READER-BASED WRITING AND HIGHER-ORDER CONCERNS

A singular distinction of more scholarly and sophisticated writing is the concept of **Reader-based Prose vs Writer-based Prose.** Several years ago, composition scholar Linda Flower[1] compared student writing to professional writing and identified this striking difference. Specifically, she identified that many students wrote generally for themselves as learners – writer-based prose. In comparison, professional writers, whether in the academy or elsewhere, were highly conscious of their readers and composed their writing with the audience in mind.

Although writer-based prose is a normal first stage for student writers exploring a topic, reader-based prose is what faculty expect for most finished assignments. Knowing this, it will help you to revise your work if you anticipate your readers' needs. Remember that you're writing to and for an academic reader, especially as you venture into your self-reflective pieces. For more on the expectations of an academic audience, see the VWC's resource on this topic: https://www.antioch.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/VWC-Writing-for-Academic-Audiences.pdf

While many AU faculty require personal reflections in the array of class writing assignments, they're not necessarily looking for personal narratives alone; typically, faculty also want to see critical engagement and integration of the class readings. Similarly, if faculty assign a video or article review, an element of the assignment might include your personal response – however, that must be only part of and contextualized within the purpose of the assignment. For the most part, the purpose of such an assignment is to have you integrate theories and other readings within the discussion.

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[1] Flower, Linda. "Writer-Based Prose: A Cognitive Basis for Problems in Writing." College English, 41 (September, 1979), 19-37.

As a result, these reflective assignments draw upon your ability to blend the personal growth you've experienced in the class (assignments, class discussions, faculty presentations, and reading) with your ability to integrate points from outside writers. "Basic" personal reflection might be a component of the final writing and is certainly part of the writing process; however, your ultimate goal for this "critical reflection" requires you to situate it in the learning context of the readings and the class.

Below are the steps involved and some characteristics of composing with the reader in mind. In academic writing, your reader expects a thesis or clear main idea, and generally expects information presented in a hierarchy of major and minor points. Your academic audience often expects cues to ease reading and wants conclusions explicit.

Use a reader-based structure:

Prewriting:

- Analyze Your Audience: Identify your audience and consider how their knowledge and needs differ from yours. What is the reader expecting from you with this assignment? Decide how you can best communicate with that audience and what elements/sections are required of you in writing.

- Decipher the Assignment: What is the purpose for writing? What do you know is expected within the writing?

- Anticipate Your Audience's Response: Reflect to class situations or the assignment. Many faculty will outline their expectations regarding content and format.

- Organize for the "Creative" Reader; that is, the reader who wants to enter a learning experience with the text.

Composing:

- Compose the paper around a problem, a thesis, or a purpose.

- Decide the other points your want to make. A mind map is a helpful visual for brainstorming and in illustrating relationships.

- Organize your ideas into a hierarchy. Distinguish between major and minor points and make the relationship between the two explicit. Make your conclusions explicit. An outline is helpful in organizing and identifying the necessary topics.

- Use cues to make your organization clear to the reader: If you're writing in APA, you might consider headings and subheadings for longer papers. If your reader allows, include bullets to list material.

Higher-order & Lower-order Concerns

One way to ensure a reader-based structure is to prioritize higher-order elements in your writing. Academic writing is formal writing requiring writers to respect the stylistic expectations, rhetorical moves, and conventions of the discourse community. Consider the following hierarchy of elements:

- Focus & Thesis

- Support & Development of ideas

- Organization of material

- Research

- Style & Voice

- Accuracy of "lower-order concerns"

- Use of Discourse Conventions (eg APA, format protocols, et)

As you write, first consider **higher-order Concerns** in writing. These are the "controlling elements" of your writing and reflect your knowledge of your topic and how you have integrated outside reading. In other words, these are the elements that relate to the purpose for writing & how well you:

- ◆ Address the assignment

- ◆ Argue a point

- ◆ Develop and support thesis

- ◆ Comprehend the material

- ◆ Integrate research

- ◆ Structure writing logically

As you revise & proofread, attend to **lower-order Concerns** in your writing. These are all the "right or wrong" features (or conventions) of written discourse, and your reader expects these fundamental expectations attended to. In fact, having errors here can dramatically distract your reader. Read and scan your document for correctness in the following areas.

- ◆ Grammar

- ◆ Punctuation

- ◆ Syntax

- ◆ Spelling

- ◆ Language/vocabulary

- ◆ APA, MLA or other formatting & documentation

And finally, we hope you consider using the VWC to help you identify if you've been successful in writing for a reader. Peer writing consultants can also help resolve any writing issue you know you have. An outside, objective reader can also help you with content development and transitions. And, you may submit any assignment 3 times to the Virtual Writing Center for feedback.

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