

Integrating the Grassroots Writing Research Journal: Morning Panel B & Breakout Groups

In the post-assessment survey, student comments about the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* were more negative than we expected (and would like to see). The comments generally took the form of either a lack of connection between the articles and the work in the class, or a sense that the journal was not integrated into the work of the class.

Survey Questions:	Student Responses:
What ways might we consider altering this course to better help students improve their ability to write in new situations?	Less homework assignments that are about reading Grassroots writing journals. ¹
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.	Some of the stories that were read in the Grassroots journal were irrelevant to me and felt like it was not worth reading. Other than that, everything that we did in class was useful in the future.
How would you describe this course to another student who was going to be taking it?	It will be nothing like you think it will be. It's not the normal English class, which isn't necessarily a bad thing. However, you will have to study and dissect genres, and write multiple analyses on the most mundane things you interact with on a daily basis. Oh, and almost EVERYTHING is a genre. One more thing: the book that you bought for \$50 at the beginning of the semester will *maybe* used twice, and since it changes every semester you won't even be able to sell it to get your money back.

These students don't necessarily dislike the journal as a whole, but the perceived uselessness and wasted money are important to them. As the following comment shows, there were some students who actively wanted to use the journal articles more, but felt as if the articles weren't included in the curriculum:

¹ The post-assessment survey didn't actually ask any questions specifically about the journal, so these comments come from students who had strong opinions. It is possible that many students like the journal or have neutral feelings about it, but didn't feel compelled to mention it in their comments.

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Survey Question:	Student Response:
What ways might we consider altering this course to better help students improve their ability to write in new situations?	Read more Grassroots

While these types of comments were confined to a minority of the students, only 1.5 % of the sample population made negative comments, we think it points to several possible issues that we may want to work as a program to resolve:

(1) It is possible that as a group we are still not approaching our use of the journal in ways that illustrate to students **the methods** these articles employ to do is writing research. In other words, rather than approaching these articles as examples of daily research methods for **Practical Writing Researchers**, our attitudes and intentions towards these articles is still connected (in our own antecedent teaching and learning experience) to a “readings” approach. We assign the articles as readings, for their content and so that we can ask students to consider the topics, as well as issues like authorial intent, style, rhetorical positioning—all the kinds of things we would want to consider and discuss when addressing any kind of literary or public interest readings we might assign. However, the intent of the articles is **first** to serve as examples of how to become writing researchers. The fact that students (and possibly ourselves as instructors) are having difficulty connecting the types of research activity in the articles with the types of research activity that we need to do (in practical ways) in our daily experiences as writers may mean that we (and therefore the students) are still having trouble connecting daily writing research with this particular type of end product of that research: *Grassroots* articles.

(2) Students aren’t making connections between the work the authors do in the journal and their own experience doing the uptake genres. So another issue that we need to consider is how to help them connect the activities represented in the articles to the activities that they are using to do genre/CHAT analyses of different writing situations. We might also discuss how the “genre” of the *Grassroots* articles “professionalizes” that knowledge in particular ways—moving it from “what writers do” to “scholarship about what writers do.” If we can figure out how to do this, it could be incredibly useful, as it is an example of how knowledge is professionalized that could then be connected to other kinds of knowledge that is produced, both within the academy and outside of it.

(3) Finally, while numbers of submissions for the journal are up, we would still like to promote the journal as a learning tool (and publication venue) for students who become more interested

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in this work. That means that the journal needs to be integrated not just as a “reading and learning” tool, but as a “writing and learning” tool.

In your working group, the issue of the journal can be considered from any perspective that the group thinks is valuable. However, we’d ask that you take as a baseline premise that the articles in the journal are **real-world examples** of exactly the kind of thinking, and exactly the kind of writing-research activities, that we need to promote to students throughout the course in every way. So surely there are ways that we can help students to see these connections more actively, and as more connected to their daily experience as writers.