

A human life is long. The students who walk into my classroom will be different from the ones who will leave it at the end of the semester, and then, they will be different from the people they will be by the end of college, by the end of their 20s, by the end of their 30s, and so on. The time we have with a student in a writing classroom is profoundly short, and each "student" is, in fact, a human being with their own life, their own allegiances and experiences, their own identities, their own goals, and their own relationships to power.

This informs my teaching philosophy profoundly. In my writing classrooms, I strive to a) acknowledge the humanness of my students, treating them as intellects, emotional beings, and bodies; b) ask them to interrogate and co-create our classroom space; and c) help them to develop something of value in our time together that they can take away with them. I think of teaching primarily as a service: I want to do something of use for my students our short time together.

To do this, I focus most of my class time on helping my students develop what Stacey Waite calls "habits of mind." These habits include critical thinking and a healthy sense of skepticism, an awareness of audience and context, an understanding of texts (and all communicative systems) as human-made and subsequently contingent and fallible, and an awareness of rhetoric as both an expression of power and a way to intervene in systems of power. To do this in an introductory rhetoric and composition classroom, I theme my class around education and its purposes. I ask my students to think about their own past educational experiences and their current educational goals; they are experts in these experiences, and—as current college students (often as freshmen)—they are deeply concerned with how to navigate the novel contexts of college. Through this framing, I can talk about the hidden curriculum of the university as well as its institutional structures, ideologies, and expectations. As part of our class discussions, we often analyze and interpret texts related to college (admissions websites and videos, syllabi, assignment prompts, the physical space of the classroom itself, scholarly research articles, etc.). Doing this allows students to analyze genres and texts that they're already familiar with while also challenging them to image the people and the purposes behind these texts.

Structuring my class this way also allows me to draw upon my background as a former academic advisor. Because of this experience, I believe that it's vitally important to help students—particularly first generation and minoritized students—understand how to navigate the structures and resources of the university, while challenging them to articulate their own goals and expectations for college. College students are fantastically busy, and I hope that my class can offer them a pause for reflection in their busy schedules.

As my writing students engage with the research process in my class, I try to challenge their conceptions about "academic writing" as something that is universal, or universally good. Instead, I explicitly describe college writing as entering just another discourse community with its own expectations and tropes (which, of course, differ widely by discipline, genre, and reader). To get my students thinking about writing as contextual and audience-driven, I frequently bring in non-academic genres and discourse communities that my students are already familiar with. When I ask my class to analyze YouTube videos, Instagram posts, emails, text messages, oral conversations, memes, and other popular genres, I don't do it as a gimmick. Instead, my goal is to help my students understand that they're already expert at certain forms of communication, and that they already have a good grasp of genre and generic conventions (whether they have the academic language to describe that knowledge or not).

By using these examples, I hope to draw parallels between these texts and academic discourse. It's my experience that students are used to thinking of academic writing as something monolithic, mysterious, rule-governed, and stodgy. But I want them to see it as just another conversational space, one with its own flaws, limits, and expectations. For example, when we talk about citation in class, I draw attention to the ways that they already "cite" their sources in everyday conversation with friends before asking them to look at the citational practices of scholarly articles in different fields. By showing them that a) citation has an important social function in their lives *and* in the lives of scholars, and b) that citation "rules" are as

variable as any other communicative practice, I ask my students to think of citation as another tool they can draw on in their communicative repertoire, not just as another rule to memorize.

In general, I avoid giving my students “rules” of academic writing to follow; instead, I try to challenge them to practice a few “habits of mind” that scholars value. This means that we spend a lot of in-class time practicing critical thinking, strategic and context-specific argumentation, careful attribution, and rigorously supporting claims. And I don't actually teach that much about structuring texts (organization, transitions, introductions and conclusions, topic sentences, etc.) until the last third of the semester. Once we do start talking about possible structural choices as writers, I try to frame those choices as questions of a) how to thoughtfully respond to specific audiences, contexts, and purposes; and b) how to best be a “good host” for their readers, one that conscientiously welcomes and guides readers through their texts.

By focusing on habits of mind, the diversity of discourse communities, and audiences and contexts, I hope to help my students understand communication as a human endeavor. And because communication is for *all* humans, I want them to understand that writing is something for them, something that they are capable of taking up, not just as students, but also as political co-creators of the world. I don't want to “empower” students *per se*, but I do want them to notice when and where they have rhetorical power and to be thoughtful in how they take it up.

Beyond these admittedly ambitious goals, I also try very hard to make my classroom a space where students with marginalized identities can thrive. In framing my classes, designing my lesson plans, creating PowerPoints and other course materials, and structuring my in-class time, I'm deeply indebted to disability studies, crip theory, and critical pedagogy. I try to offer my students options whenever possible, to allow people with different abilities, needs, and preferences to interact with my course materials in whatever way they need to. To do this, I draw on the principles of universal design to continuously improve how I deliver material. I also try to be explicit about my purposes and priorities whenever possible. I do this in the hopes of getting my students to “buy in” to what we do in class, of course, but also to help them learn how to “read” classes in the future; so much of being successful in college is about figuring out instructors' motivations and what they're asking for, and I hope that by talking about why I do what I do, students might become a bit better at interpreting their instructors' communications in the future.

Also, I know that what I'm asking my students to do in a composition class is hard. Because it's hard, I try to make my instructions and materials explicit and clear, trying to not assume any prior knowledge on the part of my students, trying to account for cultural differences and differences in educational background so that my students can spend their energy on their thinking and writing, not on figuring me out. I try very hard to balance challenging my students to think in new ways and respecting their intellects, with also making sure that how I communicate about my ideas, the class expectations, and my assessment practices are transparent. To me, this is not just a courtesy—it is also a social justice practice.

As my classes progress, I ask my students to take part in shaping our class's structures. They're not always comfortable with this, but they get more used to it over time. This means shifting deadlines and giving extensions when it would help students' physical or mental health to do so. I occasionally offer my class polls or ask them to vote in class so that they can decide communally how we use class time, how we conduct peer review, and how I prioritize the material we talk in class. I strive to teach reflexively and flexibly whenever possible, acknowledging the limits of my own pedagogical plans and giving my students the chance to make the class answer to their own needs and priorities.

The human beings in my classroom are doing the difficult work of figuring out how they fit into the world, and I want to serve them by meeting them where they are, treating them with trust and compassion, and giving them the best rhetorical and academic tools I possibly can in our short time together. Becoming a reader, a rhetor, and a thinker is a lifetime's work, and I try to honor my students and their various labors as we move through our semester together.