

ENG 108 Unit 1: Literacy self-study

English 108, Bradley Dilger, Fall 2014 ~ <http://dtext.org/>

Summary: Document the ways your literacy has developed and then write a four page literacy narrative which focuses on a single event. Starter 9/12, final 9/26.

Some writing scholars who study genre believe that “critical transitions,” important moments where writers learn through change, help writers learn to adapt relevant skills, knowledge, and experiences to perform new writing-related tasks. At these moments, we realize our skills, experience, and knowledge seldom move between contexts unchanged: we have to transform or repurpose them in some manner. This is particularly important when we learn the features of a new genre, or the ways a particular community adapts it for their purposes. In these moments, what approaches help us? Who offers advice, encouragement, or even stinging rebukes? Where do we learn what we learn? How long does it take? What tools and technologies help us? Require extensive practice? Get in the way?

For this assignment, we will tell stories of our development as writers, focusing on these critical transitions. Because we define “writing” broadly, experiences with reading, speaking, computing, and creating or consuming other media are relevant—while paper is important, it’s not the only game in town.

Narratives are stories of personal experiences, moments in our lives through which we can explore how we have become who we are today—and invite others to identify with and learn as we do the same. With that in mind, and given our target length, you will want to examine, describe, and reflect on one particular event. That will be far more powerful than a number of shorter stories with less depth and detail. Our assignment will be structured to help you identify a good event to work with, then develop a narrative characteristic of this genre.

This semester we consider not only genre but the role technologies such as mobile computing play in reading and writing. This is nothing new; writing itself is a technology, and stories of the growth of literacy over time are deeply technological, regardless of the culture or communities in which they are told. With that in mind, use our readings to add to your self-study by documenting the technologies of your literacies, and reflecting on ways you have learned to read and write over time.

This is the first of three key assignments designed to fit our method for learning about writing via community engagement. The second and third will be distributed the day the final is due.

Starter (due Fri 9/12)

Using our readings and discussions about genre, literacy, and technology as a guide—especially the essays in Deans—list and describe the moments, people, and technologies which have been important for your growth as a reader and writer. Be detailed and descriptive. Set yourself up to engage the features of a literacy narrative. With that in mind, you should include relevant anecdotes, and ensure your starter is rich in the quotations and direct engagement with people which makes narratives compelling. You can include outlines, flowcharts, diagrams, or any other element which can be printed.

Include examples of your reading and writing, or similar works in the same genres. This need not be polished; in fact, spending a lot of time making it pretty is a distraction from the real work of invention—getting down ideas you can work with later.

Length: Enough raw material to require 10 minutes of careful reading time — at least 1,500 words. Generally speaking, the more material you have to work with, the better.

Format: Use whatever formats you like—a notebook, a Word file which includes an outline and cut-and-pasted images, a WordPress.com blog—as long as it is hard copy and/or you can print it.

Submission: Turn in a pocket folder containing your hard copies. If you’re done Thu 9/11, bring it to class. If you need the extra day, you can bring it to my office in Heavilon Hall 303B on Fri 9/12.

Grading: 0–50 points, based on completeness, detail, relevance, and engagement with issues related to course readings. How well does this starter equip you to write a literacy narrative? Any good faith effort will receive at least 35 points.

Final (due Fri 9/26)

With feedback from your peers and me, isolate a key critical transition and write a literacy narrative which tells your story in a compelling manner. While this is not a research paper, you may need to cite some of the sources you rely upon, both those assigned for class and others.

Length: 5 to 6 double-spaced pages (1,500 to 1,800 words).

Format: Follow MLA style (refer to the OWL or use the handbook on library reserve if you need help). No cover page. Staple or paper-clip your hard copy.

Submission: Turn in hard copy in class Thu 9/25 or deliver to my office Fri 9/26. Email a .doc format (MS Word 2007) attachment to me as well, using a unique subject line in the form “Purdue 108 Literacy Narrative” and the file name “purdue-108-litnarr.doc”, with your last name substituting for the name of our fine institution.

Grading: 0–150 points on A–F scale, considering the following in this order of importance:

1. Genre features: closely following the features of literacy narrative, as documented and exemplified by our readings.
2. Interestingness: using carefully written dialogue and rich detail to tell a compelling story.
3. Relevance to course: engaging issues raised in or by our readings and discussions.
4. Format and style: following MLA format and style. Writing with few correctness errors. Professional appearance.

Strategies (and a few directives)

- ✓ Refer to our course readings early and often—they offer far more detail about the genres we’re examining than this assignment sheet.
- ✓ Feel free to ask questions about our assignments in class, by email, or in office hours, or to make assignments the focus of your in-class work.
- ✓ Please note I will not give written feedback to submissions which, in my judgment, fail to meet a majority of assignment criteria because of lack of effort. In that case, a grade of F (1%) is likely.
- ✓ Assignments build in two ways: you recycle material, and I tweak future assignments with past successes and trouble spots in mind. With that in mind, think carefully about the stories you tell, the media you select, etc. You will likely be working with the material you present here for the rest of the semester.
- ✓ Turn to the examples in our readings to learn the characteristics of the genres you are writing—but *do not use them as templates*. Consider what they do best, then try to do that in your own way. (My dissertation adviser often recited, “Follow not in the footsteps of the masters, but seek what they sought.”)
- ✓ Remember, we think of writing broadly—texting, creating a PowerPoint deck, writing a sermon, developing an outline for an extemporaneous speech, and coding a video game are all forms of writing. With that in mind, engage writing in diverse ways in all your assignments when possible—and especially when required!
- ✓ In final documents, please pay attention to correctness—print, read carefully, mark, and revise. I am happy to help.