comment on each other's time capsules to commemorate the discussion. These “yearbook style” comments should be friendly and capture something

the students have taken away from the discussion.

## Learning Outcomes

Students engaging in this activity will:

- Develop skills in metacognition and multimodal reflective composition
- Think critically about the role of audience
- Gain an understanding of composition as a social act
- Form connections with peers and others across campus

## Learning Accommodations

- Sharing identity narratives is a personal process, unique to each student. To accommodate differences in comfort level, instructors may wish to help students understand that they get to choose what to share with their audience. This will also help students develop a deeper understanding of the role of audience in composition.

## Works Cited

Hrynowski, Zach, and Stepanie Marken. "College Students Experience High Levels of Worry and Stress." *Gallup*, 10 Aug. 2023, <https://www.gallup.com/education/509231/college-students-experience-high-levels-worry-stress.aspx>. Accessed 31 May 2024.

*Timelycare.com*, 2024, [https://go.timelycare.com/l/916941/2024-05-17/t52m2/916941/1715969310eIvUsRm1/Report\\_Call\\_For\\_Campus\\_Action\\_AM\\_TC.pdf](https://go.timelycare.com/l/916941/2024-05-17/t52m2/916941/1715969310eIvUsRm1/Report_Call_For_Campus_Action_AM_TC.pdf). Accessed 31 May 2024.

Tinto, Vincent. 'Taking Student Retention Seriously: Rethinking the First Year of College.' *NACADA Journal*, vol. 19, 2000, pp. 5–10.

Yancey, Kathleen Blake. *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*. Utah State University Press, 1998, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt46nsh0>.