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A Instructors' Guide: How to Use This Book in Class

Students need to purchase, rent, or borrow the text. They will need to have a personal copy, at least for the duration of the semester. Some students will want to use the first edition, which was widely pirated and is available online for free. I would discourage this, for a number of reasons. But the initial struggle, I have discovered, is about the purchase of any text. Many students don't think they need a text to teach them how to write; they have written papers before and are sure that they "know the drill." You need to disabuse them of this notion.

Once they have bought the text, they will need to read it. This involves some work, especially since the vocabulary is at times off-putting. Some teachers assign the entire book, while others assign only key chapters, such as the ones on "thesis," "development," and "style." It seems to me that some students like this but others are annoyed that they had to pay for a whole book when they were only assigned 20 percent of it to read. Hence I would suggest you just have students read the whole text.

Chapters 1–5 and 7 should be read prior to having a paper come due.

Chapters 8–11 should be read after a paper has been written and graded, and preferably prior to having students do rewrites of their papers.

Chapter 6 needs to precede the writing of a research paper.

Chapters 12–13 should come about two-thirds the way through the time you allot to this text, and Chapters 14 and 15 should ideally be read toward the end of the unit.

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How long you should spend on this varies from class to class, and of course from college to college. It seems to me that it might be compressed into no shorter a time period than seven or eight weeks, since you want to assign students some papers to complete and you want to get them to do some research. At the end of the eighth week, you might have the research paper come due. If you meet twice a week, then, a chapter should be assigned for each class period.

What to do, actually, with this text in class also will be quite interestingly various, depending on the instructor and the class. In general, I want to run a "student-centered classroom." This involves engaging students and having them speak and write during class.

In general, what I try to get out in classes is the following. In each chapter, I try to present or elicit . . .

- the main idea(s)
- any controversial ideas or points of confusion (references, words)
- places where you as the instructor disagree
- some sense of how what's being suggested jibes with students' prior education
- connection to the requirements of your course
- connection of ideas in text to the larger surrounding culture
- interesting texts quoted in part or in full
- connection between imaginative argument and other texts in the course

To get at this material, you can use discussion, some streamwriting, and other pedagogies.

Conducting Discussions in the Student-Centered Classroom

The Imaginative Argument is not tightly tied to a specific pedagogy, but it does ask students to generate their own, imaginative ideas. It's not really a text for a "transmission model" classroom, or one that uses (for example) multiple-choice exams. It's a book that argues for the independence of spirit and confident individ-

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ualism that inventing an argument nurtures, and for the sense of communality and generosity needed to send that new idea out into the world.

As you probably know, there is always a certain risk involved when you enter a "student-centered" classroom. The risk is this: you never know what's going to happen. What is going on in the outside world? What's affecting your students' lives, work, mood, and willingness to cooperate? Some variables also concern the physical environment you're in, that is, your classroom. Will the heat or air conditioner be operative? Will the classroom be too hot or too cold? Too noisy? Will there be rats, mice, spiders, or other distracting/repulsive vermin in the room? What about that huge bumblebee that took everyone's eyes off of you as you tried to elucidate a particularly important point? And to break the problem down still further, each student has his or her own life situation to deal with and live through. In your class of twenty-five, you are engaging twenty-five very distinct brains, and each three-pound universe, as it takes in what's going on in your class, incorporates, encompasses, or groks in an individual, unforeseeable way.

Your butterflies, then, are justified. Keep in mind, too, that your students—at least some of them, and a majority of them if you are in fact doing your job well—will have butterflies, too. They will be nervous because they're in public and could potentially be put on the spot, could embarrass themselves. Even though one of your goals as a teacher is not to embarrass them but to engage them and get them to respond, still, on a regular basis, students will be intimidated or inadvertently humiliated by what you do, say, or ask of them. So we have a nervous-making situation for the teacher, who must be speaking in public—something most Americans supposedly fear more than death itself—surrounded by twenty-five or thirty or more students who also stand on the brink of this potentially terrifying enterprise. It's as if you're not on the edge of a single precipice, but as you turn around and look about you, you notice other voids yawning as well. You are as if on a single tower, standing alone, surrounded by a large abyss, and the tower you're standing on isn't ivory, either.

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The Four Modes of Discussion

I see discussion—one of the primary pedagogical methods that this text should encourage—as involving at least four major modes of discourse. First, you can engage students in conversation, casual talk about their other classes, the weather, how they are feeling at a given point in the semester, what they think about this or that news item. Second, you can check to see if they have been listening or doing the reading. I call this second activity a "catechism," since you might ask questions for which there are specific and correct answers. Third, you can work with students on difficult issues, and try to help them solve these. This activity resembles the catechism in that there is usually a correct answer, but it's one that needs to be arrived at through various acts of ratiocination and also through an understanding of contextual or external material. I call this activity "problem solving." Finally, you can offer to your students questions that don't have answers but that tend to cause people to develop strong emotional responses. I call these provocations. These are the heart, of course, of the "imaginative argument."

The conversational aspect of a class is not hard to master or invoke. Students like to talk, and they often have very interesting things to say, so engaging them in conversation is usually rewarding and fun. But of course conversation is only the beginning. You will want to move on to the other levels of discussion, but do remember that you can lapse into conversational mode every now and then. This gives students a bit of relief from the pressure of "performing" or of being engaged with a serious, oftentimes difficult topic. They don't fear getting the wrong answer during conversation, though sometimes material emerges such that a "values clarification" moment might ensue. Overall, though, conversation represents a relatively risk-free zone.

Less risk-free is the second mode of discussion I mention above: the "catechism." Here, there are absolutely wrong and clearly correct answers—and it's a mode most students and teachers are quite familiar with. It's fine to slip into this for brief periods—for it's here where you can "check" to see if students have done the reading, and it's here where students who have

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done the reading but haven't really reflected on it very deeply really have an opportunity to speak up. They might be able, for example, to tell you the names of all the characters from *The Great Gatsby*, but they might be befuddled by a question such as "How is Daisy a quintessential all-American girl?" The catechism should not go on for long, though. A professor asking questions and fishing for particular answers all too quickly becomes a tiresome and straining master of ceremonies. It is surprising to me, I confess, how many teachers rely on this mode alone, and believe in fact that what they're doing is conducting a discussion. They're not. They're just conducting a catechism. It's not entirely without value, but you want to move on from there.

Another mode I urge teachers to employ is what I call problem solving. You need, in engaging this particular type of discourse, to try to figure out what puzzles or difficulties the students themselves face—what questions might arise in their minds. (See Ken Bain's work on this idea.) That is, look for material about an issue or in a text that you see as important but is likely to be missed by your students. And you, someone who has more experience and education that they have, can help illuminate some of these difficult aspects of issues or texts. There is, as with the "catechistic" discussion, a correct answer, or one that more or less accords with your own answer or that of other scholars, but it's not an obvious or simple answer, and you need to work through with your students how you arrived at it.

For example, to take a well-known poem, Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken," you might ask students why the speaker emphasizes that the "two roads" the traveler chooses between are "really about the same." You might want to point out that the speaker's twice-repeated emphasis on the roads' similarity seems to stand in sharp contrast to the ending lines, "and I—/ I took the one less traveled by / And that has made all the difference" (lines 18–20). Critical opinion on this poem has, in the last couple of decades, suggested that this disjunction lies at the heart of understanding the poem.

But it's still tricky for students to figure out. You need to offer some guidance in this "problem solving" mode, as well as

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allow for some latitude of interpretation. Remember that this isn't really a catechism, this mode; it's a way of communally puzzling out texts and issues, and while scholars might agree on a certain interpretation, and that might have resonance and persuasive power for you, you might have to do some work to convince students of its value.

Finally, you want to ask questions that I call "provocations." These are questions that I myself find personally perplexing and really very difficult to answer: they are questions that might be answered with an "imaginative argument." An example of this type of question might be, to stick with Frost's poem, "OK, if the poem's speaker is ultimately not a 'reliable narrator,' and the poem is about how people tend to mythologize their own past, how do you account for its incredible popularity as a poem about 'making the hard choices' or taking the difficult path in life and finding great rewards from doing so?" Or, to make it more provocative still, "When the words say one thing but millions of readers believe another, what finally does the poem 'mean'?" Some students will say it means what critics say it means; others will contend that the poem has moved into public understanding in such a significant way that its message is the somewhat trite uplift of choosing the harder but ultimately better way.

Now, I don't know the answers to these questions—they are not nearly so pat as to have answers—but I have a general idea of where I might go to find an answer. They are usually unanswerable—sometimes even unaskable—and always real questions. They are what might be called the "let's-get-to-the-underlying-issue" kind of question. I think this is the type of question you want to infect your students with, for in fact one goal of your class should not be just transferring knowledge to them, giving them some of what you learned in order to get your college degrees, but teaching them how to pose questions like those you employ in your discussion. If you can get students to ask polarizing questions of this sort, then, to a large degree, you've succeeded, since you are providing them with a small model of the way of thought behind the argumentative academic essay.

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The Value of Discussion

Too often, it seems to me, college education is about providing just pat answers, correct choices on multiple-choice tests, or bald reformulations of what the professor him- or herself said in lecture. The class needs to work together, asking real questions, and arriving—where? I'm not sure, but at a level of interrogation that probes as it stirs reflection, that answers, to an extent, by asking. What are some of these questions? How do you come up with an "unaskable" question? If it's not askable, how can you ask it? Well, I'm not sure. Perhaps we should discuss it.

You as a discussion leader want to keep the discussion going, but you want it to have a direction. That's really your major goal once a group has been ignited, or at any rate begins to talk. You want to keep it moving. But it has to move productively. You need to create a special kind of atmosphere in the class—one that helps establish a community, which is supportive of multiple voices, but which compels students to perform at a high level—to think and say good things.

Your job as leader or facilitator of discussion is to keep it going, to find out things, to give everyone a space. When someone makes a comment, then, you want to pick up on that comment, not just say, "Good point" or "Uh-huh" or "What do the rest of you think?" or "Anybody? Anybody?" perhaps unconsciously replicating the famous economics teacher played by Ben Stein in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*.

What you want to do, then, is ask for elaboration of a student's remark. Ask him or her to give examples from the text. Or you could dispute the claim, playing a pleasant devil's advocate, as in "Convince me. I'm willing to be convinced, but I don't quite see what you are getting at." Or you could mention some evidence that would seem to contradict the point being made: "You claim that Jordan Baker is a good person in *The Great Gatsby*, and that Nick jilts her. But isn't it true that she cheated as a golf pro, and isn't it also true that she is a bad driver? And bad drivers, in the novel, can be deadly, no?" Another response would be to enlarge on a student's comment, especially if you think it's on the right track. This is far better than saying

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simply, "Good point." In your responses to your students you don't want to shut down conversation or judge it, and you especially don't want to remind students that you are judging them as they speak. You are, I know, but you need to put that activity in brackets for the duration of the discussion, because your goal is to draw them out, to create a space in which opinions and ideas can be expressed and developed, and to even find out some new things for yourself.

You will notice that some student responses will be better than others. These you need to highlight, repeat, rephrase, come back to. Weaker responses should be listened to as well, but honestly dealt with, I think, either by you or the class. Try to get your class, though, to imitate you in terms of how to disagree politely. Some responses will be flat-out weird, though, and here you need to ask for clarification. Once in a seminar on Transcendentalism that I was taking, another student said, in response to a photo of Thoreau that the professor had shared with us, "Well, it seems clear that Thoreau was simply not sitting in his own dish." The professor, who often responded to the student, Boulos, by saying, "What do the rest of you think?" here took up my classmate: " 'Not sitting in his own dish'? And what does that mean?" Boulos, who was from Lebanon, explained the idiomatic expression for us, which meant that Thoreau was not happy, though the expression has an additional flavoring, one might say, or implication, that now escapes me.

But as a student I should have pressed Boulos to explain other comments he made. One thing that a professor needs to encourage and develop in a class is getting students talk to one another rather than making them filter all their comments through the overriding intelligence of the person at the front of the class. If all the students must get approval from you as the teacher, then this isn't really much of a discussion at all, but a sort of competition for the teacher's approval.

Reticent students, who often try to slip through classes and say as little as possible, I try to draw out. "What do you think, Cedric?" you might ask. This occasionally draws student wrath, I note. Once a student said when I called on him, "If I have something to say, I'll raise my hand. If I don't raise my hand, please

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do not call on me, as I have no response." Whoa. I said, "OK, but I'm asking you for a spontaneous reflection here—just kind of trying to draw you into the conversation. I'd like to hear what you have to say." The student did respond, but from that point on, I have included on my syllabus, "I will call on you in class. Be prepared to answer questions on the material."

And as far as how to pattern the discussion, I won't offer a fixed template. I'd recommend starting with pre-conversation ("business"), moving into an actual conversation, and mixing some catechistic elements in every so often. The more challenging discussion modes such as problem solving and provocation should probably not be invoked during the first five minutes, but as I said before, you can cycle from one mode to another. Provocation for a whole period's discussion is too intense, perhaps, so you need to mix it up. And, too, you can occasionally break off discussion and present a mini-lecture, say of three or four minutes. Or you could have the students break into groups to discuss and then in the re-formed full class present their group's ideas to the whole audience. Variety of discussion and variety of modes of discussion make for a lively, effective class, but you need to decide when to change modes and when to pursue one in favor of the other. Try to be sensitive to your students' wishes, try to figure out their inclinations, and try to gauge their level of involvement with a particular issue, text, or idea. Try to figure out where the class itself wants to go. Though sometimes difficult to ascertain, this is worth the effort.

Anxieties/Problems of Class Discussion

Some suggestions. Don't worry about "coverage" of all the material. You won't be able to cover as much as you'd like, so forget that metaphor. Instead, allow students' own interests and focuses to help create the shape of the discussion. If students want to go in one direction, then don't force the conversation back to where you want it, at least not right away: explore a bit. You can gradually bring it around or even discover in a new direction a better way to go than you had initially planned. Don't be afraid of briefly going "off topic," especially since very off-topic

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discussions can be legitimately cut off at any point with, “Well, getting back to the text,” or something similar, and sometimes it’s good to have such discussions since ideas and perspectives and quiet students will emerge.

I advocate a device-free classroom. It’s not that I am indulging my Luddite self but, rather, that I want to create a community of people interacting with one another, face-to-face, without the distraction of electronic digital media. This policy I’d recommend announcing the first class period, and students should be urged to drop the class if they cannot go for the class time without checking their messages. Keep in mind that many people, students among them, are addicted to their devices and feel terribly uncomfortable not being able to constantly monitor them. Hence you might institute a five-minute “device break.” It’s up to you. Some teachers penalize the whole class (the “*Full Metal Jacket* treatment,” my colleague Daniel Hengel calls it) if a student’s phone rings or is consulted. (Hengel withholds “bonus questions” on quizzes when a device goes off or is consulted, or when a student yawns or sighs or drifts off. Another colleague, Matt Eatough, simply counts a student absent if he or she consults a device during class time.)

Running a discussion like this has an element of intensity that many students find a bit exhausting—so it’s usually best to break the discussion at various points in order to dilate on a topic of interest, to consult the Internet for some information, or to write a key term or reference on the board. But be prepared: students will fight the discussion format as you go into and out of it. They are not used to this, for the most part. Some students, I’ve noticed, pack a meal with them, and they have no hesitation about tucking in right there in class. I discourage this. I tell my students, “Remember, this is not a spectator sport, to which you bring your soda, hotdogs, and cell phones. You’re not in the stands. You’re on the field; you actually have to play. You don’t see Nolan Arenado munching a hot dog on third base, do you?” This idea has to be reinforced again and again, probably because most students are used to classes in which they sit and passively absorb information or passively be passive.

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Sometimes, of course, the discussion will die down. No one will be saying anything at all. That's OK. This is called "dead air," and I urge people not to be worried about it. Sometimes you need time to consider a statement, an idea, a passage from the text. You might not have an instantaneous response, so hold off. Modeling this behavior for your students can be useful, too, as it shows how sometimes the slower response is better; how reaction can quickly or easily devolve into knee-jerk reaction, and how a considered, thoughtful response can often bring the conversation to a whole new level.

A useful variant of discussion is the student-led discussion. I've seen this wonderfully used in a class taught by Hengel. Students are asked to bring in three or four "discussion-type questions" as well as to write a brief response to the literature being assigned. The questions are of the "provocation" type I describe above, or at least of the problem-solving kind. The teacher forms a circle and then sits outside it. He or she is not part of the discussion, at least not ergonomically speaking. He or she tries to keep his/her mouth shut after naming a student as discussion leader. Dead air occasionally prevails but not often. And students take the initiative. Like many effective pedagogies, this one puts pressure on the students to make the class effective.

This pedagogy resembles that of Don Finkel, whose book *Teaching with Your Mouth Shut* advocates for some classes in which the teacher says absolutely nothing at all. The class, warned ahead of time that this would take place, simply has to go it alone, with the teacher sitting in their midst, mutely listening. This dead air really forces students into coming up with something like a discussion on their own.

Miscellaneous Suggestions: Teacher Energy, Confronting the Pantheon

Overall, the most important factor in terms of keeping a discussion going is your own energy. Students respond very positively to displays of energy in the classroom. A blasé, nonchalant, detached persona, an ironically distanced or robotic attitude, seems

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to squelch chat and to generate an endemic listlessness. But if you display emotional energy, that will infect your students and can be, in a manner of speaking, relatively easily converted into intellectual energy.

Finally, you need to understand, I think, that to an extent you as a teacher represent not just yourself or your discipline or institution, but a much larger cultural icon. Your presence and person reverberate in each student's mind down that long corridor of remembered teachers, K–12 and beyond. Thus when students see you, they see arrayed behind you some thirty or forty other teachers, different for each student. As you speak in your own voice, you at the same time form part of that group chorus. Even though you won't know what these other teachers were like or what impact they had on each student, you need to be aware that your students' history with previous teachers makes it impossible for them to have a tabula rasa conception of you. You've been to an extent predetermined. In joining each student's individual pantheon of teachers, you will have a different position, a position that's likely to shift over the course of the semester, as you get to know the class and assign grades to various assignments. But in general, I feel compelled to add, that group of teachers has represented authority, some sort of intellectual standard, and an external-to-family group of adults that knows how your students think. You happily, or at least willingly, join that group. But you need to remember that, in joining it, you will be compared, contrasted, judged, and even understood against and in relation to the other members of it. The irony is that who these people are, you'll never know.

Reanimating Pedagogies: Group Work, Workshops, Student Presentations

The pedagogies I deal with here tend to shift the teaching/performance focus. The teacher, in what I'm terming "reanimating" pedagogies, is no longer at the center of the classroom or necessarily its focal point. Instead, she or he hands over the teaching to the students themselves. As they take over this duty, they come to terms with the material in a new, different way—an

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imaginative way. They internalize it because they have to express and convey it to others. Such a shift is not new or revolutionary, I realize, but it's still used only rarely in writing classrooms.

There will be some resistance. It often takes the following form: "I [my parents, the federal government, the state of x] paid a lot of money for me to attend classes taught by people like you, Professor, people with many college degrees and books in print. . . . I didn't pay money—my good money—to listen to someone from Hoboken blather on about why *The Great Gatsby* is a flawed vision of the American Dream. I mean, c'mon!" Another form I recently encountered involves complaints from students that the teacher is lazy: "All she has us do every day is write and talk about what we've written," a student recently complained to me about a colleague. "She's not doing her job! She assigned essays for us to read and should talk about them!" The subtext of this is as follows: "She should tell us what these texts mean."

Well, OK. Superficially, these objections seem fair enough. The students are paying for knowledge, wisdom, information, insight, experience—for the very things that the professor represents and often has—for those things that in fact define a professor. So my response to such objections is, initially, acknowledgment of a relatively reasonable point of view. And the quality of many oral reports, group presentations, or student-led discussions often reinforces the strength of my hypothetical students' objections. I have very often found myself observing a class and struggling to retain interest (or consciousness) during one of these slightly avant-garde pedagogical experiments. I've also found myself drilling my fingernails into my bloodied palms as students presented material that was ill-informed, confusing, or wrong—usually with the aid of PowerPoint. There are dangers inherent in such pedagogies.

Just the same, even when these techniques don't quite work out, they often provide for students a release from the usual lecture or possibly pressure-inducing discussion, or even a bit of "fun," a break from class, a move toward just hanging out and talking. They improve the atmosphere of the classroom, making it a friendlier, less intimidating place. I know that's faint praise.

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Yet such techniques often do effectively get across some material, can get students grappling with ideas, debating possibilities, and situating themselves in a new relationship with their own way of handling ideas, specifically in the position of having to formulate and express their own ideas with an eye toward presenting them to an audience.

This very activity—formulating ideas—constitutes the center of *The Imaginative Argument* and of the writing course, perhaps more so than it does in other college courses. That is to say, crafting an argument is more than merely imagining an audience. It requires the invention of ideas. Thus while the transmission model of instruction certainly has to be engaged sporadically, interfiliating it with more student-centered pedagogies leads to greater student independence of thought yet keeps as a touchstone a professor-generated model of how to think critically. An audience, for example, might be heterogeneous; some audience members or segments might disagree. Additional perspectives need to be anticipated and addressed. Ideas must stem from some problem that has an urgency the audience finds believable; perhaps other obvious or already-existing solutions to the problem should be acknowledged. In short, putting the student in the role of presenter forces him or her to think of the discourse situation in a sophisticated way. No longer is the student just trying to prove that he or she has read the text or listened to the lecture. Now that student has to come up with something genuinely insightful.

When students complain about having to listen to this person or that, I tell them the following: actually, your fellow students often come up with valuable insights into the material. They should not be trapped by ad hominem dismissals of their peers—dismissals which don't ultimately differ in kind from dismissals of the course and its instructor because that course is "only a general education distribution requirement," or worse, dismissal of all courses offered at a given institution because it's not, say, in the Ivy League.

To the dissenting student, too, I have a second response, namely that it's up to her or him, at least partially, to make another student's report more responsible or informed, to challenge

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its inconsistencies or inaccuracies, to engage the presenter in debate, realizing all along that every dissenter is potentially subject to the same level of challenge that the presenter her- or himself faces. In short, students need to be reminded that in a relatively small class they are themselves largely responsible for the level of discourse being employed and for the type of community created.

Finally, though, it seems to me that the underlying objection—the crux of most student and faculty resistance to student centered or student led classrooms—stems from our joint situatedness in the Epoch of the Post-Original. When students lead a class, they often feel the (wonderful) compulsion to be original, to do more than merely repeat what they have heard, to not merely parrot the professor's ideas or rehash a summary of text material. They have to come up with something—gasp!—new: something their own. Using such pedagogies as much as forces students against the grain, forces them to do something that they were not only rarely taught to do, but maybe (in other classes) prevented from or punished for doing. Thus the teacher here isn't simply conveying information but instead engineering a widespread behavior modification. Sometimes students will recognize this and express gratitude. At other times, they will resist. Mightily. I mention this here because other faculty also might see the techniques and methods I advocate as a cop-out or a refusal to take responsibility for conveying what we as professors should convey: The Truth. As you know, I don't believe in the "The."

"A schoolboy can read *Hamlet* and can detect secrets of the highest concernment as yet unpublished therein"

Emerson, writing this comment in "Experience," was onto something in 1844, I think; yet his lesson no longer has much currency. It should. It seems to me that students, and the general population as well, to an extent, have been brainwashed into the following belief: what they say or think does not matter. Only the proclamations of important people (like professors) have any value. Oh, we have slogans such as "Every opinion counts" or "If

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you see something, say something," which imply that the individual can make a difference and has decided responsibility. But in fact the days of "marching to a different drummer" or of posters proclaiming "Question Authority!" have receded into the past.

I am reminded of a memorable TV episode of *My Favorite Martian* in which the Bill Bixby character, Tim O'Hara (an average U.S. white male middle-class human), assisted by Ray Walston's eponymous "Uncle Martin" character, a Martian with preternatural abilities, can paint extraordinary imitations of Leonardo, Matisse, Van Gogh, and the like. From across a room crowded with art critics and enthusiasts, Uncle Martin surreptitiously directs Tim's paintbrush. (He can make things move by pointing to them.) An onlooking audience is awed and amazed—at least until someone asks for a painting not in imitation of another artist, but in an original style. Tim looks over at Uncle Martin, who shrugs and then gestures in a way to say, "Go for it; you're on your own!" Then Tim starts creating on his own, and he's entirely talentless. So his short-lived fame dissipates. That was in the 1960s. Today, I think the same character's lack of originality would not matter—people would simply latch on to his ability to reproduce beautiful simulacra. After all, the summer I write this has witnessed not one or two but four Hollywood blockbuster movies based on comic books. We are in a culture that adores the simulacrum, the mash-up, the prequel and sequel, the "son of"—even if it's not the son of Leonardo.

So maybe my sensibility emerges from the 1960s, during which era originality had more value than did imitation, and people did things for the value of doing them, not simply for the value of having done them. This is a new concept for many, I know, that I'm setting out here, namely the importance of the experience within the classroom itself, not its instrumental value as a way toward students' completing a course or achieving some predetermined "learning outcomes" (though these do have value). I want to stress the intangibles that emerge in the classroom, the moment-by-moment sense of understanding and community that the classroom represents. It's a crucible in which amazing things can happen: enlightenment can dawn, for example. My sympathies more clearly align with those of Geoffrey

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Sirc, who argues that the writing class should be an intense experience, and less with those of agencies, offices, and administrative boards that want to assess precisely what it is that each student has learned in each class. I see formal education as a complex and oftentimes metric-resistant process of intellectual and social accruing. We often teach and convey attitudes, abilities, and facilities that we are unaware we're conveying, that are impossible to accurately measure, but that are, finally, useful for students, insofar as they increase the students' ability to be independent thinkers, collegial team workers, and co-creators within the unique intellectual community of the classroom itself.

Varying Classroom Dynamics: Group Work

The late novelist David Foster Wallace once remarked to me—we were both teaching in the same university consortium, and kind of grousing about Southern California in general—that what he found most depressing about the Los Angeles area was that the weather was the same every day. Classrooms with the same weather patterns day after day also tend to be depressing; they tend toward something like weatherlessness, an ideal clime for those who don't want to feel, or think, or bring awareness to the surface. You as the teacher should employ various techniques, styles, and pedagogies—should even change the seating configuration of your classroom if possible—to keep students a bit off balance, a little uncertain of what the next class will bring. You do this not out of perversity, but out of a desire to involve all the students, and to involve them in various ways, where, for example, some students who play minor roles in one type of ergonomic structure might play the principals in another.

One way to significantly vary a classroom dynamic is through the use of group work. What might be a hostile, threatening, ominous environment if the class were left in one large group often transforms instantaneously into a much sunnier and more productive place when the students are put into groups. Early one semester a colleague asked me how my class was going, what we were doing, and I told him we had done group work that day. "Oh, so it's come to that point in the semester, has it?" he asked,

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chortling, as if to suggest a certain pedagogical desperation on my part. It wasn't mean-spirited, I want to emphasize, but a moment in which we both realized that sometimes classes taught in traditional ways cause ennui or succumb to an entropic flattening out of energy. Fair enough. These things do happen, and group work does seem to combat them.

What happens in group work is sometimes … nothing at all. Students just chat and come up with something on the spur of the moment when asked to present. But oddly enough, just as often, it's something rather special and amazing. The key is that group work disrupts the usual dynamic of the classroom. Suddenly it's not just that students are "performing for" or responding to a teacher; suddenly it's not just an undifferentiated "us" and "the professor"; no, the arrangement has changed in a major way. Now it's just a group of three or four, and if they have been given an accomplishable and interesting task, that group sets out to do it in a way that differs from how they responded in the class as an entirety.

What happens is that each student has the opportunity to take on the role of the teacher. Each student, when this technique is done well, teaches his or her peers, goes in some way beyond himself or herself in assuming understanding of material and in modeling how one ought to respond. The mini-class formed by each group establishes a wholly new personality and then applies that personality to the course material. That's why group work can be so valuable.

But group work is still quite difficult to organize well, and requires as much if not more energy than lecturing or leading a discussion. It should probably be familiar to most readers, so I won't dwell on it at length. I simply want to highlight some techniques for organizing it, techniques that make it an effective use of classroom time.

Groups can range in size from pairs to half the class. I prefer to split the difference, and usually put students into groups of three or four. Fours are probably better than threes; fours make up real groups, rather than just troikas. This effectively creates a number of mini-classes, which I think function better than twos

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or threes, which fail ("bad chemistry") if the students don't like one another, or if two of them are emotionally involved in some significant outside-of-classroom relationship. Groups of more than four students allow some people to disappear. Many students make it a practice, over their college years, to disappear in their classes, to blend into the Formica-work. Grouping students foils such willful self-zombification.

What should their presentations be like? My suggestion is to keep these informal in nature, done seated among other group members (rather than standing in front of a class). I usually urge groups to choose a "note taker" and a "spokesperson," so that groups will be prepared to present something once everyone finishes with the group work. And despite the existence of a single spokesperson per group, I urge non-spokesperson group members to speak up if they feel the impulse to add something of value. This presentation aspect is usually much facilitated by your having assigned to groups a very specific task—usually an open-ended discussion question—to which the group can provide a least a provisional "answer."

One example of a very specific task emerged from a workshop led by Thomas Bartscherer, at Bard College. Leading a group of fifty or so teachers in a multiple-day workshop, Bartscherer asked us to compose an essay for the next day. It was to be a "stab at a draft" of an essay, one that asked some important questions of the texts and that made something of an attempt to answer them. We were supposed to limit ourselves to 500 words and not to take more than an hour to write the assignment.

The next day, he put us in groups of three or four, and asked us to work with our essays. His instructions were nicely specific. He said we needed to appoint a "timer" who would be very strict. Then we needed to read aloud our essays to one another. Twice. After that, the people listening would offer responses, ones that the timer would closely monitor and make sure were no longer than three minutes per person. But the best thing about this exercise was the constraints regarding responses. We were supposed to cover three areas: first, what is the main point of the essay being read? Second, what interesting language jumps out at

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the listener? And finally, how might this essay be either continued or improved? All these questions, again, had to be answered in under three minutes per listener. The exercise made for an intense sharing of ideas, and we were busy every second of the forty or so minutes that had been allotted.

Oral Reports and Draft Workshops

This brings me to another "talking" pedagogy used often in writing classes: the "oral report." Again, this provides a valuable variation from the teacher speaking and the class listening or discussing. However, I find that student presentations often lack pizzazz or vitality—lack a point, even. Students seem not to realize that they are supposed to be making a point. They read from notes or a text, or (worse) use PowerPoint and simply read a presentation screen by screen. It seems that students are no better prepared, on balance, to give oral reports, than they are to write formal essays. I think that you as a teacher need to work, perhaps individually with the students, to explain how an oral report is most effectively delivered, how to speak in an organized fashion but extemporaneously and engagingly, how to make eye contact with an audience, and the like.

It might be best for students to start by posing the problem or asking the question they intend to explore. They need to make it clear why this is an interesting, important, or pressing question. Then they should provide their "solution" or "answer." This, the essence of their presentation, should be delivered within the first two or three minutes. The remaining time, I suggest, should be devoted to asking questions that they encountered along the way to developing their idea, and offering answers to these. Finally, the conclusion should extend the opening point. This pattern, as you probably noted, closely mirrors that of the argumentative academic essay; it reinforces that conventionalized but I think very useful pattern of inquiry. It varies, somewhat, from the typical "tell the audience something, tell it to them again, and then tell them what you told them," but it still includes sufficient redundancy to be comprehensible for listeners.

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Another kind of presentation pattern emerges in the "draft workshop" class, a class in which all students are required to talk about and comment on two or three students' draft essays. I usually schedule as many of these per semester as papers are due (usually three to five), and I try to make sure that each student in the class, at least once, has his or her paper the subject of a "draft workshop." These workshops involve circulating a draft of a student essay ahead of time and then discussing it in class, trying to locate its strengths and weaknesses, as well as suggesting ways to improve it in a final version.

I use a method taught me in creative writing courses I took from Peter Michelson, a poet who taught at my undergraduate institution, Northwestern University. Here is what I am calling "The Michelson Technique":

1. At the start of the term, every student signs up for a draft workshop day. Note that to cover five or six student essays in this draft workshop format, two or three class days are required, assuming a class size of twenty to twenty-five students and a ninety-minute class.
2. Prior to the draft workshop, the students whose papers will be discussed need to email their drafts to the rest of the class (or they need to distribute these in photocopy form the class prior to the draft workshop).
3. The class should be organized in a circle. The workshop proceeds by having the student whose paper is under discussion present his or her thesis. (In fact, the whole introduction might be presented—the student's choice.) Then, that presenter must *remain silent* while each and every member of the class offers a critique. Sometimes I set a time limit of one or two minutes for each critique or specify that students make exactly three suggestions.
4. The person whose paper is under scrutiny ("on the block," the students say) *may not talk* during his or her classmates' comments. Hence it is important that the commenting students not ask direct questions. There should be no back-and-forth dialogue between the author and those offering critiques. If the student responds, his or her winning, charming,

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or hostile and aggressive personality will inflect subsequent responses to just the paper itself. These responses won't be so helpful, since such responses will be to the writer plus the paper or maybe in lieu of the paper. But we want as much as possible to look at the paper in isolation.

These responses to the draft should be "constructive" in nature and substantive rather than merely suggestions for copyediting (though some sentence-level corrections do come up). In terms of defining "constructive," I use some of the same ideas that I use when trying to describe the proper tone for teachers to take when evaluating student essays: one must be supportive of the student but at the same time honest in one's appraisal of the work. For example, you might have students look at just a few aspects of the student paper under discussion:

a. The thesis—is it there?
b. Is it an argument?
c. Is support/development offered? How convincing is that?
d. Are counterarguments engaged? Are important ones being ignored?
e. Is there a Δ-Thesis?
f. Are the fundamentals of paragraph development/cohesion/coherence etc. respected?
g. Is the form correct?

These criteria follow the main ideas of *The Imaginative Argument*, reinforcing them and bringing them to bear on real-world examples.

5. I urge students to try to add at least one new idea when they offer the critique, though admittedly this task is increasingly more difficult as more and more students take their turn speaking.
6. After the critiques, the author may respond—to questions raised, to doubts, to problems he or she encountered during the composition of the essay. She or he may ask questions to the whole group.
7. The class then moves on to the next draft. Again, over the course of the semester, the goal is for all students to have one paper "draft-workshopped."

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I know this is a difficult process for the student whose paper in "on the block." I've been on the block myself. But it's a useful process, in that usually as a group the class offers quite valuable suggestions. And generally students are kind and do offer constructive suggestions—especially since they know they themselves will inevitably be on the receiving end of commentary. By critiquing others' papers and listening to multiple student responses, students get a fuller sense of what is being required of them, of what works and what does not, and of how academic writing, with its own conventionalized and particular format, has a special value: in fact, the academic argument exists as a kind of discourse that functions in ways that the draft workshop makes less and less alien.

During this process, the teacher can take on several roles. She or he can remain entirely silent, simply calling on one student after another, moderating the discussion by cutting off the over-lengthy comment or softening a too harsh attack. Alternatively, the teacher him- or herself may offer a response, along with everyone else. This has a democratizing effect, but it also allows the teacher to reinforce various ideas and principles. If the students are attentive, they infer a kind of "oral grading" of a paper, and they get a better sense of what it is they are being required to do. Another teacherly role would be to record the essence of "valuable" comments and to reiterate these as a sort of summary prior to the author's "reply."

Other Patterns, Other Genres

A final suggestion I'd like to offer here as a way to vary your "weather pattern" is to ask students to express their ideas in a different genre altogether. For example, having students act out a short story or a poem (usually in groups) can be very enlightening, can make them come to terms with the material in new and sometimes profound ways. The caveat here is that students can't be given too much time to rehearse. When dealing with a nonfictional work, too, they might attempt to construe a scene or confrontation between opposing forces or ideas. Again, these should be completed during the class in which they are assigned.

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Another, perhaps even more challenging genre—and one that, when students engage it, will probably bring a small tempest to your classroom—is requiring students to illustrate or draw in response to texts. Get students to produce, on the spot, a "non-alphabetic text." In a recent workshop I attended, run by Cindy Parrish, our group was given four or five blank graphic novel pages. One page had three equal-sized panels or boxes horizontally arrayed on the page, one atop the other. Another had six panels, another just one. We were then provided with the written version of a scene from *Romeo and Juliet* and asked to draw that scene on one of the provided pages. Cindy acknowledged that most of us were not likely to be artists, but she enjoined us to make the best of it, using stick figures, caption bubbles, and thought balloons to graphically convey our idea of the scene.

Students, many of them familiar with graphic novels, might have an easier time with this than the roomful of professors had: one of the professors grumbled, in fact, midway through, "This is the assignment from hell!" And while no one had that much artistic ability, the results I saw were impressive, as they conveyed understandable and often creative interpretations of the scene. Such an exercise reinforces the value of process over product, too—in trying to come up with a product, an illustrated work of art, however successful or unsuccessful, each participant had to reimagine the text, to see it in a way he or she had never seen it before. That process was valuable in and of itself. Perhaps the ideal follow-up on this would be for people to present their illustrations (perhaps using a document camera of some kind). In Parrish's workshop, we just laid out the illustrated pages on the floor and walked around the room to look at them.

If one assigns this kind of exercise, one must be courageous enough to try to respond in an open, nonjudgmental way to the wide range of possible responses inevitably produced. For a negative example, when my sixth grade teacher asked my class to draw a political cartoon based on "current events," my twin brother, Grant, took the opportunity to make a strong statement about segregation. It was 1963, and my brother's cartoon

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simply showed two men shaking hands. One was labeled George Wallace; the other, unlabeled, had a shock of black hair and a black toothbrush moustache. Both men wore swastika armbands. When our teacher received this, she held it up to the class as an example of "a lack of patriotism," "disrespect," and "awful exaggeration." She was, in short, outraged, and said that a pro-segregationist differed from a genocidal monster. My brother held his ground. "I didn't say they were the same," he said. And I think that most of the class must have realized at the time, too, that to have sparked such passionate ire from our teacher, this must have been a very good political cartoon indeed. The assignment was in some sense proven effective by my brother's response to it. The teacher's failure was in not recognizing this fact.

The Value of Such Pedagogies

All of these pedagogies place the onus of instruction, in some real sense, on the student. And by interspersing these with more "traditional" lectures, discussions, and in-class writing, their effect resonates. It is true that these pedagogies do not directly teach the genre of academic writing, do not show students how to develop an argument, use evidence, or even punctuate a sentence. Instead, they work on modifying and enriching the way students think and respond. They compel students to consider the material in meaningful-to-them ways. The class then becomes less a venue for teachers to present their ideas and interpretations, and more one in which students strive to make the material their own, to understand the material in the same way that one must understand something in order to teach it; and to do a public presentation that requires students to adjust and shape their own notions into ones understandable to and tailored for a specific audience.

Naturally, you will develop your own methods and exercises that you will use to run your classes. I'd recommend that you develop in-class "talking" practices that feed into the way of thought that informs sound critical writing, a way of working that requires student independence, that gets students thinking

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about and addressing an actual audience, and that gets students to assume a perhaps-new-to-them role, a role in which they get to take charge of the material in an authoritative, teacherly way. Empowering students in this manner—even if only temporarily empowering them—reconfigures the college classroom into a space where ideas can be exchanged among equals.

Using Streamwriting in Class

What follows is a description of how streamwriting might be used in a writing class, how I have seen it misused, and what I see as its primary value. It seems to me that it's too often dismissed as a "touchy-feely" kind of pedagogy, one that's detached from any real intellectual purpose, and one that's associated with production of an often inchoate if intermittently torrential flow of random ideas. The label it has gained, "expressivist writing," neatly sums up what its detractors don't like: it's writing that does little more than express feelings, and what emerges from practicing it, like expressionistic painting in some way, resembles a raw evocation of feeling, like that embodied, say, by Edvard Munch's *The Scream*. Streamwriting (or Peter Elbow's "freewriting," or some variation of these) has often been confused, I think, with raw emoting, with uncontrolled outpourings, and with writing that really has very little to do with the kind of writing usually taught in or required by college-level courses.

There is certainly some truth to these allegations, but I want to argue here that while streamwriting is indeed useful for generating lots of words, it also fulfills other non-invention-related functions. Specifically, when used in the writing class, it helps students uncover ideas that they didn't know they had. In addition, it creates a sense of community—a sense of shared purpose. As it creates that community, it also establishes for student writing an actual audience, complete with its own built-in diversity of experience and response. And finally, it helps students get some sense of what kinds of questions are interesting, worthwhile, and important to ask. It models for them the interrogative mode and approach so necessary in academic writing.

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Yet at the same time, streamwriting, as I have seen it used in dozens of classes I've observed or attended over the last few decades, has the potential to be a truly classroom-deadening pedagogy. If used in a certain way, it reinforces a dynamic in which the loquacious, confident, assertive students dominate (as they always tend to do), and it eats up class time in a way that most students will perceive as quite simply wasteful and counterproductive—one that reinforces individual and class-wide poor habits. And, sad to say, I more often see streamwriting used in this way than as a technique generating ideas, creating community, or empowering otherwise silent voices within a classroom.

It's true that using streamwriting as a common, repeated feature of a writing course has many advantages, but as I've observed it over the last few decades, its use carries great risks as well. You risk losing your class's seriousness of purpose. You risk giving students the impression that free-flow, stream-of-consciousness transcription of what's in their brain's forefront equates with the sequential, thoughtful, argumentative essays they should probably produce at some point or points. You risk turning the class into an encounter group, where everyone is so in touch with his or her feelings that sober analysis and reflection are all but impossible. You risk confusing spontaneity with real creativity.

Just the same, I maintain that such risks are worth taking. Such risks, while clear and apparent dangers, can easily be guarded against, and your class's overall level of discourse easily elevated, by following a few relatively straightforward guidelines. In general, these guidelines strive to give every student equal time, to inculcate/support/shore up/make evident/dramatize the value of the written word, to validate the class itself, and to give students a genuine gift: their own ideas. Perhaps these ideas will be somewhat unformed, nascent, poorly or tentatively worded, inevitably incomplete. But in providing students the opportunity to streamwrite, by giving them that space, that time, and that audience, you vouchsafe them an entrance to a world that many of them had previously never known.

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Streamwriting: A Description of the Method

Before I go on, I need to distinguish streamwriting as an individual practice—that is, something one might do alone in one's office, or riding a subway, or writing in any favorite locale—from streamwriting as a pedagogical practice. These two are not the same, though since the pedagogy is based on the individual action, I ask you to review Chapter 10, which outlines this use.

Using streamwriting in a writing class has rules of a sort that are perhaps a bit more fixed than most practitioners would like to believe. It's not just a matter of getting students to write without stopping to go back or pausing to think. It also involves figuring out what to do in order to get students to write something that's somehow valuable, that is, worthwhile to have written. The goal in most writing classes is not just producing verbiage of any sort, but rather writing something at once good and consonant with a relatively fixed conventional framework, that of the academic argument in the humanities or social sciences, most typically. Hence, streamwriting, while something that certainly might be used in order for students to develop and discover new ideas, also has to be connected to the admittedly more challenging enterprise of writing an academic essay.

The stream in which the student simply writes without cease, and on anything that comes to her or his mind, that is, the "secret spring," should, I suggest, be used at the beginning of a class period. It only takes about five minutes, and, I've discovered, has the salutary effect of calming everyone down, of clearing away the anxiety and hubbub of whatever preceded the class proper. It is important to start with this secret spring, too, because the ideas, anxieties, and pressures informing it inevitably would find their way into any prompt-driven streamwrite anyhow, and would probably detract from its effectiveness. At the same time, starting with a secret spring allows students to get into the—is it a rhythm? a habit? a method? a routine?—of transforming something that's in their heads into written words on a page. That's what writing is, to an extent. But starting with something sometimes called a "low-stakes" writing task allows students time to warm up, to establish various cerebral-sensory-

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motor pathways that facilitate that transfer of ideas from head to page.

The teacher, or facilitator, or leader, should also do the writing. This is a shared endeavor, finally.

From the secret spring, it's a simple move to what I call a streamwrite done to a "rainmaker"—a "wellspring" of sorts. Here, the teacher needs to provide a prompt or rainmaker, a way to get students thinking in a certain way. I don't believe that enough attention has been paid to the kinds of things that teachers or facilitators do to invent prompts, but it's clear that they draw on something quite sophisticated and special when inventing questions to get students writing. A quick test of this is to ask a student, early in the semester, to provide a rainmaker. Almost always, it doesn't work. This happens, I think, because in fact a large part of the challenge, as I've suggested above, resides in the asking of the "right" kind of questions, and students need to be taught this—or untaught how to ask the wrong kind of questions. Later in the semester, students start to get the idea, and they can often provide prompts of considerable value.

The guideline for rainmaker-creation is fairly simple. You have assigned some reading material, and you know the stage and direction of the course's arc. You have a good idea of where you are, what texts have been read and assimilated, and what kinds of responses students had and will have. Hence, you are in the perfect position to come up with a rainmaker, using the guideline that it needs to be something that you yourself are willing—nay, even eager—to write to for at least the next five minutes, and then publicly share your thoughts about. It should be something that interests you. And again, you write along with the class. You don't sit, by contrast, reading the *New York Times*, your feet propped up on the desk in front of you. (I've seen this on multiple occasions.)

Be sure to alert your students to the need to write legibly, as they will have to read aloud what they've written. And many students are not used to writing things out in longhand, much less reading them out loud just minutes later.

When your students reach the four-minute-thirty-second mark, or thereabouts (I actually never time these myself, unlike

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the scientist with the stopwatch; rather, I just write along with the group and bring them to a close when I feel as though I'm running out of prose myself), you might announce to them, "Try now to find an endpoint to your thoughts." And in twenty or so more seconds, "Just finish the sentence you're on." And finally, "OK, now put your pens down and look up, please" or, "If you're really onto something, maybe you can come back to it later. Make a mental note to do so."

(Another aside: using streamwriting, you have the opportunity to treat your students like fellow writers—they can come back to their private work later; what they write has some power, some insight, some value. You are trying to share with them some of the attractions of being a writer, and to help them reinvent a self: a writerly self. This is part of what I see as a defamiliarization that only takes place in the best classes.)

Students have set down their pens. Or they have stopped typing on their laptops. (Again, I try to get them to handwrite in a notebook, since the laptop sets up a barricade between students and the rest of the class and also gives students the option to multitask between your class and various websites.)

Now students—and you—share, that is, read aloud, their work. The whole group goes oceanic, I offer, a term in some ways so ridiculous that no one laughs. There are a couple of key elements here: first, you should not allow disclaimers, as in, "Oh, this is really stupid; it's not what I meant at all but I'll read it," or "I couldn't come up with anything any good," or "This really sucks but here goes." Why no disclaimers? It's as basic as this: you gave the students and yourself just five or four or six minutes—so of course what you have come up with, what they have come up with, is somewhat imperfect. That's a *donée*. Yet also, why prejudge it? Why allow students to decide that what they have produced is no good? Indeed, if you allow this to happen, too, when students read what they have, they will hurry through it, reading it as if it were something poor and not worth reading or sharing. And if everyone or almost everyone offers a disclaimer, then everyone might wonder, "What are we doing here, reading stuff that we all admit is of low value?" or, "Maybe we should be

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reading aloud really insightful stuff that's been published by professionals?"

That brings me to the issue of reading aloud. After producing their streamwrites, students now share them. All students should be given a space to share what they have written. Everyone should read. And they can read in any sequence you as teacher would like. They might simply go around the circle. Or you might call on people. Or you might randomly ask people to read, whenever they feel that the time is right, Quaker meeting style. I've witnessed a facilitator wait for as long as two minutes until a student volunteered to read a streamwrite. The facilitator had his eyes closed, as he calmly, quietly waited. There were close to seventy high school students in the room. The pressure was almost unbearable. You as the facilitator should read as well, though neither as the first person to read nor the last. I try to read usually at about the half to three-fourths mark.

Notice how many times, if you will, I used the word "read" in that last paragraph. Eight times, to be exact. The idea is that everyone has completed a piece of writing. It's a script. It's not a list of talking points. It's not something that you are asking people to summarize or use as the basis for a new, oral, extemporaneous response. You just want them to read what they have written, and you need to give every student a chance to do so. Therefore, even the shyest student has some time to read—that person doesn't have to fight for time or space—and not only that, like everyone else, the shy student has a script. So just as you have to rein in the voluble students, and ask them simply to read what they have written, so you have to open up space for chronically timid under-responders, vouchsafe them a few moments during which it is their voice that predominates. Often this is a unique, life-changing, first-time experience for them, and it sometimes will modify that shy student's in-class role so that, from then on, he or she will voluntarily start participating in activities and discussions.

As might be expected, students do not like to read their own writing, verbatim. Sometimes they are unable to make out the scrawl that is their handwriting. Sometimes they are simply too

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timid. On several occasions, students have said, “Oh, please, don’t make me read—what I have here is . . . too *personal*.” Well, OK, I say. But that only works once. If, every time that students streamwrite, the same student writes something that is “too personal,” then maybe that student has to be counseled—or be called for bluffing. On some occasions, too, if time is running out, the facilitator might say, “Bracket off some material to read—this might be the entire piece you’ve written, or it could be as short as a phrase or even a word.” I prefer not to do this, but it’s a possibility. At other times, only a few people will have time to read—but the caveat here is that it shouldn’t always be the same few people reading when time is short.

Try to make your students good readers, too. Have them read their work with some care, some expressiveness, some feeling. It seems to me that the worst and most frequent mistake is reading too quickly. You as the facilitator will have to get students to read so that others can understand and appreciate what’s been read.

In addition, you will need to teach the other students how to listen. They need to listen. They need to be attentive. They are not supposed to interrupt the reader, though once she or he has finished, it is perfectly legitimate to ask for a sentence or portion to be reread. If the reader had come up with an especially good insight or turn of phrase, I make it my policy to ask for that to be reread. I also suggest that students write down material that they like. They keep it in collection bottles. Listeners grab interesting, exciting, refreshing, intellectual thirst-quenching bits—in this case, of prose—as they hear it read aloud. They can keep a list of what they have captured, and in class, now and then, I’ll ask people to read from some of the prose they’ve bottled.

Often what a student reads will spark some controversy and discussion. I encourage this, though I know that sometimes it can have the effect of squeezing out time that other students need to do their own reading. But in general, if students want to take issue with something that’s been read, or if they have questions or comments about it, I go with it. Keeping pressure on the discussion, too, is the weight of the still-unread streamwrites.

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Problems with the Pedagogy

Now, some problems do emerge because this pedagogy takes a great deal of time. A teacher must be careful to plan out these streamwrites so that all the students have a chance to read and, at the same time, such that it doesn't end up that everyone has read and there is simply not quite enough time for another streamwrite, nor really enough material for discussion. And in classes of more than twenty students, you might need to have every other person read, or maybe use very short streamwrites. In a large lecture class you'll just call on students or volunteer people yourself.

A larger problem, though, can develop if students come away with the impression that what they have done in class, in a streamwrite, is equivalent to what they might do in a formal essay. While often students will use portions of streamwrites in their formal essays, they need at the same time to understand that the streamwrite differs quite radically from the academic essay, and that they need to hone their editing skills at the same time as they work on their "expressivist" ones.

Finally, do keep in mind that as students get used to this format, as they find it more and more comfortable, more and more a venue in which they can transfer their thoughts and feelings to the page, they will write material that verges on the highly "personal." So you as a teacher must be aware that a prompt that might seem innocuous could have the effect of generating a deeply disturbed response. For example, using a William Stafford epigraph to "Postscript," a poem by Naomi Shihab Nye, "Think of something you said. Now think of what you wish you had said," can have devastating results. Some students inevitably end up crying and distressed when I use this prompt. An equally probing but less moisture-producing prompt is one that I've borrowed from a recent National Public Radio series, "This I Believe." I give some examples of actual responses that were aired on NPR, and then I ask students to write their own "This I Believe" response. Although these may not be prompts that connect closely to the theme or subject matter of your course, they nonetheless fulfill the very useful function of helping to

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establish a community. And of course, if you write to them yourself, you'll find that the self-revelation you undertake brings you closer to your class and maybe also to its concerns.

The whole process of writing and sharing is most valuable, though, as a way for students to see how students respond to their peers' thoughts, words, and experience. It gives an immediate, unrehearsed, and authentic response to writing, and this response from an audience—not just the audience of one that is the teacher—shows students that what they write can make an impact. It also shows them how sometimes it can make an impact where they as the authors least expect it. And it shows them how prose can come to life—or not—right before their eyes. No longer is writing a mechanical process of simply fulfilling the requirements for a given course. Instead, writing is something that can tell them what their neighbors are thinking, something that can help them make connections they never before had even considered, and something, too, that can allow them to impress on others their own ideas.

I believe that college students are not, generally speaking, asked to be especially "creative" or imaginative/original thinkers. Most of their work involves proving that they have received the transmission of ideas from lectures and texts. In addition, our students do not seem to be stretching themselves verbally: they are not experimenting, playing around with language—at least not in their college courses. (Maybe they are, though, in personal writing such as blogs or texts or tweets. But we rarely see these.) Instead, the language of their college writing is typically just communicative, often chock-full of fundamental errors, slang, misusages, jargon, repetitions, broken or strange sentence constructions, and miscellaneous mixtures of form. It's also usually boring.

College writing, for most students, is also boring for them, something that must be done in order to get the degree, to get the job, the spouse and 2.5 children, the house in the country with the two cars and the pool and the big chocolate Lab that slobbers on you when you come home at night.

Writing, then, for its own sake, has only minimal value. Writing in college, it seems to me, has been relentlessly instrumen-

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talist for several generations now. Writing as a path to new ideas, as a way to know oneself, as a way to generate fluency and to play around with words in the process, has been relegated to a dustbin, or perhaps to an icon of a trash can on most people's cerebral equivalent of a desktop. Look, we're busy people. We can't be involved in frivolous stuff. We have things to do, places to go, messages to send and answer.

I'm suggesting here that we need to back up, that we need to consider this world we've in some real sense (as college teachers) co-created, and think again. What is it we want our students to do? What do we want them to be? And as we consider their relationship to language, to writing, even to thinking, we need to consider ways that our own pedagogical choices reverberate down long, as-yet-unseen corridors of a future world that we, if we're lucky, will not only inhabit, but will want to inhabit as well.

New Terms

Most of my experience with this pedagogy comes from my many years teaching in Bard College's innovative "Language and Thinking" Program. The program, initially started by Peter Elbow, has become adept at using Elbow's freewriting in complex and interesting ways. I have altered the terminology used at Bard (and by Elbow), however. It is possible that you are familiar with some of these terms, so in what follows I will discuss four or five useful classroom practices and mention their original names along with my new nomenclature. But it's the practice that's ultimately the most important thing, not the terms.

"Loop writing," the Elbovian term for taking some aspect of one's freewritten work and freewriting on it, has always struck me as confusing. I propose instead "meandering," including "Meander One" and "Meander Two." (I give examples of these in Chapter 10.) These terms imply a branching off from but still a connection to the original writing stream. Using these terms might ameliorate the problem of students' forgetting the original freewrite while doing "loop writings" based on it.

Another typical prompt requires someone to read aloud a text—a poem, short story, or essay, perhaps—while the others in

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the group listen and write. Reading aloud is in general a useful practice, but in this particular pedagogy, students write what is called "movies of the mind," or the thoughts that pass through their minds as the poem or work is being read aloud. Writers attempt to capture the exact thoughts that the words of the read-aloud work seem to be sparking. I suggest renaming this "mind-streaming," which at once connects up with the "movies of the mind" name but also emphasizes how the writing reproduces the stream of thought inspired by the material that that mind is taking in.

Several other terms I also propose modifying. For example, what's called "dialectical notebooks" (or sometimes "dialogical notebooks") seems to me a term too suffused with ideology. The practice is valuable, however: it involves streamwriting to a rain-maker, then exchanging notebooks with one's neighbor, who streamwrites in response. Calling this process "dialectical," it seems to me, urges strong disagreement, of the thesis-antithesis-synthesis variety (though it need not, of course); but it strikes me that many of the comments one makes on a neighbor's stream-write are positive ones, or ones that spark another direction to be explored. They are not really antitheses. Perhaps this is why "dialogical" is preferable to "dialectical," because the "notebooks" are in dialogue. (Mikhail Bakhtin's use of "dialogical," however, complicates the issue—it's in some ways an ideal fit, but perhaps is too specialized for most students to feel comfortable with.) At any rate, I propose using a new term to describe what is basically the same activity, namely "coalescing streamwrites." I like the image it provides of streamwrites coming together, coalescing, and the cooperative nature of this event.

I'd also substitute for the "freewrite" of "what's lurking," which might be usefully employed when appraising and engaging the ideas of other students or participants, a streamwriting notion that continues the natural flow metaphor: "aquifer discovery." Instead of asking "What's lurking?" one might ask, "What aquifers feed into this?" Like an aquifer, which is an underground spring feeding rivers or lakes, many hidden ideas underlie a text, a commentary, a point of view, or a perspective. What are these? I find "lurking" a bit too sinister: for some rea-

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son, I always recall what my linguistics teacher proposed in a class I took in graduate school. Gene Kintgen said, "The sentence 'I was lurking' doesn't make sense. One never views oneself as lurking."

Another substitution of terms involves a very good exercise called "believing and doubting." This exercise involves having a participant put forth a thesis or an assertion about a text, an issue, an idea, and then asking the rest of the group to offer "beliefs" (support for it) and "doubts" (problems with it). The great utility of such a practice is that it gets people into a somewhat argumentative—one might say dialogical—frame of mind, and it reveals the value of statements that can be doubted as well as believed. The problem I have with this terminology, however, stems from the words "belief" and "doubt." It seems to me that "belief" is perhaps not the right term: we can agree with a proposition, find it convincing or persuasive. But that's not really the same as "belief." Beliefs are often things one cannot be talked out of. They are not always logical. And the term "doubt" also bothers me—it seems for some reason too contrived an activity—a pretending, a role-playing of sorts, which doesn't really belong in the same category as "belief."

Instead, I propose to continue the water imagery: when someone writes something that is persuasive, productive of insight, powerfully vivid, I suggest that that's a "white-water rapids." And if, by contrast, a piece of writing seems to have missed the point, seems to have gone off course or offers little intellectual momentum, I think it's "run aground." "White-water rapids" and "runnings aground" don't have the smoothness of "believing and doubting," but I think better capture the ways people respond to discursive prose—as in, here is where this writing is really active, turbulent, productive of something maybe new and exciting; or by contrast, here is where it's hit dry land and has to be towed back on course. And getting back on course, back on the water again, is itself a valuable activity, akin to responsibly and creatively answering the strongest of "con" arguments.

Finally, an interesting Bard College freewrite is named "exploding poem," but I want to recruit the exercise to my own pedagogy: I'm calling this "geysers and waterspouts." Here is the

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exercise: read aloud, in class, a poem or a short piece of prose—ideally, a work that is somewhat challenging, perhaps even difficult to understand. Then have students read it aloud again, slowly, giving them time to note a reaction or association or question to the line or image that's read. A third reading proceeds as follows:

1. A reader reads aloud, slowly, pausing at the end of each line;
2. If someone has a response to a line, that person should read the same line aloud again and then read his or her response to it. This repeats for however many people have responses to a given line;
3. When all the responses are finished for a given line, the reader resumes reading the text.

Ideally, this would be followed by a rainmaker such as "How has your understanding of the poem changed after having heard your classmates' various geysers and waterspouts in response to it?" This would be an example of a "reflecting pool," a piece of writing in which the students think back on their own thought processes and evaluate how they have been modified by the experience of writing, of listening to others, and to writing again.

Writing Prompts for Papers

Here are some prompts that you might use for formal papers students would complete outside class. They require some research and will take multiple steps for students to complete.

1. Take one of the assigned texts and look for a book review of it, one written at about the same time the book appeared. Next, look for a scholarly article about the book. Compare and contrast the two pieces, showing in what way the review and article differ, and how that difference can be connected to the idea of a different conception of audience.
2. Look for a contemporary review of a book similar (same theme, genre, author) to one of those from the reading list so far. Using it as your starting point, try to develop a similar evaluation of the book on the reading list, using criteria similar to

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those advanced by the reviewer, but in your paper strive for a more balanced approach than that offered by the review.

3. Many works of fiction are "thesis" stories. They present an idea or thesis, are arguing for a particular position. Write a paper in which you argue that *a subsidiary or correlative thesis* underlies the book's main thesis. (The main thesis of the book is typically more or less evident, even obvious, but looking for underlying assumptions or theses is ultimately a much more difficult and rewarding task.)
4. Many "thesis" novels are ones that could be accused of propagandizing rather than functioning as "art." Using one or more of the works on the reading list, explore the differences between art and propaganda.
5. Earlier on, I used the concept of the "writing production device"—the mechanism you use to generate prose (see Chapter 3). Describe your WPD: How does it work? What kinds of unusual features might it have—or how do you think the way you go about writing differs from how most people do, or from how I describe it here?
6. One of the sections of this book went through thirty drafts. Literally. Is this a good idea, do you think? What do you think is the ideal relationship of drafting to a finished version of a piece of writing? Can a piece of writing be rewritten too many times? At what point does it not behoove you to rewrite any more, presuming of course that you still have time before a deadline?
7. Do a "newrite," then "streamwrite" about it, maybe including a meander or two, and turn that work into an argumentative paper about one of the works on the reading list. Include all the prewriting with the final version.
8. Use one of the suggested methods of coming up with ideas (aporia, disjunction, etc.) in order to generate a paper about one of the course texts.
9. As I mentioned in Chapter 4, the humorist Dave Barry once suggested that the best way to write papers in college writing courses was to make the most outlandish comparisons possible. Try inventing such an outrageous thesis and then attempt to modify it, through the course of revision and rewriting,

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into a reasonable but argumentative thesis. Start, that is, with the zany, self-consciously out-there idea, and mold it into something of analytic value.

10. Take one of the texts that seriously challenges some deeply held personal belief—for example, one involving religion, the family, morality, or the like. Generate a paper around a thesis showing how this text's challenge to your personal belief has some validity, how it should not be dismissed, and how it might have advanced your belief structure in a significant way, even though it did not force you to entirely abandon that belief. Make sure, though, that you still focus on *analyzing* the text—revealing something important about it.
11. Play around with a sphere/disc metaphor with regard to thesis: how is a ΔT really like a sphere? What attributes are "sphere-like" and make for a good conclusion?
12. Taking a work of nonfiction that is relevant to the course (or is one of the course texts), analyze and evaluate its structure. Develop an argument as to why the author chose the structure she or he did, and show in what way that structure either is successful or could be improved.
13. Again, using nonfiction works that are on the reading list, look at two argumentative essays and isolate their thesis statements and conclusions. In what way or ways do the conclusions of the two pieces represent an evolution over their respective thesis statements? Which thesis-conclusion relationship seems to you superior? Why?
14. Take one of the writers' passages in Chapter 13 and do a detailed stylistic analysis of it. Why is it effective? Could it be better? What "virtues" of style does it possess (as enumerated earlier in the chapter)? What faults does it have? What new ways does it allow for us to talk about style, or what new virtues can you infer from it?

In-Class Writing: Sentence Combining Assignment

When students study writing, they often develop a fear of using any kind of elaborate sentence structure. They end up writing essays in sentences as simple as the following: "My puppy is

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cute. He has a long tail. He wags this a lot. He also has a sweet and warm pink tongue. He licks me all over my face. I love my puppy a lot." While all these sentences are correct, and while the paragraph that contains them also has details and some sense of development, this writing can hardly be considered college-level work. What's needed is complexity as well as correctness. It is important that you write correct prose, but it seems to me every bit as important that you develop an individual and distinctive prose style, one that reflects the patterns and complications of your thought process. And to make matters even more challenging, at the same time that your prose is complex and correct, it must also be lucid.

Write a brief story based on the simple sentences that are provided below. Try to put in paragraph breaks where appropriate. And strive for lucidity as well as accuracy. Use more complex sentences than the ones provided, though you may (if you like) retain some of the simple sentences. This is basically a simple story, so the narrative structure should be simple. However, the challenge is to make the story interesting and much more complex on the sentence level, putting the sentences in paragraphs, including revisions, and the like. Try to use a variety of ways to connect the sentences too (subordination, coordination, etc.). Make sure that you capture all the ideas the sentences present. For example, you might combine the first six sentences in this way: "It was comfortable and dark in the Queenston house, even though the sound of cars and trucks passing on the street that was so close to the house occasionally broke the stillness." There are lots of ways to combine them, preserving the details; feel free to use your own imagination and inventiveness as you combine the sentences. I have made this example kind of wacky, since I'm hoping that will unleash some creative juices.

The Glymphiad, or The Frfrlungenlied

1. The Queenston house was dark.
2. It was very comfortable there.
3. There was an occasional sound.
4. The sound was of trucks or cars.

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5. These cars passed on the street.
6. A street ran very close to the house.
7. No noise came from the wormhole.
8. The wormhole was in the house.
9. The wormhole led to Bim sub-two.
10. Bim sub-two is a planet.
11. Bim sub-two is very far away.
12. G'Narth is Supreme.
13. G'Narth is a Philosopher.
14. G'Narth is the Leader of Bim sub-two.
15. G'Narth is very jolly.
16. G'Narth is basically dinosauric in origin.
17. G'Narth is interested in the Queenston house.
18. Asleep in the house are Frfrnrfr and Glymphyr.
19. Also asleep is Biinken.
20. Biinken is a deer.
21. Actually he is not a deer.
22. He is an android replica.
23. Jathy and Frak snore softly.
24. Their snores hardly disturb the air.
25. In the household there are others.
26. There are the dinos.
27. The dinos are pets.
28. They frolic.
29. Now they too are asleep.
30. Suddenly a sound rips the air.
31. The sound is loud.
32. It is piercing.
33. It is confined to the house.
34. It is a flying saucer.
35. Flying saucers often visit the Queenston house.
36. Aliens come out of the saucer.
37. They are not very chatty.
38. They shoot all the entities and people.
39. Their ray guns are set on stun.
40. Biinken does not get stunned.
41. Androids cannot be stunned.
42. Biinken pretends to be a stuffed animal, though.

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43. The aliens drag all the stunned entities aboard their saucer.
44. It is cold in the saucer.
45. The aliens do not feel the cold.
46. Biinken is left behind.
47. The saucer takes off.
48. Biinken thinks quickly.
49. Biinken goes into the wormhole.
50. He goes through it to Bim sub-two.
51. Biinken finds G'Narth.
52. G'Narth is tall.
53. G'Narth is benevolent.
54. G'Narth is especially interested in the story.
55. G'Narth wants to help.
56. G'Narth goes to Earth via the wormhole.
57. G'Narth brings the Bim sub-two scientists with him.
58. The scientists are middle-aged.
59. The scientists are very advanced over Earth scientists.
60. The scientists bring instruments with them.
61. The instruments are very sensitive.
62. The instruments can record energy residues.
63. Energy residues are all over the Queenston house.
64. These residues tell the scientists information.
65. The information pertains to the abduction.
66. Evidently a very powerful technology was behind the abduction.
67. The Bim sub-two scientists are scared.
68. G'Narth is not scared.
69. Biinken is not scared.
70. Androids do not feel fear.
71. Biinken experiences a simulacrum of fear.
72. The Bim sub-two scientists can say where the saucer is.
73. They cannot say exactly where it is.
74. They can give a rough radius of where it might be.
75. This radius is large.
76. This radius is not insurmountable.
77. They need a plan.
78. Once they locate the saucer, they need to decide.
79. They need to decide how to capture it.

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80. They cannot destroy it because of its Earth occupants.
81. It would be best to make contact with the alien abductors.
82. Suffice it to say that they locate the saucer.
83. They make contact with the abductors.
84. The abductors are not evil.
85. They are not good.
86. The abductors are only seeking information.
87. The abductors want the contents of the brains of the abductees.
88. The Bim sub-two scientists offer an exchange of information.
89. They offer this instead of the contents of the brains.
90. The alternative is that the abductors can be reduced to Z-particles.
91. Z-particles are types of weakons.
92. Z-particles are very small indeed.
93. The aliens return their abductees.
94. The group is returned to the Queenston house.
95. Everyone is OK.
96. Glymphyr has taken something.
97. What he has taken is a key piece of technology.
98. This piece of technology is very significant.
99. This piece of technology allows Glymphyr to monitor the whereabouts of the aliens.
100. It indicates that they are on a return path.

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