

SAMPLE ANNUAL REVIEW NARRATIVES

Shannon Shaw's Comments on Teaching ENG 1310:

Along with the departmental goals, my personal teaching goal is to connect critical thinking activities with the mechanics of argumentation and use repetition and practice of revision to make those skills habitual or instinctive for my students.

Throughout the semester of teaching 1320, I observed a sharp improvement in my students "command of oral, aural, written, and visual literacy skills." Conducting regular Socratic Circles helped them practice presenting a clear argument orally. Additionally, the practice helped them to improve their ability to listen to a peer's argument, summarize and/or synthesize that argument to better understand their peer's meaning, and present back to that peer additional support for, or a counter to, the argument. Furthermore, during the Socratic Circles I periodically connected the oral rhetorical process to their written rhetorical process, and vice versa.

We regularly engaged in brainstorming sessions, both as a class and in groups, to practice interrogating and developing ideas. Most sessions began with a free-write in order for the students to generate initial ideas, and organize their thoughts. Each session concluded with a class discussion on how to formulate a thesis statement for a particular idea that was generated.

Additionally, I used clips from popular television shows—such as Last Week Tonight, South Park, and Friends—as examples of reading and presenting visual formats of an essay, using Ethos, Pathos, and Logos to appeal to your audience, and identifying logical fallacies, respectively.

In addition to the Socratic Seminars, brainstorming sessions, and group activities, I assign multiple in-class writings with specific writing prompts or questions that require an in-depth consideration of the topic.

For all essay assignments, I require my students to submit several drafts for peer review before the final paper is due in order to emphasize the importance of revision. Each peer review focuses on a different aspect of the essay. For Example, the first peer review focuses on the thesis statement and content—does the thesis statement answer the question, create a "road map" of the paper, and state the significance of the topic being discussed? The second peer review focuses on the specifics of structure and organization—PIE paragraphs, introduction and conclusion. Finally, any additional reviews focus on polishing the essay—eliminating cliché statements and wordiness, incorporating transition words, and improving general mechanics.

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Shannon Shaw's Summary Comments on Student Evaluations

Overall, the majority of student comments were positive. Most students marked "yes" for the questions on the evaluation form. However, there were a few critiques and suggestions that I have found to be helpful.

When asked if the course introduced texts and writers from a variety of cultural groups, I received several answers to the contrary. For example, one student responded, "not really. I didn't like the book we used." While another responded, "somewhat. We didn't have many reading assignments, but the ones that we did were interesting." Another student simply answered "no." Even though there were only a few students who did not answer yes to this question, I can clearly see, upon reflection, that this is an area in which I can improve. The majority of readings I assigned were from a narrow cultural group, mostly American authors with upper-middle-class socio-economic backgrounds. We read several articles and had many discussions about Race in America, deconstructing norms and stereotypes, but I realize now that I could introduce texts that help to facilitate more diverse cultural perspectives. I need to utilize more of the diverse readings in the textbook.

Another comment I found helpful (similar to the above comments) was an answer to the question, "What changes, if any, should be made in this course"? To which the student answered, "Talk more about social connections to papers to give easier perspective." I interpret this to mean that I need to explain how specific rhetoric conveys, and many times creates the meaning the author is trying to convey. For the most part, my students were naturally able to see these connections between discussing a current social issue and analyzing, synthesizing, and making an argument connected with that issue. However, rather than implying the connection, it would be helpful to all of my students to make explicit those connections between rhetoric and everyday occurrences so that the lesson comes full circle.

Several other notable comments were, when asked if the course was challenging, requiring independent and creative thinking, one student wrote, "Yes, Shaw made us actually think outside of the box." Another enjoyed "the different visuals [I] used to show [them] writing and class discussions." Finally, when asked what are the best features of this course, one student replied, "the ability to learn positively from your mistakes." I stress that writing is about interrogating a subject, making logical connections between ideas, and constantly revising to be clearer, not about memorizing content and regurgitating it back onto the page. Furthermore, because the majority of students come from public schools that "teach to the test," where the pedagogical method of choice is the banking method, I find that most lack confidence in the process of writing and their writing abilities. Continuing to stress this process while giving students multiple opportunities to revise will help their ability to write effectively, as well as strengthen their confidence in those abilities.

Stan Rivkin's Comments on Teaching ENG 1310:

I believe that my English 1310 courses met the FYE goals set out by the department. My courses furthered these aims by endowing students with critical thinking skills, a keen rhetorical awareness, and a recursive approach to composition.

Students consistently improved their critical thinking skills through both reading and writing. Students were confronted with ethnically, geographically, and ideologically diverse perspectives that challenged their normative assumptions and default settings. They analyzed, synthesized, and problematized these conversations via reflections, forums, and in-class debates, and were often asked to adopt a vantage point with which they disagreed. Project prompts demanded that students apply these discussions towards a creative and problem-solving component of the essay. Accordingly, my essay grading and commentary often concerned innovation, the circumspection of analysis, and the thorough exploration of counter-arguments.

Additionally, my lessons, assignments, and grading standards advanced my students' rhetorical awareness. Students were prompted to consider and discuss not just the content of texts, but also their purpose and strategies. As a result, students learned to identify the conventions of a given medium, genre, and audience in every communication, and to view as relational the techniques of Ethos, Pathos, Logos, and Kairos. Students applied this understanding of contextual rhetorical effectiveness to their essays, each of which prompted them to write within a markedly different rhetorical situation. For maximum dexterity and multimodality, students were tasked with translating effective rhetoric in a standard academic essay to the context of a photo essay, creative entertainment concept, public service announcement, brochure, and open letter.

Most importantly, I insisted that my students adopt a recursive and metacognitive approach to all compositional challenges. At the beginning of each unit, students journaled about a given essay topic, assessed the unique rhetorical challenge posed by the prompt, familiarized themselves with the expectations of the audience, and drafted a plan to successfully complete the assignment. Students were then asked to demonstrate each step of their writing process through regular submission and revision of process work. These items included initial research summaries, brainstorming, research reports, outlines, and drafts. Further, students peer reviewed their drafts at least once per unit, and reflected—as writer and reader—immediately after. In addition, students reflected on each of their graded essays, and my commentary, by explaining how they planned to improve both their process and final product for the next assignment. Throughout the term, I reminded students that this recursive approach should be internalized to meet any rhetorical challenge they will face.

Overall, I'm pleased with my progress in meeting the department's FYE goals. Still, I aim to improve the design of my peer review activities. While most students took the peer reviews seriously, some did not. I will try to better incentivize students through various assessment mechanisms, while changing the format to an anonymous peer review in order to deter shyness and inhibition.

Stan Rivkin's Instructor Comments on Student Evaluations

I was encouraged by student feedback for my 1310 course. Students reported learning tangible skills, and appreciated several of my most recent pedagogical changes. Moreover, I was pleased that they identified a few areas where I can continue to improve my instruction.

My most common positive feedback related to the challenging nature of the course, as well as the critical thinking and creativity demanded by reading and essay assignments. Given that I introduced many readings and discussions that problematized students' normative assumptions, binary thinking, and codes of ethics, it was reassuring to see that these texts were not just welcomed, but had prompted self-reflection and circumspect analysis. Paired with writing prompts that required innovation, creative thinking, and problem-solving, students seemed to have grown from the content and sequencing of my assignments. Students wrote:

- "The diversity in the writing was the best feature."
- "There were a multitude of articles with many different perspectives."
- "He pushed us to think deeper while completing all assignments."
- "The course offered critical thinking exercises and was effective at challenging students."
- "The essay prompts challenged my perception and made me think more about the issues."
- "Used a lot of creative thinking to complete all assignments."

Students also wrote that they'd gained an awareness of their rhetorical situation. Throughout the term, my writing assignments challenged students to improve their rhetorical dexterity by adapting sound rhetorical strategy to a variety of purposes, mediums, genres, and audiences. In the past, some students have initially been resistant to this approach, so last term I aimed to better articulate the reasoning for each assignment and emphasize the importance of practicing transfer skills. Students expressed only positive comments regarding this approach:

- "It teaches us that we have a voice, and teaches us to successfully get our point across."
- "Before I sometimes forgot that I was writing for others, and now I am able to properly convey my ideas to theirs."
- "I had a clear purpose and knew who to write to."
- "This course improved my writing skills and increased my knowledge of all different kinds of writing."

While a greater number of students identified frequent group work and peer reviews as their favorite components of the course, a few respondents saw opportunities for further improvement. I plan to address concerns regarding group work by assigning member assessments to encourage maximum accountability from all group members. Regarding peer reviews, students wrote:

- "Push students to write great peer reviews. Remind students that what they need to say may not be what the writer wants to hear."
- "More enforced peer reviews."

I plan to incorporate these suggestions by modeling more peer reviews, emphasizing the need for honesty, anonymizing reviews through a coded system, and grading them on content rather than completion. Additionally, I aim to test a workshop approach to peer review, and to compare outcomes with those of the anonymous model.

Twister Marquiss' Comments on Teaching HONORS 2309i and ENG 3348:

In Spring 2016, I taught my Honors course, *Plotting the American Experience*, for the third time. The course is now split into two roster groups, as most of the students take the course for English 2360 credit (18 students in Honors 2309i), while a few take it for upper-division English credit (2 students in Honors 3397b). The course covers American literature from the last 20 years, examining plot as both a driving force and a reflection of recent American history. In order to ensure that the students covered material that would account for the earlier works that English 2360 covers, I provided overviews of major works spanning from the late 19th century to 1996 that were relevant to understanding the contemporary works that are the focus of the class. For example, we discussed the plot of Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants" in order to understand the impact of a chapter of Jennifer Egan's 2010 novel, *A Visit from the Goon Squad*. In doing so, we examined the arc of plot evolution from traditional to modern to hybrid, and from early 20th century to early 21st century. Weekly in-class writing assignments connect students to the material, and final papers address the issue of what the "American Experience" is today, based on the literature, history, and critical theory. As with the year before, we covered a lot of material: six novels and 12 short stories (again), along with another class visit by award-winning novelist Ben Fountain, plus a class visit by writer E.D. Watson and guest lectures by Amanda Scott on the work of Jennifer Egan. Once again, with careful pacing, students kept up magnificently and with remarkable enthusiasm for the readings and dialogue (they're Honors students, after all). For Spring 2017, I have changed two books based on student evaluations and comments: I have removed Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, with which students haven't connected as well, and ZZ Packer's *Drinking Coffee Elsewhere*, which students found sluggish and difficult to engage; I have replaced these two books with Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America* (timely and pertinent in terms of plot and content) and Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad*, which won the National Book Award in November 2016.

In Fall 2016, I taught English 3348 (Creative Writing: Fiction) for the first time since Fall 2013. I loved it again, of course. For this class, which enrolled 15 students, I made one major change: I did not require students to purchase a textbook. Instead, I was able to provide all the readings (stories, essays on writing, interviews, etc.) via TRACS by selecting pieces that were available free online or by PDFs that fell within the copyright requirements. Students were grateful, as one would expect. I used readings to develop dialogue, character, and plot, including Tim O'Brien's "Telling Tales" from *The Atlantic*. Story readings ranged from late 19th century works to new pieces from 2016. There were two cycles of workshops, so each student was able to workshop two stories or novel chapters, and there was enough time at semester's end for several students to get a bonus workshop. I required a Short Story Project again at semester's end; students selected one story from the required readings and one from another list (also

available on TRACS) and applied them to their own work. Students met with me one-on-one to discuss their work at least once during the semester; several met with me on multiple occasions, working hard to improve their work. This was one of my best groups of students ever, and they navigated the events on campus in November and December (including me missing class for my girlfriend's surgery) with more grace than I could have imagined. To be frank, they helped pick me up.

Twister Marquiss' Instructor Comments on Student Evaluations:

Spring 2016:

Note: My Spring 2016 course, Plotting the American Experience, includes two rosters: Honors 2309i and 3397b, with 18 and 2 students, respectively. Both roster sections appear on my teaching load for that semester. However, as that was my only class for the semester, all evaluations were conducted by Honors College, with evaluation reports that vary greatly from the standard form used in English. Students rated the overall quality of the course, based on 15 questions each rated on a five-point scale (5 being highest), at 4.49 out of 5.00. Some key data:

"This course required you to use higher order thinking skills": 4.64/5.00

"The course was an innovative, unique learning experience": 4.73/5.00

"The course materials and format enhanced the course": 4.73/5.00

Student suggestions included multiple calls for dropping ZZ Packer's *Drinking Coffee Elsewhere*, or moving it to another point in the semester, because its narrative structure was a "letdown" especially following "Aimee Bender's very nontraditional story telling methods." I have replaced that text for Spring 2017 with Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad*, which also tackles race issues head-on.

Fall 2016:

As noted in my comments on teaching, my English 3348 class (Creative Writing: Fiction) was a special group of students. They were deeply affected by the events on campus after the election, yet they were unfazed in terms of attending class, meeting deadlines, and performing far beyond expectations. I did not require a textbook for this class, deciding instead to provide all readings online, and several students noted that detail in their evaluations, either directly (financial relief) or indirectly (wishing we had covered more older authors, such as Twain, not as easy to attain around copyrights). Several students noted that they didn't find the grading standards clear, which is a problem I encounter with creative writing classes; however, many others noted that I had outlined the standards both in class (on two occasions) and in the syllabus, as well as during one-on-one meetings. Perhaps this may eventually become a case of needing to provide numbers/points for assignments so that students can visualize their standings. To me, the idea of assigning points to creative work feels, well, just wrong. I'll compromise on that next time if students continue to have questions about grading standards.

Note: Related to an in-class comment, nearly all students colluded during the evaluation time to include a variation of the phrase "Totes McGoats" on their forms. It's a case worthy of both sighs and chuckles