

Writing Spaces

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Developing Details: Embodied Writing Activity

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Developing Details: Embodied Writing Activity

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Overview

The purpose of this activity is to have students explore the ways their body is part of their writing process. Writing is not just a mental activity—it also involves the body. The body types out words or commands speech-to-text; the body feels anxiety as deadlines approach and feels joy when writing is praised. Our bodies exist in larger social, cultural, and political structures that inherently also play a role in our writing. This activity aims to have students begin to explore the relationship between their embodied experience and their writing. To do this, students will reflect on the five senses within the classroom space and share their findings with the class. By focusing on the classroom space, there is a level of familiarity to all students, which can allow comfort while learning a new skill and clearly expose the different bodily experiences. Then, students will use the details they have developed to write a paragraph describing the classroom to a specific audience. Finally, students will share their writing in small and large group discussions to begin to explore how an individual's embodied experience and the rhetorical situation affect their writing. Ultimately, this embodied activity allows students to explore the ways their bodies are involved in the writing process, while also developing skills in writing with detail and beginning to understand rhetorical situations.

Time Commitment

50 minutes

Materials

To complete this activity, students will need access to pen and paper

or a laptop or other writing device. Instructors will need access to a whiteboard and markers or a chalkboard and chalk.

Activity Process

- Before class begins, you will want to split your whiteboard or chalkboard into five sections and label each section of the board with one of the five senses—feel, see, hear, smell, and taste.
- Students will first meditate on what they feel, see, hear, smell, and taste in the classroom through their subject positions by moving around the classroom. Give students 5-10 minutes to think deeply about what sensory experiences they are having in the classroom. Students should be given options to move and just think, to take notes, or to freewrite on what they are experiencing.
- Next, students will come to the board in groups of 5 to share their findings in the most appropriate spot among the divided board.
- Then, students will engage in an instructor-led discussion to dig deeper into their embodied experiences to see how various senses may work together and how their body may experience the classroom environment differently than others. You may find pointing to words that appear in multiple senses to be useful in the discussion and to ask students, “How is X something we feel and see?” and to use the phrase, “Tell me more” to try to get students to dig deeper. Additionally, you may ask questions such as, “Someone put X for smell. Show of hands, who can smell X right now?” Then, ask students to think about why some of them might notice the smell and why others might not.
- Next, connect the embodied senses activity to the rhetorical

situation—purpose, audience, topic, writer, and context—by having students write a paragraph trying to describe their classroom space to various audiences. This can allow students to begin to understand how their own embodied experience as the writer may need to be negotiated in order to meet the purpose of their writing on a certain topic within a context and audience constraints. You may assign a few different specific audiences, such as a 5-year-old, a parent, or a friend who attends a different university, or allow students to pick their own. As students write their paragraph, have them reflect on their embodied experience and aspects of the rhetorical situation using the following questions: how do my embodied experiences affect the details I choose as the author and how does the purpose/context/audience I am writing towards further complicate the choices I make?

- Then, ask students to form small groups to share their paragraphs and discuss the rhetorical choices they made. You may ask students to explain how they balanced their own embodied experience with what they felt their audience needed to know, how they decided what sensory details to include, and to explain what language choices they made and why those choices fit their rhetorical situation.
- Finally, conclude the class with a whole group discussion. You may ask students to share what they discussed in small groups, such as what they learned from their own experience and hearing their peer's writing on the relationship of the embodied experience of writing and the rhetorical situation. You may also ask students to share how they noticed sensory details or language being used differently by different writers or for different audiences.

Learning Outcomes

Students engaging in this activity/assignment will:

- Gain an understanding of the way the body is part of the writing process
- Think critically about the relationship between the rhetorical situation and the embodied experience of the author effect the details of a text

Learning Accommodations

- To minimize student movement, students may stay seated and reflect on their experience in the classroom space from their seat. Additionally, students may call out their findings and direct you to write them on the board.
- To eliminate movement for students and the instructor, the entire activity could be conducted via a shared Google Doc with headings to break the document into the five senses.

Further Reading

Stenberg, Shari J. "Embodied Classrooms, Embodied Knowledges: Re-thinking the Mind/Body Split." *Composition Studies*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2002, pp. 43–60.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/43501960>

Wysocki, Anne Francis. "Introduction: Into Between—On Composition in Mediation." *Composing (Media)=Composing (Embodiment): Bodies, Technologies, Writing, the Teaching of Writing*, edited Kristin L. Arola and Anne Francis Wysocki, Utah State University Press, 2012, pp. 1-24.