

From the Writing Desk

Writing Across the Curriculum at Hostos Community College

Spring 2006

WAC Goes WRAC

Volume 6, Issue 1

Greetings from the WRAC Coordinator

Dr. Linda Hirsch

Welcome to our latest edition of *From the Writing Desk*, a newsletter of the Hostos WAC Initiative. This special issue explores not only WAC practices at Hostos but also explores some research which may support our classroom practices. The lead piece highlights our recently implemented *Reading across the Curriculum Initiative* (RAC) and provides an overview of the interrelationship between reading and writing. Other articles include profiles on the collaborations between faculty and Writing Fellows, pieces on aspects of WAC pedagogy in English and Spanish, the role of the emotions in learning, and integrating personal experience into academic writing. This year we welcome six new Writing Fellows in addition to returning Fellow Alex Welcome. Our new Fellows are Randol Contreras, Lee Fulton, Miriam Jiménez, Paul McBreen, Romina Padró, and Ronit Webman.

Please contact me at lhirsch@hostos.cuny.edu or at ext. 6760 if you would like to work with a Writing Fellow or if we can be of any assistance.

WRAC: Writing and Reading and Across the Curriculum

Ronit Webman

Because learning how to read efficiently not only facilitates the process of reading but also enriches the writing process, Writing Fellows at Hostos are working with faculty across disciplines to better forge the connection between reading and writing.

Studies show that better readers are better writers. If students are aware of the structure and features of the texts they read, writing becomes easier. Reading also exposes students to content and concepts. Once students read effectively, they can form an opinion on a specific topic and develop thesis statements. Finally, reading exposes a language learner to new vocabulary and grammar which can be acquired and used in the student's own writing. Since

Meet the 2005/2006 Hostos WAC Team



Ronit Webman, Paul McBreen, Dr. Linda Hirsch (WAC Coordinator), Randol Contreras, Alex Welcome, Miriam Jiménez, Lee Fulton, Romina Padró

reading contributes so much to writing, it has become an important component of WAC at Hostos.

Preparing to Read

Reading involves two fundamental activities: transforming the letters into sound units and then processing the meaning that the words represent. Yet, skilled reading also involves awareness and planning.

Defining one's purpose in reading is crucial because it determines the reading strategy. For example, if students need to read a certain text for a test, the reading must be detail-oriented. However, if readers are looking for relevant articles to write a paper, they needn't dwell on every detail, as some texts may end up irrelevant to the topic. In this case, the text needs only to be skimmed. Most students, however, don't plan their reading and do not realize it can be more efficient.

After defining the purpose of reading, the reader should examine the text's organization to facilitate comprehension. This means looking for the hypothesis, transition words and main ideas in addition to the text's pattern of organization: description, argumentation, chronology, comparison and contrast, cause and effect or problem and solution.

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There are specific reading strategies that can help the reader identify these text features and read more effectively.

Specific Reading Strategies

What strategies does reading involve? Skilled reading is divided into three stages: *pre-reading*, *focused-reading* and *post-reading*.

The purpose of pre-reading is to create expectations about the text and relate it to prior knowledge. This makes the text more familiar and easier to understand. Creating such expectations can be achieved by looking at the items that immediately catch the eye: titles, sub-headings, captions, pictures, graphs etc. Pre-reading may also involve skimming the text and locating the main ideas. This stage not only facilitates the comprehension of the text but also helps in the selection process, i.e., in deciding whether a text is useful for one's purposes and where it contains needed information.

After readers have acquired some basic knowledge about the text, they are ready to engage in reading for deeper understanding. Now, they examine the text in light of predictions made before reading and reevaluate those predictions. At this focused-reading stage, strategies are used to monitor comprehension and improve it where necessary. A helpful strategy is to annotate the text while reading: to write questions that come up (and look for answers in the text while reading), to summarize briefly the main points, to mark places that the reader is not sure about and needs to return to, and to write reactions to the text, such as agreeing or doubting.

In the post-reading stage, the readers review and extend their understanding of the text. They relate new ideas to background knowledge, make responsible interpretations and critiques of ideas from the text, revise their thinking, and apply the information to other texts and disciplines.

As a Writing Fellow, I have collaborated with faculty teaching ENG 1300 to better integrate reading and writing strategies. The students read texts and articles that often present some dilemma or problem and then write essays in which they present their own opinions on the issues discussed. Professor Garcia-Grice and I have developed reading comprehension questions that draw students' attention to features of the texts that can help them read more efficiently, for example, elements that catch the eye and hence are immediately telling about the content (title, picture, caption, etc.), reference words (pronouns) and determiners (this, that, such). Our questions also highlight the text's pattern of organization. In addition, we have integrated "writing-to-learn" (non-graded, low-stakes assignments) to increase students' reading comprehension while enhancing writing fluency. These assignments require students, for instance, to summarize a point, describe a character or simply express their response to the text. Thus, students reflect and form their own opinions while reading so that afterwards they are better prepared to write an essay, often of the type required for the ACT. In this way, reading and writing become integrated processes.

Writing in a Bilingual College

Romina Padró

During my first semester as a Writing Fellow, I had the opportunity to work with a variety of students with diverse language abilities: Spanish-dominant students taking courses in Spanish, English-dominant students taking courses in Spanish, and non-native English speakers taking courses in English. The bilingual experience offered by Hostos Community College provides us with an ideal context to think about the challenges that our students encounter when taking courses in a second language. In what follows I explore one of the possible questions we should ask ourselves: Are the writing problems faced by our ESL students a consequence of their limited proficiency in English?

There is no simple "yes" or "no" answer to this question. Two of the most obvious writing problems that non-native students have are grammar errors and the lack of vocabulary. It is natural to attribute these problems to the fact that English is their second language. However, I believe that by focusing on the grammar and vocabulary issues we only scratch the surface of the problem. As a Writing Fellow, I was assigned to work with Professor Carlos Sanabria in an *Introduction to Humanities* course for advanced ESL students. I noticed that Spanish-speaking students tend to think in their native language and then translate their thoughts into English. The translations often turn out to be too literal, resulting in essays that have a recognizable "Spanish flavor," which though not always incorrect in a grammatical sense, do not attain the expected literacy levels. Moreover, while Spanish speakers tend to use many connecting words within and between sentences, English sentences are usually more direct. Literal translations fall short of being well-written English. Consider the following sentence: "The reasons or causes because Rome becomes an empire, were the wars between others territories, and in those cases Rome toke control of the territories and then was expanding and being dominated to the others neighboring territory" [sic].

These issues support the idea that our students' writing problems are indeed a consequence of their limited proficiency in English. However, this is only one part of the story. While working with Professor Rosa Velazquez in an *Introduction to Literature* course in Spanish, I started to realize that the problems Spanish-speaking students confront when writing in English and in their own language are not really that different. The main problem resides in the ability to organize ideas in a coherent way, and produce well-formed and evidence-supported sentences and paragraphs. This problem is not restricted to Spanish-speaking students taking courses in their second language. We also see it in the case of native English-speaking students, and, not surprisingly, in the case of Spanish-speaking students taking courses in Spanish. To address this problem, Professor Velazquez and I agreed that instead of focusing on correcting grammar and spelling errors, **(continued on page 7)**

Emotions Matter: Considering the Affective Domain in Writing and Learning

Miriam Jiménez

What is the importance of emotions in the classroom and when should the instructor account for them? How can writing tools and strategies address them?

While the central concerns of pedagogues and educators have been traditionally located in the cognitive domain involving the capacity to understand and analyze materials, make arguments, and develop critical awareness, postmodern pedagogues and educators are exploring a different and even more complex domain: feelings, emotions, motivation, and values, that is, the “affective domain” of learning, a term first coined by Benjamin Bloom in 1956.

I started paying closer attention to this approach last semester when I began working as a Writing Fellow with Professor Kim Sanabria, Director of the College Enrichment Academies (CEA). I collaborate with the section of the program that is designed to enrich the students’ cultural experience in college and simultaneously address the more practical need to help them pass the ACT. In our early meetings, Professor Sanabria made me aware of the challenges faced by students enrolled in the program and how their test-related stress could be seen in the classroom. Through those conversations and my own observation of several classes, I realized something fascinating and intriguing: Professor Sanabria and her team of teachers and tutors actually acknowledged and dealt with some visible range of students’ emotions: stress, anxiety, frustration, fear, and hope. Sometimes such feelings were only in the background, but at other times there were openly expressed concerns related to the experience of having failed the ACT before.

I started giving serious consideration to emotions, those intense feelings that shape behavior in different ways and may affect the classroom environment and the learning process in general. Drawing on my own teaching experience, I realized that students’ emotions clearly permeate courses considered difficult or too challenging, as well as core-requirement classes perceived by the students as obligations unrelated to their personal interest or future careers. McLeod (1988), for instance, has confirmed that the magnitude, duration, and awareness of students’ emotions influence their ability to solve mathematical problems. Similarly, MacIntyre (1995) has shown that anxiety is a factor that influences the acquisition of a second language.

Nonetheless, it is one thing to recognize that emotions matter and a different one to deal with them as an instructor. The CEA director and her collaborative team do a terrific job implementing a variety of strategies throughout the course. These include a curriculum of interesting contemporary topics, a related book-reading, and a film screening at the end of the course. In their classes the teachers create friendly atmospheres and deploy different encouragement and informative strategies. Finally,

they do not spare any opportunity to give helpful feedback to students on their writing.

Beyond these observations, I thought about what contribution I could make to these courses. Could I use my writing abilities in any creative way? My approach was to address the students’ emotions rather openly, in a way that could help them understand, recognize, and handle them. I had been working on what was originally meant to be a list of tips and eventually became a more articulated project of brief, informal articles that use writing to address students’ emotions about the ACT test.

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Writing-to-Learn in *Introduction to Criminal Justice*

Randol Contreras

It was our first meeting, between Professor Bosworth, a veteran teacher, and me, a novice Writing Fellow. We were meeting to discuss a Writing Intensive course, which we had to finish in several weeks. I was curious and anxious about what to expect, about what to do, about what to say.

“Students in my class write – they write a lot,” Bosworth started, with an easy smile. Immediately, I felt uneasy – flashback: ornery, disgruntled professors during my undergrad years that made courses doubly hard, doubly incomprehensible just because they had it tough during their day, the days when – according to sometimes nostalgic recollections – professors lectured without chalk, assigned thirty page papers, all to students who respected education, who worked hard to earn grades.

Professor Bosworth continued: His courses were tough, but were designed to have students think *critically* through writing and rewriting. He handed me a copy of his *Introduction to Criminal Justice* syllabus. I skimmed through it, pausing momentarily at the section describing why students must write in his course:

The essays, written exams, and homework assignments are not meant to make your life as a student difficult; on the contrary, they are meant to enrich your learning experience. For instance, if you memorize a criminal's rights, you will only know a series of facts that only allows you to recite them. But if you write an essay that analyzes whether the rights of a criminal suspect have been potentially violated, you will have mastery over a body of information. It pushes your thinking forward, making you a more inquisitive and critical student.

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DOES TEACHING WI COURSES ENTAIL EXCESSIVE GRADING OF PAPERS?

Responding to Student Writing

Lee Fulton

Writing Across the Curriculum emphasizes grading in a way that moves students' writing forward. Rather than focusing on errors, instructors primarily read and respond to content, giving specific feedback that indicates how the student can improve (e.g., "Add a quotation from the reading here to support your idea" or "See the example on the assignment handout for the correct way to cite a journal article"). Students rarely learn from vague comments (e.g., "awkward," "sloppy," "wordy," "confusing"). Moreover, making too many comments consumes time without benefiting the student. As a Writing Fellow and teacher, I've learned to set priorities and focus on one or two aspects of the content that the student can reasonably improve in a revision. I try to give positive as well as negative feedback (e.g., "Your response to the article is thoughtful and you quote correctly from the article. However, you can improve your summary by quoting less and paraphrasing more of the author's main points").

Responses to student writing should engage students as thinkers and avoid a narrow or disproportionate focus on error. This also helps ease the professor's burden when teaching a Writing Intensive course. One idea is to indicate, but not correct, mistakes. Richard Haswell (1983) describes the way he does this in his article, "Minimal Marking": *All surface mistakes in a student's paper are left totally unmarked within the text. These are unquestionable errors in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar. . . . Each of these mistakes is indicated only with a check in the margin by the line in which it occurs. A line with two checks by it, for instance, means the presence of two errors, no more, within the boundary of that line. The sum of checks is recorded at the end of the paper and in the gradebook. Papers, with checks and other commentary, are then returned fifteen minutes before the end of class. Students have time to search for, circle, and correct the errors. As papers are returned to me, I review the corrections, mending those errors left undiscovered, miscorrected, or newly generated. . . . Within those fifteen minutes I can return about one third of the papers in a class of twenty-five, and the rest I return the next session. Until a student attempts to correct checked errors, the grade on the essay remains unrecorded.* (167) Haswell's method of marking mistakes makes grading go more quickly, enables him to focus on content, and motivates students to become their own editors.

By clearly articulating the goals and expectations for an assignment, we can be clear and constructive in our responses to student writing. Giving clear directions and, when possible, a model of the type of work you expect, helps students meet

expectations. A grading checklist can also be a useful tool. Writing Fellow Alex Welcome and I worked with Professor Jo Ann Rover to create checklists for the writing assignments in her *Dental Hygiene* course, *Oral Anatomy and Physiology*. On the left hand side of the checklist, Professor Rover lists her expectations regarding content, context, and format. On the right hand side, Professor Rover has space to make brief, specific comments for each item [see example below]. Such a checklist, returned with the assignment to each student, can make grading criteria transparent for students and cut down on grading time for the instructor.

Finally, although we may not like it, grading is often subjectively influenced by our own emotions and level of stress. It helps to make time to rest as you grade in order to be fair to your students and kind to yourself. Grading student work often challenges us to keep the goal in sight: to encourage students to become better writers and to understand writing as a process in which each step is an opportunity to clarify and develop their ideas.

Work Cited

Haswell, Richard H. "Minimal Marking." *College English* 45.6 (1983): 166-70.

Example of a Grading Checklist

Den 5302, *Oral Anatomy and Physiology*

Assignment

One of your relatives living in a different part of the country is worried that there is something wrong with her mouth. She has a friend take a picture of her mouth and mails it to you.

Format: Write a letter to your relative. First, describe the appearance of a healthy tongue and explain why the tongue is an important indicator of overall health. Make sure to include information about the following:

- the dorsum and ventral sides
- the epithelium coverings
- the types of papillae and their functions
- the location of the taste buds
- the location of the salivary glands

Next, based on the picture your relative has sent, tell her if you think her mouth is healthy and why or why not. You should discuss the parts of the tongue listed above. Conclude your letter by giving your relative some advice.

Grading Check List for First Draft

Criteria	Status
Healthy dorsum and ventral sides	
Healthy epithelium coverings	
Healthy papillae	
Healthy taste buds	

Healthy salivary glands	
Relative's dorsum and ventral sides	
Relative's epithelium coverings	
Relative's papillae	
Relative's taste buds	
Relative's salivary glands	
Suitable to the context of letter to relative	

First Time Writing Fellow Experiences

Paul McBreen

My introduction to HCC came in the Fall Semester, 2005, when I was hired as a WF. Not only was I embarking upon a new job at a different branch of CUNY, but I also found myself responsible for tasks completely new to me, collaborating on one hand with Professor Charles Drago (*Radiologic Technology*), and on the other with Professors Julio Gallardo and Alyssa Cardone (*Help Desk Support*) in designing syllabi for two future WI sections (The criteria for a WI course syllabus can be found on Hostos' WAC website: <http://www.hostos.cuny.edu/wac>.)

For both WI projects, I observed courses taught by Professors Drago and Cardone and held discussions with them after the class meetings. We perused the textbooks to be used to ascertain how best the current course material could factor into the writing assignments. That is, we felt that the formal writing assignments should reflect the classroom and homework activities the students were engaged in throughout the semester. This provides incentive for the students to pay close attention to the textbooks and ensures that they will be consulting their textbooks for part of the research needed for research papers.

Another important component of a WI course is the "informal" writing which allows students to use writing as a means of thinking about course material. The textbooks are a great resource here as well, as the ends of chapters usually include various writing and critical thinking components. For example, there are usually key terms to be defined with short-answer questions and other "writing-to-learn" activities. Professor Cardone and I sat at her computer and began crafting assignments while we looked at the book. Professor Drago and I worked in a similar manner. We realized that the vocabulary lists at the end of the chapter could be turned into a simple writing assignment if students were asked to write a fun, creative story employing ten of the vocabulary words-a perfect low-stakes assignment. Both professors then drafted assignments, gave them to me, and I made suggestions on refining them based on the skills and knowledge I was gaining through my weekly WAC meetings with coordinator Linda Hirsch

and the other WFs, as well as the various CUNY seminars I have attended since being hired as a WF. Significantly, I have learned that there truly is a craft behind designing effective writing assignments, and a good part of honing that craft is to share one's work with others before the assignments are officially used in a course.

Professor Gallardo and I completed the syllabus for *Help Desk Support* and finished designing formal and informal assignments. His formal writing assignments direct students to the web sites of major companies to investigate the technical support the companies offer. We decided that as a means of judging the quality of the assignments, one or both of us ought to visit the sites, do the assignments ourselves, and report back on the effectiveness of the exact wording of the assignments and the estimated time necessary for completing these. Professor Gallardo cites this sort of collaboration with me as the most helpful aspect in working with WAC. He, like a student beginning a research paper, will have an idea in his head, which needs to be fixed on paper. It is at this stage in the process when "another set of eyes is most helpful" in shaping and re-shaping the future assignments, according to Professor Gallardo.

Professor Drago is determining how to break down the point value of his future formal writing assignments. He is adopting a "score sheet" rubric which reduces the subjective element from the process of grading a paper. This is an excellent exercise for a professor because his or her expectations for the paper must be clearly defined, a process which results in the refinement of the assignment itself. He plans to publish an article in a Radiology journal regarding his experiences with WAC and establishing a WI course.

In general, my experiences as a new WF have been very positive. I reflect on the writing assignments I gave my students while teaching several years ago at Brooklyn College and realize that I never really completed the assignments myself before having my students do them. When I begin teaching again, I will be a much better instructor - certainly one more open to sharing my work with colleagues for critique - due to my experiences with WAC. Furthermore, my approach to student writing will include less rigor in correcting grammar and mechanics and more in looking for clear expression of ideas and arrangement of arguments.



Intro to Criminal Justice

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A change, I thought: Professor Bosworth was neither disgruntled nor ornery; he did not want to recreate a lost, romantic past, where the tough love method was believed to have worked for a previous generation of students. Rather, he wanted students to learn through writing – putting thoughts on paper, organizing ideas, revising positions.

Often we don't know what we know, Bosworth continued, unless we write, unless we see the gaps in our knowledge, right in front of us, on a page. And I agreed: scholars and writers often revise writing several times before having editors and colleagues read drafts; then, after receiving feedback, they incorporate the comments into their work. Then the process starts all over again.

Professor Bosworth then slid over drafts of various exams and assignments. He had been working on a short assignment, a "What would you do?" essay, where students had to imagine themselves as lawyers, representing either an arrestee or the police department, and argue whether the police officers were justified or not in using certain, questionable procedures to arrest a suspected serial killer. To rationalize arguments, either for the suspect or police, students had to cite several Supreme Court cases, key decisions that have dealt with constitutional rights and their possible violations.

It was clear that the writing-to-learn approach was the hallmark of this essay: Professor Bosworth did not require students to memorize the constitutional rights of citizens – a traditional method, the rote, that is often useful for cramming (and forgetting) information quickly. He required them to use the constitutional rights *in actu*, in putting their thoughts to writing, in formulating a logical written response that would cement their understanding of constitutional rights.

In another assignment, a project designed to teach students the research process, Professor Bosworth required that students select a hot topic – the legalization of marijuana, police violence, and immigration law – and research its laws. Then students had to survey at least twenty people, and ask them about their knowledge of these laws, and what, in their opinion, these laws should encompass. Afterward, students had to write about whether the law reflected public opinion (with the understanding that this was more practice than real research: the sample would not be representative and statistically calculated). Students also had to write critically about how the backgrounds of their survey population affected the research results.

To guide the writing process, Professor Bosworth had constructed a five-page manual that described every aspect of the research project – the goals, the potential topics, the survey guide, and the written requirements. Students were also required to turn in early drafts of the assignment for commentary and revisions. So students had a guide that helped them organize their ideas in writing, and a writing system –

the revision process – throughout their Hostos experience, while attending a four-year college, and later in life.

Overall, Professor Bosworth's students were writing-to-learn about crime, laws, surveys, and public opinion; but they were also writing-to-learn about the process of thinking. Students were learning-to-write coherently, and learning how good writers are always thinking, writing, and revising to develop and express their ideas.

Emotions Matter

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In my navigation through WAC using emotion-colored lenses, I soon realized how an outline may decrease anxiety during essay-exams, as it allows students to plan ahead, time themselves, and assess how much more they have to write. I discovered how the development of good revision skills, emphasized in Writing Intensive courses, prevents learners from making the same mistake repeatedly. I also found that different kinds of informal writing exercises make students identify their own problems, give them a better perspective to evaluate their learning, and thus diminish their frustration. This is just the beginning, and I am already amazed to realize the potential of writing in terms of affective-domain issues.

Writing and learning are complex tasks that often transcend cognitive domains. *Emotions matter*. Any professor may perceive ways in which students express the stress derived from their difficulties to deal with the demands of a college education, and this applies to both ESL students and native-speakers of English as well. In the end, all students are immigrants in college: they are newcomers who have to deal with unknown fields, with well-established conventions and protocols, and with requirements and pressures new to them. We can help our students by recognizing the powerful role of the emotions in making these adjustments.

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Writing in a Bilingual College

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we would make written comments suggesting ways of better organizing main ideas and of providing evidence and examples supporting their claims. As the semester went on, it was apparent that the students' work was not only clearer with stronger arguments, but it also contained fewer grammatical errors.

So, if students face similar problems when writing in English and in their native Spanish, various issues arise. First, it is natural to think that it will be easier for a Spanish-speaking student to start improving her writing proficiency in her own language, rather than beginning with her second language. Since the lack of familiarity with the language will not be at stake, we can expect that it will be easier to concentrate on clearly and coherently organizing ideas. Second, it is also natural to think that once students have an idea of a coherent and well-structured paragraph, they can apply this knowledge to the second language. The problems of vocabulary, grammar, and translation may still remain, but it seems reasonable to expect that students can rely on prior knowledge of clear, well-supported, and coherent writing, and that such knowledge will be independent of any language.

Many Spanish-speaking students anxious to pass the ACT exam think they should concentrate on English courses and avoid ones taught in Spanish. Yet, I do think that they should profit from the bilingual opportunities offered at Hostos. Students should be encouraged to take courses in Spanish not only because it is desirable *per se* that Spanish-speaking students improve their Spanish language skills, but also because we have good reasons to think that the writing proficiency gained in their native language may be transferred to their second language. For these reasons, taking courses in Spanish should not be seen as an unnecessary detour, but as another way of achieving writing proficiency, be it in Spanish or English, and, therefore, as another way of preparing for exams like the ACT.

Inaccurate Observations, Overgeneralization, and Selective Observation: A Framework for the Integration of Personal Experiences into Formal Writing Assignments

Alex Welcome

Students are often asked to integrate their own personal experiences and knowledge into the formal academic writings that they complete for college requirements. This important element of writing can be found in term papers, mid-term exams, and proficiency exams such as the CUNY Proficiency Exam (CPE).

However, the instructions that students receive about what this writing consists of are often vague. And, faculty often find the attempts of students to integrate their personal experiences into formal writing to be awkward and only tangentially related to the topic that the student is supposed to address. With the concepts of inaccurate observation, overgeneralization, and selective observation—three mainstays for the evaluation of social science data—we find the basis of a framework that allows students to evaluate the personal experiences that they will integrate into formal writing assignments.

Most formal assignments rest on students' knowledge of and interpretation of some type of material, be it academic texts, academic articles, novels, plays, or musical compositions, to name a few. As students evaluate the material they come to a general conclusion, a thesis, and they support their thesis by drawing on specific examples from the material at hand. For instance, having read a number of Shakespeare's plays, a student may come to the conclusion that, "In Shakespeare's plays the fool always speaks the truth." A well-written formal assignment will contain examples from Shakespeare's plays where the fool does indeed speak the truth. If the assignment calls for the student to explain how the uncovered theme compares to the student's own personal experiences, the student will need to select his/her personal experiences that relate to the theme that he/she has unearthed. By examining their experiences in terms of inaccurate observation, overgeneralization, and selective observation, students can determine which of their personal experiences adequately relates to the thesis that they are presenting in their formal assignment.

In his treatise on social research, Earl Babbie (2001) addresses the importance of evaluating observations. Three of the litmus tests that he proposed consist of evaluating observations in terms of their accuracy, their generalizability, and the way the observation/experience compares to the larger pool of observations/experiences. In terms of accuracy, students must make sure that the stated observation did in fact take place, "Did what I'm saying happen, and in the manner in which I describe?"

Having confirmed the accuracy of the observation, students must now account for the generalizability of the observation. For instance, the Secretary of State of a world power once concluded that there was no racism in her home region of her country because she had never had experienced racism growing up. While her observation may in fact be accurate (i.e. she never experienced racism), her conclusion rests on the generalizability of her observation to everyone in that region. If her observation doesn't hold true in many cases, then the Secretary of State has overgeneralized.

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Related to overgeneralization is the criterion of selective observation. Taking the example above, suppose that the observation is not accurate, that is to say, suppose that the Secretary of State was subject to racism. How could she have come to this inaccurate observation? Given the wide range of personal experiences that people go through, it is completely possible that she had experiences where she suffered racism and experiences where she did not suffer racism. When we have a hypothesis or thesis, especially one concerning our own personal experiences, we must thoroughly inspect the materials at hand to make sure that we do not focus on those observations that support our thesis, ignoring those experiences that contradict it. This phenomenon is selective observation.

Students bring a wealth of experiences to their formal writings. Unfortunately, in many instances their attempts to integrate their experiences in support of their theses are tangential and/or muddled. By focusing on, and guarding against the inaccuracies, overgeneralizations, and the selectivity that can plague observations, students will have a framework for integrating personal experiences and observations into their formal writing assignments.

Work Cited

Babbie, Earl. (2001). *The Practice of Social Research, 9th Edition*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.

WI Course Sections at Hostos Community College

1. ADM 2522 – Law and Social Change (Prof. Howard Jordan)
2. Biology 3904-General Biology II (Prof. Amanda Bernal-Carlo) Gen Ed
3. BUS 100 – Introduction to Business (Prof. Glenroy Prince)
4. OT 23 – Business Communication (Prof. Beverly Stephenson)
5. CIP 101 – Introduction to Computer Information Systems & Technology (Prof. Sandy Figueroa)
6. CIP 2325 – Help Desk (Prof. Julio Gallardo)
7. CIP 2340-Systems Analysis and Design (Prof. Sandy Figueroa)
8. ECE 105 – Social Studies for Young Children (Prof. Susan Anton)
9. ECE 116 – Development of the Young Child (Prof. Connie Petropoulos)
10. EDU 224 – Writing in the School Work Place (Prof. Eileen Kennedy)
11. EDU 101-Foundations of Education (Profs. Jill Simpson and Christine Mangino)
12. PSY 1040-Psychology of Women (Prof. Linda Anderson)
13. HIS 4660-World History to 1500 (Prof. Gerald Meyer) (Pre/Coreq 1302) E
14. HIS 4661 – Modern World History (from 1500) (Prof. Gerald Meyer) E
15. HIS 4663 – U. S. History through the Civil War (Prof. Pat Oldham) (Pre/Coreq 1302) Gen Ed
16. HIS 4663 – U. S. History through the Civil War (Prof. Marcella Bencivenni) (Pre/Coreq 1302) Gen Ed
17. HIS 4663 – U. S. History through the Civil War (Prof. Stefan Bosworth) (Pre/Coreq 1302) Gen Ed
18. HIS 4665-US History/Reconstruction to Present (Prof. Pat Oldham) (Pre/Coreq ENG 1302) Gen Ed
19. HIS 4665-US History/Reconstruction to Present (Prof. Stefan Bosworth) (Pre/Coreq 1302) Gen Ed Evening
20. HLT 6530 – Introduction to Gerontology (Prof. Diane Penner)
21. DEN 5302 – Oral Anatomy & Physiology (Prof. Jo Ann Rover)
22. XRA 5112 – Professional Practice Issues in Diagnostic Imaging (Prof. Geraldine Ruiz)
23. XRA 5212 – Pathologies (Prof. Charles Drago)
24. ENG 1341 – Language, Culture & Society (Prof. Sue Dicker)
25. ENG 1346 – Studies In Drama (Prof. Remy Roussettzi)
26. ENG 1348 – Introduction to Children's Literature (Prof. Linda Hirsch) (Pre/Coreq 1303)
27. ENG 1350 – Latin American Literature in Translation (Profs. Teresa Justicia & Craig Bernardini)
28. ENG 1351 – Literature and Psychology (Prof. Jerilyn Fisher)
29. ENG 1354 – Modern American Novel (Profs. Craig Bernardini and Teresa Justicia)
30. ENG 1356 – Women in Literature (Prof. Jerilyn Fisher)
31. ENG 1360 – Literature of Science Fiction (Prof. Carl James Grindley)
32. ENV 4014 – Environmental Science 1 (Prof. Fernandez) Gen Ed
33. ENV 4016 – Environmental Science 2 (Prof. Deery) Gen Ed
34. MAT 1690 – Computer Literacy (Prof. John Randall)
35. NUR 7102-Nursing Pharmacology II (Prof. Kathleen Donohue) (Pre/Coreq 1303)
36. POL 4701 – American Government (Prof. Peter Roman)
37. POL 4701- American Government (Prof. Stephan Bosworth) E
38. POL 4707 – Political Systems of Latin America (Prof. Peter Roman) Day & evening
39. VPA 104-Modern Art in the City (Prof. Magda Vasillov) (online D&E)
40. VPA 3502 – Arts and Civilization I **Online** (Prof. Magda Vasillov) (D&E)
41. VPA 3504 – Arts and Civilization II **Online** (Prof. Magda Vasillov) (D&E)
42. VPA 3552 – Music Appreciation (Prof. Alberto Bird)
43. VPA 3582-Introduction to Theater (Prof. Sol Miranda)
- WST 1010 – Introduction to Women's Studies (Prof. Jerilyn Fisher)

**For more information about WAC at Hostos,
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