

**Report of Program Assessment  
First-Year Writing (ENG 101)  
Spring 2012**

*conducted by the*

**Illinois State University Writing Program**

## Introduction

In Spring 2012, the ISU Writing Program conducted a program-wide assessment, which was administered by first year writing instructors in all sections of ENG 101 (Critical Inquiry), and consisted of 8 questions based on ISU writing program learning goals regarding genre, technology/media, trajectory, research skills, citation, grammar, and both in and out-of-school writing<sup>1</sup>. Each instructor decided upon individual administration methods, providing a report upon conclusion of the assessment describing his/her methodology. As expressed by the Writing Program in its Spring 2012 Writing Program Assessment Procedures document, the assessment goals included an attempt to better understand how students might be “taking up” the concepts and strategies of our genre studies/CHAT based writing program.

The method of analysis included both an overall review of responses from randomly selected students (2 from each class), and a more detailed analysis of these same responses, which sought to review both trends and anomalies in the demonstration and/or application of program terms, concepts and skills. Additionally, the instructors submitted brief narrative reports on these students, which were also used as part of the analysis.

As a first step, a team of reviewers divided responses to each question into 3 very general categories: responses that seemed very well-articulated in some significant ways; responses that seemed to indicate understanding of concepts generally; and responses seemed incomplete or lacked any indicators of understanding. The group did informally discuss their response as they reviewed the assessments, but no formal normalization procedures were followed.

As a second step, researchers made special note of trends and anomalies in the responses, with several goals in mind:

- To locate areas where students seemed to be having particular trouble with terms and concepts (which perhaps might indicate areas needing additional teaching materials or resources)
- To find examples that might indicate trends in the ways that instructors are explaining particular terms and concepts, and to begin tracing how different kinds of explanations might be taken up and used by students
- To locate interesting topics for further research
- To lay the groundwork for a 4-year longitudinal study of students’ use of WP terms and concepts as they work in different writing settings inside and outside of school.

## Section I. Student Responses

Examples of student responses follow the corresponding question from the assessment instrument here. Excerpts of what the assessors described as exceptional *or* unusual

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<sup>1</sup> See **Appendix A** for a copy of the ISU program Learning Outcomes, and **Appendix B** for a complete copy of the assessment instrument.

responses appear first, followed by a short description of possible implications. The responses included here exemplify a range of answers that first year writing students at Illinois State University wrote, and were chosen based on qualitative interpretation of data rather than the numerical ratings that appear in Section II of this report.

### **Question 1: Identifying Genre**

**Part One:** Using specific examples from class discussions about genre, explain your understanding of how genres are identified, constructed, produced.

**Part Two:** Then, select one of your major compositions you did for your class this semester. Describe how you understand the specific elements of the “genre” (or genres) for that writing. How was the content you created shaped by the boundaries and features of the genre? Be sure to provide specific examples from the text to illustrate your points and makes sure to thoroughly describe the choices you made regarding complying (or not) with the genre in your writing. (For example, were there things you couldn’t say about your topic because it didn’t fit with the genre? How did the genre affect the research you included?)

**Excerpt from I32:** Throughout the English 101 course I have learned how to identify a genre well. The most effective way for me personally, is to start by looking through examples of the particular genre. From those examples I can usually develop a good list of conventions that I can follow by reviewing them closely and taking annotated notes. Specifically I look to learn who the audience may be and how they will receive it, the length of the genre, common patterns and what kind of trajectory the genre may take. Understanding what the genre consists of is essential to producing it.

**Implications:** Demonstrates an understanding of writing as research related through genre—a genre process approach to writing that is extremely well and confidently articulated. The final line of this excerpt also indicates the student recognizes the necessity of purposeful authorship as related to the concept of genre as situational.

### **Question 2: Organizing Information in Multiple Genres**

**Part One:** Select any one genre that you worked on during the class and discuss how the organizational features of that genre work to shape the content.

**Part Two:** Select a different genre (from the first one) and discuss/analyze how the features and requirements of the new genre might shape the content differently. If your class has done this kind of “genre juxtaposition” (moving content from one genre to another) you can use examples of that work for this response. Otherwise, you can choose any other genre you think would be interesting to discuss.

**Excerpt from I18:** For project 2 I explained the genre of independent films. For majority of the paper I compared it to Hollywood films [from project 1]. The major difference between Hollywood films and an independent film is that there are a lot less people working on independent films. It’s a smaller knit group that works

together face to face to bring their vision to the screen. Hollywood films tend to be made by an incredibly large amount of people, all of whom have their own jobs. Yes they work together, but it isn't quite the same relationship. There is a different incentive behind making independent films that makes this genre extraordinary. Independent films are often created completely differently than the films majority of people are used to seeing. Many bigger films take around a year for preproduction and filming. The film *Like Crazy* was wasn't dependent on a script and was created in about a month according to the director Drake Doremus. "Mr. Yelchin, 22, and Ms. Jones, 27, made Mr. Doremus's film without a script, without knowing each other, through improvisation and, ultimately, a process that both declared was total freedom" (Anderson). It is rare that an entire film doesn't

**Implications:** The student chose to juxtapose two highly similar genres, that while having slightly different organizational features which the student does go on to discuss in further detail, differ more significantly as a result of trajectory as a result of production and reception (the student identifies this, but not in those specific terms). The student demonstrates a recognition of the necessity for examining genre (especially aspects of design) on a situational basis.

### **Question 3: Technology/Media**

Respond to one of the following writing situations by describing the decisions you might need to make regarding technology or media – What tools would you use to create and distribute the text? Keep in mind that tools/media/technology can include any material object you use to produce or distribute the text. What "things" would you use to create the text, and what (perhaps unconventional) tools/or venues might you use to distribute it? Also consider how these technology/media choices impact the text you create. Topics include: An advertisement for a personal hygiene product, A review of a film, play, music album or song, An instructional how-to guide for a game (board game, video game, etc.), A scrapbook chronicling the experiences of your first year of college, A billboard addressing a proposed change in some policy/practice within the community.

**Excerpt from I26:** If I were to create an advertisement for a personal hygiene product it would definitely use a lot of different technologies. I would create a flyer about some of its features with a picture, price, and description. Would use a fancy printer with good print quality and I would tape them to the walls of stores so that people walking by and walking in would see them and maybe be interested. I attempt to create a movie about the product using windows movie maker, probably only a few minutes long exaggerating the usefulness of the product and showing different ways it's helpful. I would then post that video to youtube with an odd title like MOST HELPFUL THING EVER!!!! Hopefully this would attract viewers even if they weren't originally watching it for that. I would also post it as "(insert oral hygiene name) works amazing!" so that someone already interested could find it. Both of the ways that I listed above are incredibly technology dependent, you can't create or distribute the flyer without a computer to originate it, or printers to physically create it. The movie option is 100% digital, there is no way to upload a

video onto the internet and to attempt to get views without A) you creating, editing, and uploading said video onto the internet, and B) the only way for other people to view this is by them using technology as well!

**Implications:** This writer displays a particular awareness of the fact that in order to use technology, one must be able to access technology. Additionally, the writer differentiates between digital and non-digital technologies without creating an either/or binary line between digital and non-digital technology. Included in that awareness is a savvy use of forum (i.e., “the walls of stores”) as a kind of technology. Note also the student’s implicit acknowledgement that some forums (i.e., YouTube) depend on attracting “unintended” audience traffic.

#### **Question 4: The Trajectories of Literate Activity**

We’d like you to create a visual map of one your major textual productions from this semester (could be a production that you did outside of ENG 101) and discuss the text’s trajectory. Consider these three elements: 1) everything that went into to making the text, from your previous knowledge to the resources you used, and even what was necessary to create those resources, 1) what genres is your text connected to or derived from and how might you map these genres in connection to your text, and 2) what are some of the future interactions that individuals might have with your text. Keep in mind a person need not physically see your project to interact with it.

**Excerpt from I25:** For this question I decided to draw my map out on paper. With this map I explained how I got the idea to write this article, which was the fact that I have a twitter account and I have had one since 2011. Then I went on drawing lines to connect the boxes and I explained the experiment I was assigned and the type I research I did to create my article. Next, I went into the people that read my article and the possibility of my article being published and the readers that would read my article if that were to be true. I then went on to explain that if people read my article they might gain a better understanding of what the genre twitter consists of and why it is such a great tool for communicating. This might also cause them to create a twitter account of their own and create their own tweets.

**Implications:** Of particular note, this student writer acknowledges in her response that the trajectory of her writing actually began before the specific school assignment she is completing (i.e., “I got the idea to write this article...[from] the fact that I have a twitter account and I have had one since 2011.”)

**Excerpt from I74:** For this question, I would like to talk to you about the trajectory for my visual genre that I created for the It Gets Better campaign against gay bullying, which I created a YouTube video for. Also, instead of creating a trajectory map, I decided to use another type of “print based” form by answering the questions by using bullets under the headlined questions in an organized manner.

How the text began and moved out into the world

- It began with a man who submitted his video about gay bullying into YouTube
- It caught on and was seen by many and they redistributed it to others and this soon led to a website being created.
- On this website, people could submit their videos and inspirational words about gay bullying and how it gets better.
- After this, it soon was recognized all around the world and was talked about around the internet and on television.

#### Other Genre's Used

- I used other genres such as the internet, television, and YouTube to form my genre.
- First, I researched my issue on the internet and tried to understand why people have created videos and tried to spread awareness about this issue
- I watched television, mostly the news, so I could learn how people try to get their issues heard.
- I finally watched many YouTube videos that were created on the It Gets Better website.
- I took down notes of how they talked, what they said, and how they got their message across while keeping the audience's attention.

**Implications:** The student takes a personalized approach for visualizing trajectory through language, but manages, also to maintain the complexity of the concept in the various subcategories she includes, such as “How the text began in the world”, “What readers might do with the text”, and “How the text could be stored and disseminated to others.” In this way the student manages to create a linear visual quality that maintains the branches and divergences more consistent with a nuanced conceptualization of trajectory.

### **Question 5: Flexible Research Skills**

Imagine that you plan to do research on a more specific variant of one of the following topics, but not as an assignment for school. Discuss where you would go (physically and digitally) and what you would do to find the information you need. Topics include: the current U.S. economic crisis, a genealogy or family history, potential careers in your major or area of study, the body of work of a particular author/filmmaker/artist, the causes of and treatments for autism, the cultural/community values/rituals/beliefs of a particular group, The aftermath of the “Arab Spring”, Ramifications of the “Occupy” movement.

**Excerpt from I20:** For this question I chose to focus on a text about a genealogy or family history. The kind of technologies I would use for this project would be mostly the internet or family ancestry online data bases. I think a more reliable option would be to talk to my parents, grandparents, or anyone else in my family that

would know a lot about my family history. I think for this project I would mostly focus on events that directly affected my family and influenced our history. These events could be in the family or world events happening during a specific time. For example, I could talk about the Great Depression and the New Deal because I know my grandparents grew up during that time. Or I could talk about more recent events like 9/11 and interview my family to find out what they were doing when it happened and how they reacted to this. I would be able to research what was going on and how my family members reacted to this. The criteria I would use to make decisions about the types of information that would be useful for this project would be how big of an impact they had on my family. My grandpa was very involved with the CCC's and he still talks about so I know it was important to him and that I would want to include it in my family history. I think the most credible sources for this project would be the first hand experiences and stories. They went through what they are telling me about and I think that is more credible than what I would be able to find online. Using the internet may be more valid for the part involving the history events.

**Implications:** The student discerns the value and significance of contextualizing the personal within broader social contexts, and interestingly seems very aware that history is something that actually includes more recent, contemporary events; this suggests a more nuanced understanding of social cultural factors. The student also recognizes that contextualizing such information requires different research tactics considering the situation and goals—how to historicize broader cultural moments as opposed to more personal events in one's life.

## **Question 6: Using Citation Formats/Citing Source Material in Multiple Genres**

Explore how citation functions within one of your projects from this semester. What citation format did you use, and how did it work within your text? Why was this source cited in this way? Then, discuss the purpose of citation methods in general. You may want consider how your evaluation of sources affects the purpose of citation.

**Excerpt from I25:** For my play, I used MLA format citation styles. I know this doesn't seem like it would work – but it did. My play was more than a play – it was a how-to play. In the margins, I had commentary with information about plays and how to write them. This is where MLA came in. I chose MLA because I think footnotes and endnotes would take away from the flow and structure of a play so CMS was out. And I wasn't focusing on *when* the information was created, so APA was out. MLA seemed to fit right in. I would cite my source in the commentary box and the works cited page had all the information one would need to find the source themselves. That's the purpose of citation methods – to use, share, and give credit to the information that helped you construct your own work.

**Implications:** The student is able to link citation style to purpose and situation demonstrating that there is an attempt relate the concept itself to something more

than simplistic notions of accreditation. This notion is reinforced, though only briefly and in an off-hand fashion, when the student explains that the purpose of citation includes “shar[ing]” information. There is also some indication that the student understands citation is different for non-school genres such as scripts and plays when she begins by stating that she “know[s] this doesn’t seem like it would work –but . . . My play was more than a play –it was a how-to play.” According to this the student implies that citation is simply not necessary within this genre, excepting that she has constructed it, interestingly, as an educational (in-school) tool.

### **Question 7: Grammatical Usage and Sentence Structure**

Discuss a particular issue/concept or “rule” of style or punctuation that you learned about during ENG 101? Try to provide examples of how you worked with these concepts in specific projects or writing activities during the semester (both in 101 and perhaps in other classes). Explain specifically the rule of this convention as if you were going to teach it to someone. Consider how you came to this knowledge.

**Excerpt from I24:** The punctuation was different from any other genre I wrote in and did not really follow the standard English rules because I focused on making my dialogue believable, not making it formal and correct. If I were going to teach this to someone, I would tell them to do research on their genre and find out the rules of this convention for their genre specifically. I came into this knowledge by writing in many different genres and recognizing that the rules can be very different depending on what you write.

**Implications:** The student not only demonstrates an understanding that grammatical rules such as punctuation are linked to issues of style and of genre, but that these conventions are situational and therefore may be researched for deeper learning and mastery of a particular genre and situation.

### **Question 8: The Issue of Transfer**

Take a few moments to consider the kinds of genres you use to write outside of school. What kinds of skills have you developed to help you use those genres? Now take a moment to consider the kinds of genres you’ve used to write in ENG 101. What kinds of skills have you developed to help you use those genres? In what ways are the skills you use to write outside of school similar to or different from the skills you use to write in school? Please use examples from your writing to illustrate your discussion.

**Excerpt from I62:** I have gotten a completely different definition of the word “genre.” Before I took this class the only definition I had known for the word genre was the genre of a type of story. . . After taking this class genre is actually anything that you have done or will do. Just you asking me this question is a type of genre. Me answering this question for you is a type of genre.



**Implications:** The student appears to be re-conceptualizing genre in very broad terms that allows for the study of active genres so that the student is beginning to see genre as something *not limited* to in-school and out-of-school. Instead he is beginning to regard it as more situational—and something that might allow response by identifying patterns of behavior as well as writing. He goes on to describe conventions of “waking up” and “asking and answering questions” demonstrating this understanding more substantially.

## Section II. Statistical Data

In this section we provide some basic quantitative data based on the reviews of the team of writing program members (6 individuals). While the purpose of this section is to provide all quantitative data related to student outcomes as correlated with the instrument, it is important to note that this data shouldn't be regarded complete evidence of the levels of understanding and mastery students acquired over the learning outcomes during the 2012 Spring semester. The data simply offer a basic assessment of how well students were able to respond to the specific set of questions given. Patterns discussed within the report are meant only to encourage further research of programmatic goals.

### Method

Before the process of evaluating student assessments began, the assessment team, comprised of Scott Sands, Jordana Hall, Kellie Sharp-Hoskins, Raul Garcia-Lopez, and Susana Rodriguez, discussed ways to norm the analysis. Each evaluator provided annotations for their evaluation methods explaining how they assessed specific responses and what those evaluations were primarily based upon. Assessments were evaluated on a scale of 1-3. Responses placed in the “3” category were responses that seemed very well-articulated in some significant ways, for example, including detailed examples of specific writing situations or practices. Additionally, evaluators looked for nuanced understandings of concepts such as citation, genre, grammar, and trajectory, scoring higher for students that demonstrated a deeper, often re-visioning of the topic. Responses placed in the “2” category were identified as indicating understanding of concepts generally, but without characteristics that might distinguish them as particularly complete or nuanced. These responses generally included some examples of specific writing situations and practices as well as evidence of basic comprehension of the topic. Responses placed into the “1” seemed incomplete or lacking indicators of understanding. They generally included only minimal details, or evidenced less comprehension or misconceptions of the subject matter, and sometimes failed to address the question itself.

### Results

Overall, the reviews indicated that almost half of first year writing students from the selected sample demonstrated an average understanding of question 1, 2, 3, and 5. However, student responses to questions 6, 7, and 8 seemed to indicate (generally) less understanding or at least less nuanced responses. According to these results students were better able to articulate detailed responses about identifying genres, organizing

information in multiple genres, technology and media as related to composing strategies, and demonstrating flexible research skills in response to specific research problems<sup>2</sup>.

Figure 1 shows the percentages of student scores according to the evaluation system described above. Percentages are taken from a sample of 85 students administered the assessment instrument in a variety of ways. The chart demonstrates that on average students scored higher on questions 1 (24.71%) and 5 (22.35%). Additionally, a high percentage of students did not attempt to answer question 4 (21.43%) for reasons unknown.

**Figure 1: Student Scores on the Assessment\***

	Percent Rated 1's	Percent Rated 2's	Percent Rated 3's	Percent with No Response
Question #1	25.88%	47.06%	<b>24.71%</b>	2.35%
Question #2	32.94%	45.88%	16.47%	4.71%
Question #3	31.76%	<b>48.24%</b>	15.29%	4.71%
Question #4	25.00%	36.90%	16.67%	<b>21.43%</b>
Question #5	27.06%	45.88%	22.35%	4.71%
Question #6	<b>49.41%</b>	27.06%	14.12%	9.41%
Question #7	47.06%	36.47%	9.41%	7.06%
Question #8	42.35%	38.82%	12.94%	5.88%

\* Scores in bold indicate which questions elicited the highest proportion of that score among all questions

## Section III. Some Patterns and Notable Responses

### Typical Responses

Many of the student responses to the assessment were quite short, lacking nuance as well as adequate details to make any real points and connections about student work and writing. This is potentially an issue that might be corrected by implementing the assessment in different ways in the future.

### Grammar

Issues of stylistics and voice were often confused with issues of grammar. Almost universally, students struggled to discuss meta concepts in relation to this issue. Responses to questions of grammar were particularly short and lacked specific detail.

### Citation

Issues of citation, like grammar, almost universally lacked any real nuance. Students tended to regard citation *only* as a method of giving credit to previous *scholarly* work, and

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<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note that we found anecdotal evidence (from instructor reports) that a number of instructors spent more time working directly with students on the first questions, which may be related to the less robust responses to the final questions.

linked this concept in particular only to in-school genres. Any connection between citation and effective research methods was also universally lacking.

### **Technology/Media**

While students often displayed savvy methods for technological composition and even research, students struggled to demonstrate effective composition and research strategies beyond using a personal computer and the programs and databases made available through this medium. Additionally, discussions in relation to technology and trajectory seemed to lack any real nuance connecting technology, trajectory, and genre as composing *process*.

### **Language and Articulation**

Many students seemed to lack the necessary language to successfully articulate nebulous or abstract concepts such as genre and trajectory. Articulation of these concepts seemed to manifest primarily in terms of “formal” and “informal”, which often appeared to refer to “in-school” and “out-of-school”. Additionally, examples that students used to explain concepts discussed in their answers often did not fully or accurately connect to one another.

## **Section IV. Additional Analysis**

### **Summary**

This section presents the findings of an analysis of responses to the Spring 2012 Writing Program Assessment that draws from a sample of 76 writers randomly selected from among all respondents to the assessment. It is divided into several subsections. This subsection, the “Summary,” outlines the methods and goals used in the analysis, and summarizes several key concepts that the analysis discovered “cut across” question boundaries in surprising and meaningful ways. The next several sections outline the researchers’ findings about each individual question, providing examples and excerpts to illustrate those findings. The final section sets forth some of the major implications of the researchers’ findings, including recommendations for future practice.

### **Methodology and Goals**

This analysis of responses to the Spring 2012 Writing Program Assessment sought to explore concepts that “cut across” questions themselves, including both concepts that individual questions had been designed to investigate (e.g., trajectory, research, and so on), and other concepts that the assessment had not been designed to study directly. In essence, researchers sought to investigate how key concepts within the writing program—whether explicitly acknowledged in the assessment instrument or not—worked together to shape writers’ conceptions of writing.

More than 500 pages of data from 76 randomly-selected respondents to the assessment were examined. While researchers attended to any instance in which a writer identified a concept that was part of the Outcomes for the Writing Program or that was mentioned in the assessment instrument, particular attention was given to two kinds of concepts. First, researchers sought instances of concepts from the Outcomes or the assessment instrument that occurred in responses to questions that didn't specifically mention that concept. (An example might be a mention of tools or technology that occurred in response to Question 6, which specifically asked respondents to consider citation.) Second, researchers sought articulation of concepts that seemed important to respondents, but that were not specifically mentioned in the assessment instrument or in the Writing Program Outcomes. (One such important concept, discussed in more detail below, was that of "purpose.")

As detailed in the sections below, researchers counted the number of instances of a particular concept to get an idea of just how prevalent the concept was in the sample. Researchers then sought examples of responses that would demonstrate how writers framed the concept in question. Together, the number of instances of each concept, along with the specific examples of such concept, are provided below. The researchers hope that these data will help readers to better understand how writers have "taken up" particular concepts important to the Writing Program. Readers are cautioned that the quantitative data provided (i.e., the number of responses and percentages of responses in relation to the sample) are provided in the interest of establishing a context for the qualitative data—by themselves, the numbers mean very little. Readers are advised to attend to the examples and interpretation provided, as these are the richest sources of information that have arisen from the analysis. While not comprehensive, the data below have important implications for the Writing Program and its practice.

## **Key Concepts**

### *Audience*

Measured solely by how often respondents referred to it, audience was perhaps one of the most important concepts described by respondents to the assessment. Considered in light of genre theory, audience seems to be most directly a part of trajectory, and when prompted directly to consider trajectory (for example, during Questions 3 and 4), respondents were very likely to indicate the importance of audience. But writers also foregrounded the importance of audience when considering grammar (Question 7). While some respondents did focus on the idea of "correctness" often associated with a mention of "grammar," many other writers considered "grammar" a synonym for "convention" or "guideline." Thus, respondents who focused on audience when considering Question 7 displayed an impressive grasp of the ways in which those audiences constructed a social and cultural context from which grammatical rules and guidelines could arise.

### *Process*

Many respondents used a “process approach” to organize their responses to questions, meaning that they used transition statements like “first,” “next,” “before,” “after,” and “last” to indicate the relationships between ideas in their response. This was true even when the question itself did not prompt the students to consider the actions they might take (especially in Questions 3 and 5). That students took this approach suggests, among other things, that respondents were aware of the importance of a text’s trajectory. It also suggests that, even when not prompted to think in terms of action, writers persisted in conceptualizing writing as an activity.

### Research

Though Question 5 provided an explicitly-named forum for writers to discuss research, many respondents mentioned research in almost every other question, regardless of whether the question itself prompted a consideration of research. Perhaps more importantly, respondents were far more likely to frame research as a tool with which to learn genre production when considering it in light of a question other than Question 5. (For more on this phenomenon, see the sections below.) These findings have important implications, both for the Writing Program’s future assessment activities, and for instructors who wish to help students discover tools with which they can enhance their learning.

### Purpose

Though no element of the assessment instrument asked students to consider their own purposes for writing, several answers suggested that respondents considered the writer’s reasons for undertaking a writing task an important part of that task. In general, writers seemed to hold a more nuanced understanding of a particular concept (i.e., trajectory) when they could clearly connect that concept to their own goals. For more on this phenomenon, see the sections for Questions 1, 2, 3, 5, and 8 below.

## **Question 1**

The Instructor’s Guide for ISU’s Writing Program defines “trajectory” as “both how a text might move through a process of production, but even more importantly how texts move through institutions and spaces and in relationships to different people” (Instructor’s Guide 27). Although Question 1 did not explicitly prompt respondents to consider trajectory, 32 of the writers in the sample (42 percent) made explicit mention of the importance of audience in shaping a genre’s boundaries, suggesting that student writers do understand to some extent the importance of “how texts move...in relationships to different people.” For example, one respondent noted that

Each genre has a target audience. Depending on whom they are speaking to, there are differences a writer can make to insure their writing appeals to that audience. For example if one wanted to reach out to a younger audience writing in a magazine such as Time would not be very beneficial. For younger children the content in this

magazine is too advanced to read and overall uninteresting to them. The writer would be better off writing an article in highlights or Time kids. There also has to be a clear purpose within the writing. If the goal is to inform an audience about a topic with just facts, something such as a research paper would suit that intention. However, using a research paper when the goal is to creatively intrigue the audience on a topic would make no sense. The writer would be better off giving a speech or writing some sort of documentary (I18, Q1).

This writer appears keenly aware of the way she might use a genre as a tool to “insure [her] writing appeals to [her target] audience.” Furthermore, this writer connects audience to purpose, suggesting that what a writer wants to accomplish might also influence the genre she selects. While not every respondent evinced such a nuanced understanding of audience in their responses to Question 1, a large proportion of responses indicated an awareness of audience, suggesting that instructors might better help students understand trajectory by building on their already-present understanding of the importance of audience.

In addition, although Question 1 did not explicitly ask writers to consider research, 18 respondents to Question 1 (24 percent of the sample) made specific reference to research as an activity involved in writing. Some of these responses suggested a nuanced understanding of the way genres might affect content, as when one respondent noted that

This [the selection of one genre over another] not only affected my overall project, but it affected the research I could use. I could no longer use research that focused on anything other than the college application process. Some of the research I found was explaining the benefits of going to college, but all of this had to be thrown out or risk compromising the original intent of the project (I76, Q1).

Not only does this writer’s response suggest an understanding of “how...content...[is] shaped by the boundaries and features of [a] genre” (Writing Program Assessment Instrument, Question 1), but it also suggests that he has come to understand genres themselves as providing some of the “criteria [he] would...use to make decisions about the types of information that would be useful or valid for this project” (Writing Program Assessment Instrument, Question 5).

Furthermore, 11 of those respondents who mentioned research (15 percent of the sample) specifically described research as a strategy they use to learn how to construct and distribute genres. For instance, one writer asserted that

when attempting to create a composition in a particular genre, you must first research similar compositions of that same genre and create a rubric containing the important criteria found (I3, Q1).

Later, the same writer comments on the advantages of using research as a method of learning:

This [creating a rubric based on information found when researching a target genre] proved to be extremely helpful later on when I needed to construct my own music album review because I was easily able to see criteria that I needed to include in my review to make it a true review. I even used my rubric as a checklist, checking to make sure I had each and every component that we found important in the other reviews (I3, Q1).

For this writer, research became a tool, one that enabled her to complete a writing task by making the boundaries around that task more clear and distinct.

Finally, student writers responded to several questions using a “process approach”—that is, describing the actions they would take to complete a task as steps that had to be completed in a particular order. In answering Question 1, 8 writers (11 percent of the sample) took such an approach. Given that the Writing Program also defines trajectory as “how a text might move through a process of production” (Instructor’s Guide 27), such an approach to organization suggests a powerful source of antecedent knowledge that student writers possess, knowledge that instructors can use to help writers to better understand and apply the concept of trajectory to the writing they do. For more on this phenomenon, refer to the sections below, particularly the section on Question 5.

## **Question 2**

Question 2 asked writers to consider how the conventions of two different genres would lead them to shape similar content in different ways. Like Question 1, Question 2 provided students with an analytical framework with which to shape their answer, prompting students to consider the methods and materials they used and the audience for which they were writing, among other things. And although just as in Question 1, writers were not explicitly prompted to consider research, many writers did, with 9 writers (12 percent of the sample) mentioning research. For some writers, research was an essential activity that helped them to construct an example of the genre. One writer in particular suggested the possibility that “personal experience” might count as a form of “research” in her response to Part One of Question 2, asserting that she

decided to conduct research on a genre which I have been familiar with reading as well as writing: fanfiction. Since I had my own experience with fanfiction on the internet (specifically around Harry Potter) to draw on, I was able to really analyze how fanfics are structured as well as what sort of content is most often included (I21 Q2).

This writer’s response is important not only in the way it foregrounds research as an activity that can be used to learn skills, but in that it demonstrates the writer’s investment in a genre with personal significance to her. In fact, several respondents to the assessment described how their personal investment in particular topics shaped their responses, suggesting that writers placed great value on opportunities to engage with topics and situations with direct connection to their own lives. For further examples of this phenomenon, please refer to the sections on Questions 3, 5, and 8 below.

Other writers saw research as an element that helped them to distinguish one genre from another, with one such writer commenting that biographers “interview people or research the life of the person they are writing about in order to get the true facts” (I46, Q2). Such responses suggest that the student writers in our program do see research both as a convention that can shape content, and as a tool with which to learn how to produce examples of genres.

In a move that is perhaps related, rather than confine their thinking about citation to Question 6, five students (7 percent of the sample) mentioned citation in their responses to Question 2. Most often writers compared or contrasted genres based on their differing citation styles, as one writer did when she observed that “[i]n an article you are also required to use sources and are required to cite those sources, whereas in a wedding toast you, when using someone else’s work in your toast you may make reference to who you are quoting but there is no need to create a citation in either MLA, APA, or CMS” (I25, Q2). Responses like this one suggest that it is both possible and valuable to expose writers to genres and situations involving writing that is not strictly “academic.”

### Question 3

Though Question 3 explicitly asks respondents to focus on the “material objects” writers “use to produce or distribute the text,” writers also focused their attention on what they did when producing or distributing texts. This resulted in several respondents making local observations about trajectory—in particular, by describing in a step-by-step manner the actions they would take to complete the task outlined by the question (i.e., a “process approach”). In total, 16 writers (21 percent of the sample) focused on such a process-oriented description.

Of course, it could be that respondents interpreted the directive to describe “the decisions you need to make” in order to produce and distribute the text as encompassing action (i.e., what they did). But writers did not always confine themselves to describing what they would do. One student in particular chose to begin his answer to Question 3 by developing the significance of the topic to himself. In describing why he would choose to create “A billboard addressing a proposed change in some policy/practice within the community,” that respondent wrote that

In my county, the side-street speed limits are 25 miles per hour, however peoples drive way faster. Several years ago I was on the scene of a young child who was hit by a speeding car outside of his house when he ran across the street to grab his football. After seeing the horror of the accident I have always wanted to do something about people traveling on side-streets with such high speeds (I79, Q3).

This writer’s answer demonstrates that he understands the importance of *kairos*, or exigency, to the trajectory of a text. In beginning his answer to Question 3, which asks him only to consider producing and distributing a particular text, this writer also demonstrates his understanding that the trajectory of a text extends prior to its production. And by



developing a specific goal, the writer furthermore demonstrates that he understands a text's trajectory as extending beyond its initial distribution.

In addition, four respondents (5 percent of the sample) remarked on the importance of research when completing the Question 3 task. Interestingly, three of the four writers who mentioned research in their responses to Question 3 characterized it as a strategy they used to learn how to write a genre rather than as a way to gather content to input into a genre. For example, in explaining how she would write a manual for a board game, one respondent noted that she "would begin my rules and instructions guide by playing the game; this would be my research of the product" (I8b, Q3). Especially because they appear when students are not otherwise prompted to write about research, these students' responses suggest that student writers can and will use research to learn how to write in an unfamiliar genre, and that instructors should work to foster and support an understanding of research as a tool for learning, rather than simply for accumulating content.

#### **Question 4**

Question 4 was perhaps the most broadly-couched of the questions on the assessment instrument outside of Question 1. In particular, the question's directive to consider "everything that went into to making the text, from your previous knowledge to the resources you used, and even what was necessary to create those resources" allowed students wide latitude in discussing their writing. In addition, Question 4 explicitly acknowledged the possibility that a writer might choose writing not done in ENG 101. Thus, it should not be surprising to learn that responses to Question 4 were rich and varied in their consideration of writing.

Yet, like Questions 3 and 5, Question 4 lays down a carefully-mapped framework on which most respondents constructed their answers. This framework asked students to "think about the following":

- How did the text begin and how did it move out into the world?
- What other genres (generally) or specific examples of genres did you use to inform/understand your production?
- Who read it?
- Who do you anticipate might read it in the future?
- What might those readers do with the text?
- How might the text be stored, or disseminated to others?
- What new kinds of texts (if any) could the ideas in the text be used to create?
- What cultural institutions or organizations (if any) does the text help to support or challenge?

Though the above list does not explicitly prompt student writers to consider research, 10 of the sample respondents (13 percent of the sample) explicitly mentioned research in their consideration of trajectory. And though it might be expected that respondents tended to conceptualize research as a method of gathering information (especially when answering

Question 5, which explicitly asked them to consider research), writers answering Question 4 framed research in a variety of ways.

One respondent, for example, noted that “[t]o get to the point of being able to write free verse poetry I had to do research on the web as well as in books” (I58, Q4). This writer’s response suggests that she saw research as a tool to learn how to create, rather than simply as a name for the act of collecting content. This same respondent noted that the genre she was writing in “start[ed] off as research material on the web or in a book that was not written by me and transform[ed] into poems created from all the sources to express a new ideas created by me” (I58, Q4), suggesting an understanding of research as a kind of genre juxtaposition. Instructors may wish to explore how priming student writers to consider research as part of every text’s trajectory might influence those writers’ understanding of juxtaposition.

Another respondent wrote that she first “researched my issue on the internet and tried to understand why people have created videos and tried to spread awareness about this issue” (I74, Q4). This response suggests a keen awareness on the part of the writer of the importance of purpose, and the influence of social and cultural factors on writing tasks.

## Question 5

Perhaps more than any other, responses to Question 5 revealed a prevalent mode of organization on which student writers leaned while completing the assessment. Like Question 3, Question 5 focuses students on objects, enjoining respondents to “Discuss where you would go (physically and digitally) and what you would do to find the information you need” to complete a research project. The question then provides respondents with a list of elements to consider, which is reproduced below:

- What kinds of technologies or media might you make use of in your search?
- Who are some of the people you might gather information from (either as informants or as experts)?
- How would you decide what kind of information is applicable to your project?
- What criteria would you use to make decisions about the types of information that would be useful or valid for this project?
- Using the possible texts for this topic discuss some examples of sources that might or might not be credible to use for this project.
- What might you do with this information? Why and how?

Although the stem in the prompt and the final bullet do ask students to consider what they would do, nearly every one of the remaining items in the bulleted list prompts students to think of a thing—a tool, a person, a criterion—rather than an action. Thus, Question 5 could be said to prompt student writers to conceptualize research as a thing rather than a process. Yet, 19 respondents (25 percent of the sample) used process-oriented language to help them describe the relationship between the different kinds of sources they might use. For an example, consider this writer’s response below. Transition terms suggesting a process-oriented organizational structure are underlined and bolded to aid identification.

If I plan to do research on the potential careers in my major and/or areas of study I would **first** look it up on Google. For example Economics is my major. I would not use Google to look up references. I would only be using it to get ideas that I can focus on. When typing in Economics and careers in Google, I quickly got banking, accountancy, tax advice, actuarial work, insurance, and trading. **I would then** make an appointment with the Career Center at Illinois State University. This would be my main source. **After getting a list of jobs that involve economics, I would then** use Milner's databases to learn about the jobs. I could also check out books involving economics. **My next main source** would be an economics professor(s). If I were doing this assignment, I would narrow my research down to the most popular jobs or the highest paid jobs (I67, Q5).

Below is another example of a response to Question 4, again with transition terms suggesting a process-oriented organizational structure bolded and underlined:

**When you are first given a topic to study** there are certain steps that are necessary to take in order to get all the information you need. For example if I were given the topic of potential careers in the field of geography extensive research would be necessary. **I would first research** the field of geography on the internet in order to grasp a general knowledge. I would look for reliable websites that offer the information I would need. Examples of these websites would be Association of American Geographers or GIS. **The next step I would take would be** to talk to a geographer in person or by phone. Before the meeting I would prepare a list for all the information that I still wanted to know about the profession such as what skills are needed, education, what the job conditions are like, as well as tips on how to get into the field. **After this[,]** I would then continue my research on job outlook as well as salary for the profession. Another resource I could use in my research would be to attend a career fair and look for information that might be beneficial. **After I finished gathering my information** I would then decide what be useful to someone trying to land a job in geography. All of these steps would help me gather my research to write my paper (I51, Q5).

These and other respondents' consideration of Question 5 suggested that writers persisted in seeing research as a process—a set of interrelated steps designed to accomplish a goal. Yet, many respondents followed the order of the bulleted list in the question when elaborating on their process. For example, note how both writers above mention people as a resource only after mentioning some other kind of source, mimicking the bulleted list's positioning of people in the second bullet. In addition, both writers above wait until their response is nearly finished to consider credibility, following credibility's position as the next-to-last point in the bulleted list.

Exactly why respondents so often chose to meld their own understanding of research as a process with the order of the bulleted list in the question is, of course, not entirely clear. It is possible, however, that respondents adopted the bulleted list because they saw the items in the list as what the teacher wanted them to write (i.e., as "the right way to organize the question"). It is equally possible that, faced with a time-sensitive task to which they had

not yet given much thought, writers adopted the most available scaffold on which to build their organizational structure. The Writing Program is advised to investigate how writers make organizational choices for such tasks, particularly to determine whether the classroom context itself has some effect on how writers might organize a text.

As surely as a pattern emerged in respondents' organization of Question 5, exceptions also emerged. One particularly striking example again foregrounds the importance of identifying writing topics and tasks that relate directly to the respondent's interests, goals, and experience. This writer's response is reproduced below.

If I were to research the causes of and treatments for autism, I would first start off with my special education book. This past semester I took a special education class and was interested in learning more about learning disabilities especially after I worked with a young boy who had autism for a year. I already have some background knowledge about autism and its characteristics and personally found my own way to work with a toddler who had autism. The treatments for autism and how certain exercises and routines can truly help children with autism live their life a little bit more easily and even help out the friends and family around them was very interesting to me. In my special education book I would look for the normal treatments that they state. After that I would look those treatments up on the internet to see more in depth of how these treatments work and affect them overall. Next I would make sure I went to a blog site for parents of children with autism. Now a day many parents find comfort in blogging with other parents who are in the same position as them, and find it as some sort of outlet to discuss their struggles and how they are coping with them. I find it would be the best way to get information from people who are actually going through some of these treatments and see how they feel the treatment has impacted them, and if it has in a positive or negative form. I also would get in contact with the grandma of the boy I used to work with. She has a PhD in Special Education and is the primary caretaker of Tyler, and in the beginning of my swimming lessons with him, she would help me with techniques to get his attention and help his focus. When doing this research I would have to use a book and the computer for internet access. The people that I would gather information from would be parents or extended family of children with autism or professionals such as teachers. I personally feel that any type of technique, exercise, or strategy that has worked for someone is applicable. Everyone is different, and one treatment that might work for one person may not for someone else and I think it is in everyone's best interest to know as many treatments and technique's that you can to become educated on the topic (I13, Q5).

In contrast to the two examples above, this respondent does not immediately begin her search for information on the internet and then—following the order of the bulleted list in the question—name an individual or group to whom she would turn. Instead, the writer mentions several sources—a textbook, her own experience, the internet, a blog, and a specific individual. And rather than wait until the end of her response, this writer evaluates each kind of source almost immediately after naming it. For example, she explains her

choice to consult a textbook first by asserting that “[t]his past semester I took a special education class and was interested in learning more about learning disabilities especially after I worked with a young boy who had autism for a year.” And later, she explains her choice to visit a blog for families of children with autism by noting that “[n]ow a day many parents find comfort in blogging with other parents who are in the same position as them, and find it as some sort of outlet to discuss their struggles and how they are coping with them.”

In short, unlike many other respondents, this writer’s specific engagement with the topic at hand allowed her to engage more fully with the question, adopting an organizational structure that was more dependent on her own knowledge and experience than it was on the structure of the question itself. This finding has important implications, both for the ways in which instructors approach framing research as an activity, and for how the Writing Program might construct future assessment efforts.

### **Question 6**

Predictably, the vast majority of respondents mentioned research often in answer to Question 6. However, nine respondents (12 percent of the sample) invoked the concept of their own credibility as a writer, or ethos, as a reason to cite. Many respondents simply asserted that citations within a text would demonstrate credibility by their presence alone. One writer, for example, asserted that “[t]he purpose of these citations was to show my credibility and that my information is not made up” (I31a, Q6), and another characterized the Works Cited page he included on one project as existing “to show that all information I received was credible and not plagiarized” (I31b, Q6). But perhaps most interesting was the way a third student writer’s response appeared to frame “citation” as a kind of technology that enabled readers to undertake the action of establishing the writer’s credibility:

It [citation] also allowed us to check the credibility of the sources. You can usually tell the credibility of a source simply based off of the html link, the name of the person and the data given in the cited source. It also easy to click on the links and give a quick check for the website it came from. Generally the more detailed websites are and the more information given (like authors, published dates, citing their own sources, etc.) you can tell if it’s more or less credible (I68, Q6).

By foregrounding the role of generic conventions in enabling (or preventing) readers from determining the credibility of a source, this writer suggests that teachers might best help students to understand credibility by investigating how actions establish and shape credibility, and how writers can use generic conventions to make those actions easier or more possible.

### **Question 7**

Many respondents to Question 7 answered the question with some version of “The grammar or style used depends on the audience or situation,” suggesting that students at

least tacitly understand the importance of reader expectations in identifying generic conventions. For example, one writer defended her choice to write “short and informal” sentences for a debate assignment by asserting that such sentences would “not [be] too much for the audience to take in,” thus ensuring that “their attention was not drawn away from us speaking” (I60, Q6). Another writer made a similar claim about producing a “how-to” text, writing that

In how to articles we used short segments that allowed readers to quickly and simply follow instructions or look for the information they needed and not spend time reading large complex paragraphs (I78, Q7).

Furthermore, though many writers did focus on defining grammar in terms of the “correctness” of punctuation, spelling, spacing, or syntax, many others took an expansive view of grammar as the general rules or conventions by which readers make sense of a text. For example, the previous writer did not simply write about the value of concision, but focused on the arrangement of visual compositions when he explained that “[w]e used pictures and diagrams to give readers a visual example of what they needed to do or to help explain instructions” (Q7). And another writer discussed the need within narratives to make it easy to determine who was speaking during dialogue, arguing that “[i]f the reader does not know who is speaking than all the dialogue goes to waste” (I32, Q7).

These observations suggest that student writers tacitly understand the importance of context and culture in the production of texts. Thus, instructors might best benefit students by helping them to articulate that understanding, and by continuing to provide them with opportunities to encounter and use genres for which “effectiveness” is more important than “correctness.”

### **Question 8**

As previously noted, many respondents to the assessment characterized writing tasks in a binary manner, coding some as “formal” and others as “informal.” While many respondents used this conceptualization in their response to Question 8, writers also often focused on their own goals for writing. Thus, for example, one writer concluded that

A genre I would...use outside school would be the short story style we worked on. While learning about this genre I discovered the use of dialogue and detail within the text. I learned how to develop a scene or a characters personality by describing it through other characters and scenes. I would use this genre outside of school because I enjoy writing down stories and ideas I may have and produce into something more. A life goal of mine is to produce a novel and with the skills I learned in English 101 I am one step closer to developing that story (I31a, Q8).

Likewise, another writer asserted that

...recently creating my resume has been a type of genre that in it employers want to easily be able to see what I have done and what I have learned but it most also pop

out from all the other resumes they will be receiving. As well as responding to interviews and other emails from the employers and sending thank you letters to them for hiring or considering me for an internship. These are all different types of genres I have just begun to use. As I have seen in my parents' lives and professions they use many different genres (178, Q8).

These writers' responses suggest the importance of helping writers to identify and pursue their own goals whenever possible. They also foreground how important it is that young writers be able to productively connect what they do in an unfamiliar situation with prior knowledge. Other writers' responses to Question 8 suggested that respondents' reliance on a "formal/informal" binary to frame their thinking actually hides a complex and nuanced understanding of the tension between a writer's purpose, an audience's expectations, and the genres that mediate those purposes and expectations. Consider this respondent, who asserts that

The skills that I use outside of school to write are different than how I use my skills for school related writings. This is because when I am writing something that is not school related, I can be more informal and explore more genres. I can be more casual and lenient with my work since I will not have to be writing for teachers or professors. In school, I have been used to writing essays and always making sure that my writing is perfectly understandable but in the outside world, I can explore with my writing and learn different ways that I can write such as using blogs, facebook groups, or even videos (174, Q8)

While on the surface, this writer appears to frame writing as either "formal" or "informal," and to resist the goals of an important audience—"teachers or professors"—her response is, in fact, littered with observations that suggest a complex and nuanced understanding of the typical contexts within which she has produced writing. This writer understands that there is a tension between audience (the "teachers or professors" for whom she has often written) and the exploratory attitude so necessary to learning. Though she understands "school writing" as involving "writing essays and always making sure that my writing is perfectly understandable," this writer's experience has also shown her that she can produce using "blogs, facebook groups, or even videos." In sum, this writer has a keen awareness of the way school as a context can shape the actions available to her as a writer, even if she might need assistance in articulating her understanding in non-binaristic terms.

## **Section V. Implications and Next Steps**

### **Limitations Resulting from the Assessment Instrument**

Throughout their analysis of responses to the assessment instrument, members of the assessment team noted that students employed two rhetorical strategies directly connected to the structure of the instrument itself. First, students tended to focus solely on

the specific tasks named in the instrument—for example, by directly answering each of the bullet points in Question 5, and not considering any aspect of research that was only suggested or implied by the question. There also seemed to be a conceptual disconnect between question responses; this may have been linked to the concept markers listed before each question, suggesting to students that their responses should focus *only* on issues of juxtaposition, or trajectory, or tools/technology according to what the question specifically asked. For example, in questions about trajectory students rarely discussed the significance of the concept of genre as a contributing factor to trajectory and vice versa. Second, students tended to use the language of the question itself as a “springboard” into their answer; often, student responses began by “talking back” the question itself.

That students employed a strategy both well-known and often-encouraged in school settings suggested that students saw the assessment as just another school-oriented task. Furthermore, the fact that students relied often on the way the instrument itself was phrased in order to respond suggests that students engaged in another rhetorical strategy typical of first-year college students: using an example to help guide their own thinking.

To put it another way, students responded to the assessment instrument as they would any other classroom assignment: by seeking an example to help structure their thinking, and by using the feedback provided by that example to determine the scope and boundaries of their responsibilities as students in the class. But that response suggests several intriguing questions.

Firstly, how can the Writing Program learn more about how students conceptualize writing that is not explicitly tied to school? Though many questions on the instrument itself (e.g. 4, 5, 8) attempted to elicit responses from students about writing outside of ENG 101 and outside of “school writing” in general, student responses tended to remain rooted in the academic context, or to conceive of “out-of-school” writing in a rigid, binary fashion.

Secondly, how might we revise the assessment instrument (and/or the ways it is administered) to create opportunities for students to make more nuanced, integrated responses that more accurately express their complicated understandings of these concepts and skills? One way to address this issue might be to offer students “problems” or “scenarios” in writing that they are asked to address using the concepts and skills they’ve learned throughout the semester.

## **Recommendations for Future Assessment Activities**

Based on these concerns, the assessment team makes the following recommendations about future efforts to assess the Writing Program at ISU:

- 1) **Assess student writing directly.** Rather than create an instrument that will “hail” students as students and encourage them to respond as though they are responding to an assignment, the Writing Program should pursue methods of assessment that



allow them to assess student writing directly. Such efforts could be as simple as collecting and analyzing student work, and as complex as creating events during which students are invited to collect, submit, and reflect on specific instantiations of their writing in contexts outside of school.

- 2) **Investigate longitudinal options for assessment.** Given that many of the issues facing students are the result of their status as first-year students who are encountering a complex network of ideas for the first time, it is imperative that the Writing Program create opportunities to study students at several intervals after their completion of ENG 101. While students may have developed a rudimentary grasp of concepts like genre and trajectory by the end of a fifteen-week semester, it is likely that their understanding of genre and their ability to use that understanding productively will mature as they gather more experience.
- 3) **Involve instructors in development of future assessment procedures.** Many instructors in the program indicated that perceived the assessment as an extra or added activity, or that they struggled to integrate the assessment into their teaching. Alternative models of assessment need to address this issue and discover ways to create more integrated opportunities for assessment.

## **Some Implications and Recommendations for Teaching**

Based on our analysis of student responses, instructor reports we believe that the follow topics and issues are worth careful exploration as we move forward with our program's development:

- 1) **Assist writers to better articulate how specific concepts work together to enable composing.** Respondents to the assessment were actually very perceptive about the way concepts named in the Outcomes worked together to enable writing—as, for example, when writers suggested that research was part of trajectory, or that citation could function as a tool or technology. Evidence suggests, however, that such concepts can be framed in ways that make it more difficult for writers to see how such concepts are related, and for instructors to identify the ways in which writers have successfully grasped those connections. Members of the Writing Program are encouraged to create situations and spaces in which students can construct their own understanding of how concepts connect to one another.
- 2) **Whenever possible, present writers with opportunities to respond to writing situations in a way that productively utilizes their past experience, and honors their own purposes for writing.** Again and again, researchers discovered that students who were writing about subjects and situations in which they could identify a vested interest demonstrated a more nuanced and complex understanding of the concepts at hand. Furthermore, respondents who

could connect a concept to one or more past experiences were more likely to write confidently and clearly about that concept. Thus, members of the Writing Program are encouraged to create opportunities for students to respond to writing tasks that carry personal investment for the writer, and that allow the writer to make productive use of their prior experience.

- 3) **Aid writers in articulating the relationship between writing as a product and writing as an activity.** Rather than simply asking writers “What would you do?” Writing Program members are encouraged to clarify the relationship between the products of writing and the processes that bring about that product. In particular, writers could benefit from a better understanding of the ways in which genres function to mediate action. If necessary, the Writing Program should provide both students and instructors with opportunities to explore related concepts—such as Cultural Historical Activity Theory—in greater depth.
- 4) **Discover ways to encourage students to both understand and enact moments of transfer and apply their knowledge to writing in situation within and outside of school settings.** While it is true that limitations in the assessment instrument may have led students to compartmentalize their knowledge, and while it is almost certainly true that instructor’s implementation of the assessment as a “separate” school assignment may have contributed to a lack on nuance in students answers, it is also true that responses indicated that students were not often able to articulate their use of terms, concepts, and skills when asked about these matters outside the confines of their activities in ENG 101. This kind of “real world” transfer is therefore a key point for our future research and program development. We need to explore ways that students can move beyond the 101 classrooms in their conception and articulation of these strategies.
- 5) **Help students to better integrate pre-existing understandings of terms and concepts (such as “research” and grammar”) into they ways that they understand and take up our writing program terms and concepts.** Answers to the assessment questions did indicate interesting gaps in the ways that students were able to (overall) exhibit nuanced use of activities related to terms such as citation, research, and grammar and style. But student responses also indicate that a understanding of these terms is often embedded in antecedent knowledge that exists in parallel to new concepts they may be learning. Our research needs to focus on how these parallel understandings of terms, concepts and skills may be impacting how students proceed as they move into new and different writing situations.

**Proposed Format for 2<sup>nd</sup> Programmatic Assessment (scheduled for Spring 2014)**

For the next iteration of this program-wide assessment, we plan to create a different format and structure for the Assessment Instrument itself, with the hope that this new format will allow for a more robust and integrated view of students' literate practices, their critical understanding of these practices, and their ability to flexibly transfer skills and knowledge from one setting to another.

Our 2<sup>nd</sup> assessment will also make use of digital portfolio technology, available through ISU's Reggienet (Sakai) system. This system will allow us to collect portfolio data that includes both course assignments and student course work, and to collate these materials with the assessments.

The assessment instrument will consist of randomly assigned "scenarios," which will be drawn from the different types of genre and writing situations that instructors use in their sections. The scenarios will consist of a described writing situation that asks students to make choices about the genre(s) that can be produced, to complete genre research related to their targeted genre, and to then perform a genre experiment (where they work to complete research about a topic and produce it within the target genre).

The Spring 2014 assessment will consist of 3 separate components:

**Part One:** At the beginning of the semester, instructors will share with students specific information about the writing program goals, learning outcomes, and provide a list of shared vocabulary (can be presented in a single class period, or broken down to smaller portions and discussed over several class periods. [Note: The Writing Program will create digital materials (videos) that instructors can use to discuss these issues].

**Part Two:** During the final class period, students will be introduced to the scenarios, and will work to complete the assigned genre writing task.

**Part Three:** During the final examination period for each section, students will be given time to produce a "learning document" (essentially a self-assessment) that outlines their participation in the assessment production and also documents their understanding of the production, using examples from specific skills and concepts they learned in their ENG101 course. Instructors will use that time to also produce a brief narrative that examines the productions and portfolios of two randomly selected students.

#### **Assessment Research:**

The completed assessments will be reviewed by a team of selected instructors (NTTs, adjuncts, and GTAs). Their investigation will focus on analyses of learning outcomes in several ways:

- Through analysis of the responses to the genre writing scenarios and the student self-assessment, investigators will examine how well student are able to use terms and concepts related to our learning outcomes, their ability to connect their work on the assessment to the work they completed throughout the semester, and their ability to transfer skills learned through their coursework to their completion of the assessment.
- Through comparison of the genre writing scenarios with student portfolio work, the investigators will examine both connections and disconnections between the perceived quality of the assessment responses with the student's complete body of work in the course. [Note: Because of the large numbers of students in EGN101, this part of the analysis will be completed by selected 2 random students from each course and completing the more detailed analysis on those students only].
- Through analysis of the instructor narratives and course materials, investigators will be able to consider the relationship between particular teaching practices and particular categories of student responses to the genre writing scenarios.

**Goals of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Assessment** will include the following:

- (1) To assess the overall variations in the quality of student responses.
- (2) To compare performance on the assessment with performance throughout the semester (using the approximately 60 randomly selected students).
- (3) To connect the different types and qualities of student responses to the different types of course assignments, in order to assess which types of assignments seem to be most likely to support and encourage a robust and flexible understanding of diverse writing situations.

# Appendix A (ISU Writing Program Learning Outcomes for ENG 101 and ENG 101.10)

## 1. Identifying Genres:

Students should be able to identify the features of multiple genres, and articulate (through verbal or written communication) the differences that separate these genres (this ability to include both academic and non-academic genres).

Students should be able to document (through verbal or written communication) how the features of a particular genre work to shape the genre's content, style, and structure through visual, conceptual, stylistic constraints, as well as through the expectations of the reader/user.

Students should be able to demonstrate (through verbal or written communication) how choices in their own writing either conform (or don't) to the established features of the genre in which they are working.

Students should be able to compare how the features of different genres shape content (and knowledge-making) in different ways.

## 2. Creating Content:

Students should be able to create content in multiple genres.

**NOTE :** Although students may not necessarily be able to create flawless versions of an unfamiliar genre, they should at least be able to create content and shape it according to the features of a genre, and discuss/reflect on how well their work fits/or doesn't the framework of the genre. This learning outcome highlights the goal that students in ENG101 learn more than the ability to mimic specific (or generalized) academic genres, but that they instead develop a clear understanding of the complex factors that shape texts and their production. Students in ENGL 1050 should learn that each text/genre they encounter will have a range of requirements based on technology, media, genre history, etc. Students also need to increase their awareness of the ways that a text or genre is shaped, not only through compliance with established features, but in response to the history of its use, the ways it is envisioned, produced, and distributed, and the unique ways it may be taken up by reader/users.

Students should be able to employ cognitive/conceptual skills related to argument and analysis in their textual productions, and be able to identify the use of these strategies in their own productions.

**NOTE :** We highlight these rhetorical strategies specifically, because they often come up as terms used to discuss writing in the academy. Students should be familiar with these terms, and be able to identify how they might work differently in different genre situations. Projects in the course will certainly discuss and practice other rhetorical strategies, but these should specifically be included as a primary component of at least one of the genres in the class.

Students should be able to employ a range of other skills (rhetorical strategies, mechanics, style, etc.) and defend these choices as thoughtful response to specific writing and genre situations.

## 3. Organizing Information in Multiple Genres:

Students should be able to identify the organizational structures that govern different kinds of writing genres.

**NOTE** : While this knowledge can be based on different academic and non-academic genres, student learning should definitely include the ability to organize traditional-style writing genres using features such as clearly delineated topics for paragraphs, creating effective thesis statements, integrating transition statements to create logical flow, etc. Students should also be able to identify and articulate the differences in organizational technique that apply to various writing genres.

#### **4. Technology/Media:**

Students should be able to identify the technologies (print or digital) and tools necessary to produce a text in a given genre.

Students should be able to decide on and use appropriate digital and print technologies to produce a genre (based on the genre's required features).

Students should be able to demonstrate (through written or verbal communication) how a given text is affected by the use of different technologies or media (in terms of its conception, production, and distribution, as well as the potential ways the text may be taken up by users).

#### **5. The Trajectories of Literate Activity:**

Students should be able to trace the trajectories of a text (the path a text takes in its production, distribution, and use) in reference to the context and history that shape a genre or a writing situation in a particular ways. This includes the way a particular instance of text is shaped by interactions with people, materials, and technologies; the social and cultural forces that shape how a genre is understood and identified; and the potential uses (both intended and unintended) that reader/users may devise for the text and its content.

#### **6. Flexible Research Skills:**

Students should be able to demonstrate knowledge of how to find a variety of source materials for research purposes. This should include using digital databases, print material, and archival resources.

Students should demonstrate an awareness of the various methods which can be used to collect data (e.g., experiment, observation, various kinds of survey, and interview methods).

#### **7. Using Citation Formats and Citing Source Material in Multiple Genres:**

Students should be able to cite sources correctly according to one or more academic citation formats (MLA, APA, CBE, Chicago Manual of Style).<sup>3</sup>

Students should be able to integrate source material into their written projects in ways appropriate to the projects' genre(s). This includes the ability to cite material correctly, to quote and paraphrase source material, and to effectively integrate source material to support an argument, persuasive goal, or analysis.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> At least one project in ENGL 101 should incorporate the use of source material consistent with a particular academic citation format (MLA, APA, Chicago Manual of Style, CBE, etc.).

<sup>4</sup> The key skill of this outcome is not for students to be able to cite sources flawlessly in MLA, APA, or other formats—rather, students should be able to recognize when and how to use source material in their writing, and be able to recognize that the use of source material is in ways dependent on genre (i.e., a news article, a press release, and a literary analysis paper may all use source materials, but the ways in which source material is integrated—and cited—differs in these different writing situations). Instructors need to make sure (if using primarily MLA) that students understand the complexity of academic citation.

Students should be able to investigate and demonstrate how different methods of citing source material (including academic and non-academic attribution) are shaped by the goals and intentions embedded in the citation style.

## **8. Grammatical Usage and Sentence Structure:**

Students should be able to identify how specific genres are defined, in part through the use of sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, and vocabulary.

Students should demonstrate the ability to make informed decisions regarding the appropriate sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, and vocabulary in their own writing (based on an assessment of the various genre features required in a particular writing situation).

Students should be able to identify the match between an example of a genre that they've produced and a representative example of that same genre (in terms of grammar, usage, and style).

Students should be able to identify in their own writing projects the aspects of sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, and vocabulary which require improvement, and demonstrate through multiple revisions the ability to address these problem areas.

## **9. Cultural & Social Contexts:**

Students should be able to identify cultural, political and social interactions that shape or influence how writing happens in a particular genre or situation. These might be local interactions within a particular group that specifically constrain how a particular text is produced, or interactions that take place at a national or international level and impact texts and genres more generally.

Students should be able to identify (within their own writing and the writing of others) specific examples of how content/form/genre/style respond to cultural, political and social influences and pressures.

## Appendix B (The Spring 2012 Assessment Instrument)

### Writing Program Assessment Spring 2012 The Assessment Instrument

The assessment instrument will be presented to the students as a series of questions, which they'll address using a report-style structure. At least one of the questions calls for student to create maps that illustrate their activities.

#### Question 1: Identifying Genre

**The response to this question should contain two parts:**

**Part One:** Using specific examples from class discussions about genre, explain your understanding of how genres are identified, constructed, produced.

**Part Two:** Then, select one of your major compositions you did for your class this semester. Describe how you understand the specific elements of the "genre" (or genres) for that writing. How was the content you created shaped by the boundaries and features of the genre? Be sure to provide specific examples from the text to illustrate your points and makes sure to thoroughly describe the choices you made regarding complying (or not) with the genre in your writing. (For example, were there things you couldn't say about your topic because it didn't fit with the genre? How did the genre affect the research you included?)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT: Think about how you understood and made decisions about the following components of the genre writing you are using as your example:

- Use of language.
- Use of description, argument, or analysis. Did you use any of these approaches? How? How did your use comply (or not) with the expectations of the genre?
- Use of a specific tone or style of language.
- Use of a specific way of organizing the text (conceptually or visually). For example, transition sentences, headers, or other organizational structures.
- Use of a specific format or structure (the look of the text and/or how it appears on the page either on the page or in a nontraditional written media).
- In terms of design, how did the genre requirements impact how the text looked or was presented?

(NOTE: if you worked on a project where you deliberately did NOT fit your content to the genre, you might want to describe how and why you made choices to do something different, and discuss how your choices resulted in a text that didn't fit the genre.)

#### Question 2: Organizing Information in Multiple Genres

**The response to this question should contain two parts:**

**Part One:** Select any one genre that you worked on during the class and discuss how the organizational features of that genre work to shape the content.



**Part Two:** Select a different genre (from the first one) and discuss/analyze how the features and requirements of the new genre might shape the content differently. If your class has done this kind of “genre juxtaposition” (moving content from one genre to another) you can use examples of that work for this response. Otherwise, you can choose any other genre you think would be interesting to discuss.

**THINGS TO THINK ABOUT**

- Describe the boundaries of the two genres (talk about differences and similarities – how the genres diverge or overlap).
- Use examples of the genres (e.g., texts you talked about in class, or texts you created) to highlight specific features of the two genres.
- Discuss how these particular genres mediate meaning (how they shape or alter the meaning an author can produce).
- Discuss the audiences/users for these genres. Are they used by different people, or for different purposes?
- Discuss the media/materials/tools use to create the genres.
- Discuss how the genres have changed over time.
- Discuss how texts in this genre are stored or archived or could re-purposed in some way (i.e., used for something other than what the author intended).

### **Question 3: Technology/Media**

Respond to one of the following writing situations by describing the decisions you might need to make regarding technology or media – What tools would you use to create and distribute the text? Keep in mind that tools/media/technology can include any material object you use to produce or distribute the text. What “things” would you use to create the text, and what (perhaps unconventional) tools/or venues might you use to distribute it? Also consider how these technology/media choices impact the text you create.

To do this, imagine you need to produce a text about one of the following topics (choose only one):

**Topics:**

- An advertisement for a personal hygiene product.
- A review of a film, play, music album or song.
- An instructional how-to guide for a game (board game, video game, etc.).
- A scrapbook chronicling the experiences of your first year of college.
- A billboard addressing a proposed change in some policy/practice within the community.

**Note #1:** Please explain in as much detail as possible. You can use examples from choices you made on projects during the semester – if applicable – to illustrate how these decisions can have important effects on the text one produces.

**Note #2:** Be sure to consider who the audience would be for this hypothetical document, and how that might affect your choices.

**Note #3:** Keep in mind that “technology” doesn’t necessarily mean “digital.”

### **Question 4: The Trajectories of Literate Activity**

We'd like you to create a visual map of one your major textual productions from this semester (could be a production that you did outside of ENG 101) and discuss the text's trajectory. Consider these three elements: 1) everything that went into to making the text, from your previous knowledge to the resources you used, and even what was necessary to create those resources, 1) what genres is your text connected to or derived from and how might you map these genres in connection to your text, and 2) what are some of the future interactions that individuals might have with your text. Keep in mind a person need not physically see your project to interact with it. Think about the following:

- How did the text begin and how did it move out into the world?
- What other genres (generally) or specific examples of genres did you use to inform/understand your production?
- Who read it?
- Who do you anticipate might read it in the future?
- What might those readers do with the text?
- How might the text be stored, or disseminated to others?
- What new kinds of texts (if any) could the ideas in the text be used to create?
- What cultural institutions or organizations (if any) does the text help to support or challenge?

Your visual map can be done digitally or in some kind of "print-based" form. Instructors and students can (and should) discuss how you want to approach this mapping process. Be sure to include some kind of key and/or a written discussion of your mapping process.

### **Question Five: Flexible Research Skills**

Imagine that you plan to do research on a more specific variant of one of the following topics, but not as an assignment for school. Discuss where you would go (physically and digitally) and what you would do to find the information you need.

Your choices Include:

- the current U.S. economic crisis
- a genealogy or family history
- potential careers in your major or area of study
- the body of work of a particular author/filmmaker/artist
- the causes of and treatments for autism
- the cultural/community values/rituals/beliefs of a particular group
- The aftermath of the "Arab Spring"
- Ramifications of the "Occupy" movement

Note: You'll probably need to make these topics more specific before you begin to respond to this question.

In your response to this question, try to describe (in as much detail as possible) some (or all) of the following issues:

- What kinds of technologies or media might you make use of in your search?
- Who are some of the people you might gather information from (either as informants or as experts)?
- How would you decide what kind of information is applicable to your project?
- What criteria would you use to make decisions about the types of information that would be useful or valid for this project?
- Using the possible texts for this topic discuss some examples of sources that might or might not be credible to use for this project.
- What might you do with this information? Why and how?

### **Question Six: Using Citation Formats/Citing Source Material in Multiple Genres**

Explore how citation functions within one of your projects from this semester. What citation format did you use, and how did it work within your text? Why was this source cited in this way? Then, discuss the purpose of citation methods in general. You may want consider how your evaluation of sources affects the purpose of citation.

### **Question Seven: Grammatical Usage and Sentence Structure**

Discuss a particular issue/concept or “rule” of style or punctuation that you learned about during ENG 101? Try to provide examples of how you worked with these concepts in specific projects or writing activities during the semester (both in 101 and perhaps in other classes). Explain specifically the rule of this convention as if you were going to teach it to someone. Consider how you came to this knowledge.

### **Question Eight: The issue of Transfer**

Take a few moments to consider the kinds of genres you use to write outside of school. What kinds of skills have you developed to help you use those genres? Now take a moment to consider the kinds of genres you’ve used to write in ENG 101. What kinds of skills have you developed to help you use those genres? In what ways are the skills you use to write outside of school similar to or different from the skills you use to write in school? Please use examples from your writing to illustrate your discussion.