

Teaching for Genre Awareness for Transfer: Afternoon Panel B & Breakout Groups

Overall, students in both 101 and 145 were *very* aware of genre and were able to engage in genre research successfully. These examples from 101 and 145 reports are pretty typical of what most students wrote in their reports:

Student Responses:

To engage in genre analysis for our genre we googled the conventions and characteristics of a basic proposal to get an idea of what is included in a proposal. We looked at templates of group proposals to see what they looked like and what some of the repetitive things was we kept seeing.

After receiving our genre of “brochure,” together as a group we discussed the things we had already known about this genre. Each of us threw out different characteristics and made a list with all of our ideas, such as it being a tri-fold paper, used for businesses or events, contains information about it, and can have contact information. We then used the Internet to help us get any kind of information that we might have left out.

We started off our Genre research by just looking up possible permission slip forms, on Google, to get an idea of what is included on them. There wasn't any trouble finding information and templates for this genre because we looked at a lot of different teaching websites that had some examples on it. We looked at a variety of different types of permission slip examples.

A good portion of students, especially in 145, tended to see the value of doing genre research and express it in their reports and in the post-assessment survey:

“There wasn't anything that I thought was useless. All the information and techniques that we did taught me something and allowed me to apply it to real life situations and to my experiment grades.”¹

However, students seem to be having some significant difficulties in transferring the skills they learned in class to the assessment. They can grasp that these skills could be beneficial, but they are not quite grasping how to apply them in new settings.

¹ This comment is fairly typical of many of the responses we received from 145 students. We think this is, in part, because the more “practically applied” nature of both 145 and 145.13 tend to help students see the value of writing research practices. Whereas in 101, students are tending to primarily focus on the difference of this class to their previous experiences in writing because they, perhaps, have yet to experience a wide range of school or workplace genres. Therefore, the value is still abstract for many of them.

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| Survey Questions: | Student Responses: |
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| Can you describe any skills, knowledge or concepts that you learned in ENG 101/ENG 101.10 that you think you will NOT be able to use in future writing situations? Again, try not to focus on a particular assignment. | As a teacher I will never have to write a comparison of reviews of a book. So i believe that this was not a very good class for freshmen. The class was pointless. |
| Can you describe any skills, knowledge or concepts that you learned in ENG 101/ENG 101.10 that you think you will NOT be able to use in future writing situations? Again, try not to focus on a particular assignment. | There was definitely a big focus on the genres and less on how to actually write the papers (that we will definitely need to be aware of for future classes). |
| What ways might we consider altering this course to better help students improve their ability to write in new situations? | Actually using projects that could potentially be used by any student, providing information about writing and not "writing genres". |

These examples show that, in some instances, transfer is being actively hampered by students being unable to see the value of the skills they are learning. Some students don't understand that the practice of researching and writing a range of genres can be practical. They regard "practical" (i.e. major-related) genres as useful, and genres they don't know about or think they will not use in the future as less valuable (i.e. "pointless").

There was also an interesting paradox that turned up—where the same student would make comments in the post-assessment survey that indicated he/she felt there had been **both** too much writing **and** too little writing going on in class. This kind of paradox happened in enough responses (although still a small minority of the total) that we feel it might be significant. Could this kind of paradoxical response illustrate that transfer is being hampered by students' antecedent knowledge of what a writing class is supposed to be and what writing in college is supposed to look like (and is this especially true for 101 students)? Consider the following examples:

| Survey Question: |
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| What ways might we consider altering this course to better help students improve their ability to write in new situations? |

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| Student Responses: |
| Possibly having more writing assignments, or get feed back from all of them with plenty of time before the smester ends. |
| Less reports and more time. |
| More frequent, less heavy load assignments. |
| The course did make me write in new situations but it did not enhance my writing. |

Overall, our analysis of the assessment indicates that while both students and teachers are placing importance on the activity of genre analysis (and we were thrilled with how this played out in the ways students described the course!), this work is still seen by students (and perhaps, in part, by instructors) as part of “class work” and not as fully integrated activities that one would employ when communicating and writing in any situation. This same issue of transfer is part of **both** the working group on “Creating Writing Researchers” **and** “Assigning and Grading Uptake Genres.” However, this working group should try to get to the heart of the issue of transfer as it applied to our courses, perhaps through discussion of these types of questions:

- How can we increase the awareness of how specific skills transfer to daily activities as writers and communicators?
- How can our classes emphasize this transfer (perhaps as part of the grade for the course)
- How does/can awareness of transfer connect with or become part of how we grade uptake in our courses?
- What would **proof** of transfer look like? To the student? To the teacher?