

Writing in your Discipline (WID) Project

Science writing is boring! English majors are the best writers! In social science writing passive voice CAN BE USED! Legalese is impossible to understand! Have you ever wondered why disciplinary writing varies so much? No? Well, think about it as you read the following description of your first project. All disciplines use writing in some way to communicate knowledge; yet, the “rules” for writing may look very different from one discipline to another. In this first project, you will *explore* how one discipline (preferably your major) prescribes and describes its writing/communication/research preferences.

Description

The first assignment for this course asks you to describe the rhetorical conventions of writing in your discipline / major. As a freshman, you are here to study your major and you, undoubtedly, have much to learn about writing in your discipline. This assignment serves at least two purposes. First, it allows you to get a jump start in your area of study by learning more about a particular discipline; and, second, it serves as a foundation for the interdisciplinary work that we will do in the remainder of the course.

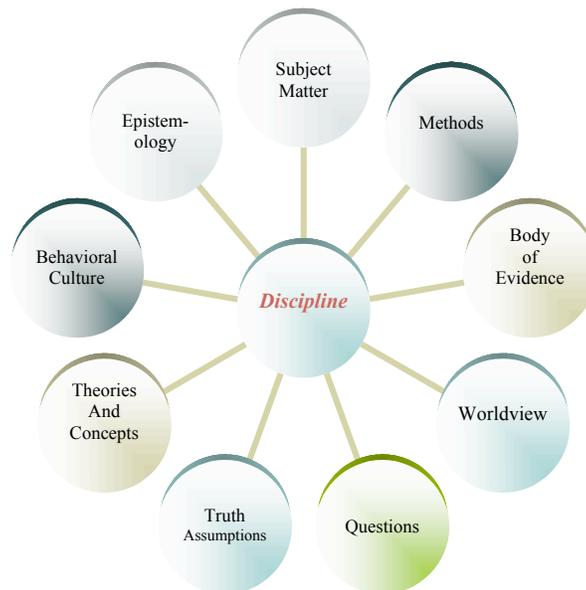
Specifically, your tasks for this project include the following:

- (1) Analyze texts that describe or instruct writing in your discipline (such as a manual or a writing guide);
- (2) Rhetorically analyze texts that serve as writing samples in your discipline;
- (3) Conduct an interview with a professional in your field to gather anecdotal evidence about writing, researching, and publishing;
- (4) Compose an essay that explores what you have discovered about your discipline;
- (5) Share your discoveries in a collaborative and creative presentation.

Theory

While the assignment asks you to focus on writing in your discipline, we cannot study rhetorical conventions in isolation. in the context of the mind the components entails:

Plan to study *writing* discipline, keeping in that every discipline



Every discipline contains subject matter, preferred methods for gathering information, ideas about what counts as evidence, epistemologies, expectations of particular culturally appropriate behaviors, theories, concepts, and assumptions about truth which work together to compose a “disciplinary worldview” – a way of seeing the world through a specific disciplinary lens. Often a disciplinary worldview is evident by the questions a discipline asks.

Although disciplines share categories that define them, they are distinguished by the particulars within each category. For example, disciplines are distinguished by

- the kinds of questions they ask about the world
- their perspective (or world view)
- the set of assumptions they employ
- the methods which they use to build up a body of knowledge (facts, concepts, theories)
- certain subject matter

As you learn about the role of writing in your discipline, consider how your discipline compares with other disciplines and how its texts demonstrate disciplinary perspective. Keep in mind Repko’s discussion of **disciplinary perspective** in Chapter Three. Your project should reflect a strong understanding of theoretical components.

Process

Your task is to compose a 4-5 page essay that *explores* what you have learned about your discipline and what you have learned about writing in your discipline, particularly. The nature of an exploratory essay emerges from decisions and discoveries that you make during your quest for information. The end result will be an essay where the primary emphasis is on your learning process. Hopefully, you will discover the techniques of writing and modes of thinking represented and promoted by the discourse community of your discipline.

Pre-writing: Before you begin to research writing in your discipline, think about what you already know (or don’t know) about your discipline. Spend some time pre-writing or brainstorming about these questions:

- What kinds (genres) of texts are represented in your discipline? (Scholarly research, visual images, personal essays, memos, narratives, films, documentaries, and so on.)
- What counts as “evidence” in your discipline? How does it define “proof” or “reliable source?”
- What questions does your discipline ask about the world?
- What is the discipline’s purpose?
- What assumptions are made about the world, man, environment, language, etc?
- How would you describe the worldview of your discipline?

Disciplinary writing follows set conventions, codes, and assumptions that one must follow to join in the discourse appropriately. The texts follow accepted (prescribed) standards of organization, format, notions of evidence, and overall quality. However, to a novice writer, these practices are often not explicit and must be learned through experience or trial and error. Hopefully, this assignment will give you a jump on ways of writing in your discipline and a good foundation for “interdisciplinary writing.”

*Refer to the WID Invention Sheet for more help in planning your project.

Specifics: Incorporate at least five sources into your exploratory essay:

- (a) One source should be an interview that you conduct with a professional in the field. I suggest that you read about writing in your discipline before conducting the interview so that you are knowledgeable and your questions are intelligent. Write several questions to use as a guide

during your interview. (For an example of interviews on writing in the disciplines, see the link available in the "WID" Folder on Blackboard.)

- (b) Two sources should be academic publications that give insight or instruction on writing in your discipline and/or writing resources that are either published on the web or in print from a viable academic source (such as an online writing center at a university). You might also consult writing manuals or handbooks for writing in your discipline.
- (c) Two sources should be *samples* of writing in your discipline that you analyze rhetorically and incorporate into your essay. At least one of these samples should be a recent scholarly article published in a reputable journal in your discipline. The second of these writing samples could be a non-scholarly source or a scholarly source from a different academic journal in your field. In selecting writing samples, keep in mind that you will be asked to analyze them *rhetorically*, to discuss their place in the discipline, and if applicable, to comment on rhetorical points of comparison between the samples.

ORGANIZATION and WRITING: Your paper should employ the organizational strategy of an essay – introduction (with thesis), body, and conclusion – and incorporate insight, reflection, and evidence from your interview, writing samples, and instructional materials. Present a focus that offers a sense of direction and progression throughout; employ logical transitions from one section/paragraph to another; sustain reader's interest with clarity and cohesion of paper structure and precise word choice. In essence, you are writing an exploratory essay/narrative that *works out a thesis through discovery*. Use MLA documentation for this essay. (You may need to explain the documentation style that is most commonly used in your discipline *within the essay*).

STYLE and LENGTH:

- (a) Write a 4-5 page essay where you incorporate at least 5 sources as stated above.
- (b) In addition to the essay, write a 1-2 page reflection paper: "Write yourself into the discipline" by reflecting on your writing and learning process, looking ahead to what you may contribute to the field, how you might participate in the conversation of your discourse community, how are you wired/bent toward this disciplinary focus, and what you would still like to know about your discipline.

PRESENTATION: As part of your research and learning process, you will be invited to collaborate with classmates who share the same or similar disciplines and prepare a presentation on WRITING IN YOUR DISCIPLINE to our class. You may choose the format, style, and content for this presentation. Your aim is to engage (even entertain) and teach your audience your discoveries – be creative, interactive, and educational.

DATES:

- W 1/28 Have Interview Scheduled
- M 2/2 Sources Due (2 writing samples; 2 instructional texts)
- W 2/4 Rough Draft (2 pages prose/full outline)
- M 2/9 Full Draft DUE with Transcript/Interview Summary (for peer review)
- W 2/11 Group Work
- M 2/16 Team Teaching (Presentations)
- W 2/18 Final Draft and Reflection