

Education 251 Teaching Writing: Theory and Practice  
Fall 2012  
Kathleen O'Connor

Class meeting time and location: T/Th 11:30-12:55, The Hazelton Room, 109 Kanbar Hall

Contact information: Office—102D Kanbar; 725-3760; koconnor@bowdoin.edu

Office hours: flexible; Call or send an e-mail to schedule a meeting. I am generally available after class on Tuesday and Thursday and between 10:00 and 3:00 on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

## **W E L C O M E . . .**

to you new Writing Assistants and participants in Education 251! As a Writing Assistant, you will contribute your talent, time, and energy to the Writing Project and will offer intellectual leadership in the Bowdoin community: Thank you for taking this step!

In this course we will explore the relationships among writing, speaking, learning, and thinking. Since the Writing Project has the practical goal of helping students improve their writing, this course has a strong practical dimension. You will work with classmates in this course and with students in other Bowdoin courses on their writing--and, of course, on your own. As scholars and professionals in training, you will use a variety of theoretical lenses to reflect on your practices of teaching, learning, and writing. The course readings offer lenses from the fields of composition, rhetoric, literacy studies, cognitive psychology, and education to frame your reflections. As we consider a range of approaches to writing, learning, and teaching, we will focus especially on collaborative methods, as collaborative learning is the cornerstone of Writing Project pedagogy. When you have completed the course, I want you to be able to talk comfortably and productively with other students about writing. You should be able to read a piece of writing and respond to the writer in ways that improve not only the written product but the the writer's process as well.

In keeping with this emphasis, the course is structured around collaboration. I will facilitate discussion far more often than I lecture. Since the material of this course is performative as well as propositional, i.e. it's not just about what you KNOW but about what you can DO, you will need to engage actively--individually and as a group. We'll work on our collaborative skills in class and hope to transfer them to your work as writing assistants. We will also explore the tension--possibly even the contradiction--inherent in the concept "peer tutor."

This syllabus, like the course it represents, is a work-in-progress, a draft, though it has been revised on many occasions. Like most drafts, it can benefit from further revision, at your initiative and mine. I invite your feedback at any point throughout the semester.

## **Methods and Requirements:**

**Reading** the ideas of scholars who study and teach writing provides a major impetus for class discussion and offers you a conceptual framework for the judgments you will make as Writing Assistants. You should read the assigned articles and chapters carefully, identify their main points, analyze their arguments, and measure them against your own experience and convictions.

**Writing Letters:** For a couple of spans of time during the semester, you will exchange letters (a page or two) with a classmate. In the letters, you will summarize the main argument(s) made in the readings, note how the author supports the arguments, analyze them critically, weigh them against

your own experience as a writer, student, and/or teacher, and raise questions. (Try ending letters with a question for your partner!) Some of your letters will be primarily analytical; others may be more reflective, working through issues of concern to you and the class. I hope that the letter exchange will provide a springboard for lively discussion and a shared foundation of theoretical and practical knowledge. I encourage all members of the class to speak and listen to each other and to build a constructive and engaged classroom community. Please keep a copy of all your letters; I will ask you to turn them in as a portfolio twice during the semester.

**Writing and responding to essays:** You will write three essays, posting two to our Blackboard blog and reading your final essay aloud to the class. The essays will integrate your ideas about the theories proposed in the readings with a narrative and analysis of your experience as a writer or writing tutor. You will respond to drafts of your each others' essays along the way.

**Discussions:** Whether we are discussing articles written by composition scholars or papers written by Bowdoin students, **I expect you be fully present and active**--listening and speaking, giving and taking, offering and responding--both in small groups and with the class as a whole. It is important to me that we all practice communication and collaboration as well as theorize about them. In your work as Writing Assistants, you will actually speak more than you write, so it is important to build excellent speaking and listening skills. In sharing ideas, you will become each other's best resources and thus important participants in our ongoing conversation. Your grade will reflect the quality of the ideas you contribute to our discussions as well as the quality of the ideas that you articulate in writing.

**Writing Assistance:** This semester, you will begin providing writing assistance to other students, both your classmates and writers in Film Studies 101, "Introduction to Film Narrative." You will also observe and work a shift in the Writing Workshop; we'll make time in class to talk about the logistics and reflect on your experiences.

**Grades:** Skepticism about grading pervades scholarship on teaching writing and on education more broadly, but practical factors, some external to the classroom, make it necessary and valuable. The selection process for Writing Assistants gives me high expectations of you: I assume that you will prepare for classes by reading carefully and reflecting critically on your reading; that you will exchange ideas in conversation and in writing; that you will write and revise conscientiously; and that you will work responsibly and generously with the students assigned to you. If you do all these things, you will receive at least a B in the course. If you do them incompletely or lack a sense of responsibility, even if you earn a passing grade, you will not move on to work with the Writing Project. Those who accomplish a substantial portion of these tasks with an extra measure of wisdom, wit, openness, insight, sensitivity, vigor, polish, and/or generosity--will receive an A. I will apply these criteria to each of you individually; I do not force them onto a curve.

**Course Materials:** Most of the readings are posted as electronic reserves through the library and accessible through the course Blackboard site. Books are available in the textbook store.

Hacker, Diana, Rules for Writers, 7th ed. (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 2011)  
Harris, Joseph, Rewriting: How to Do Things with Texts (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2006)  
Ryan, Leigh, and Zimmerelli, Lisa, The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 2006)

## **Course Schedule:**

**August 30**                    **Welcome, introductions, orientation to Education 251**

**Sept. 4**                    **Writing to Learn, Writing to Think**

Toby Fulwiler, "Writing: An Act of Cognition," Teaching Writing in All Disciplines, ed. C. Williams Griffin (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1982) 15-26.

Janet Emig, "Writing as a Mode of Learning," College Composition and Communication 28 (May 1977) 122-8.

Peter Elbow, "Teaching Two Kinds of Thinking by Teaching Writing," Embracing Contraries (New York: Oxford, 1986) 54-63.

Joan Didion, "Why I Write," The Writer on her Work, Vol. 1, ed. Janet Sternburg (New York: Norton, 1980) 17-25.

In your first letter to a classmate, please reflect on these articles. What claims do the authors make about the relationships among writing, thinking, and learning, and how do they support them? Does your experience bear out their claims? Have the authors overlooked or misrepresented something important? What implications do their ideas have for your own learning, thinking, and writing?

**Sept. 6**                    **Learning to Write--Writing as a Process**

Anne Lamott, "Shitty First Drafts," bird by bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life (New York: Random House, 1994) 21-32.

Peter Elbow, "Freewriting," Writing With Power: Techniques for Mastering the Writing Process, (New York: Oxford, 1981) 13-19.

Alex Johnson, "Why Isaac Bashevis Singer, Truman Capote, Joseph Conrad and Virginia Woolf (Among Others) Were Having a Bad Morning," How Writers Teach Writing, Nancy Kline, ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1992) 157-174.

The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors, "The Writing Process," Chapter 2.

In your letter, describe your writing process. How do you write papers? Best and worst case—be honest! How does your process compare with the process spelled out in the articles? Do you think your process is typical for college students? Do you ever encounter writer's block? Why?

**Sept. 11**                    **Writing Process (cont.) : Revising**

Nancy Sommers, "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers," College Composition and Communication 31 (Dec 1980) 378-388.

Linda Flower, "Writer-Based Prose: A Cognitive Basis for Problems in Writing," College English 41

(September 1979) 19-37.

Richard Lanham, "Where's the Action?" Revising Prose, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (New York: Macmillan, 1992)

Sommers, Nancy, "Between the Drafts," College Composition and Communication (43/1) Feb. 1992, 23-31

For your letter: How do you revise? Which of the authors' ideas about revision apply to your revision process or offer you a potentially fruitful way to think about it? How might you imagine using their models to work productively with other students on revision?

*The Writing Workshop opens tomorrow night, September 12. **By Fall Break (Oct. 5), you should observe a full shift in the Workshop.** Arrive a few minutes early, introduce yourself to one of the Writing Assistants on duty, and ask if it's OK to observe his or her conferences. (I'll warn them beforehand.) Workshops are open Sunday through Wednesday evenings and Thursday afternoons in the Center for Learning and Teaching. To see exact times, go to the website, <http://www.bowdoin.edu/writing-project> and follow the link "to sign up for a conference."*

**Sept. 13** Harris, Joseph, Rewriting: How to Do Things with Texts, p. 1-52

Share with your letter partner ways in which you tried to "come to terms" with source texts in writing you did last year. What kinds of things have you tried to do with source texts?

**Sept. 18** Harris, Joseph, Rewriting: How to Do Things with Texts, p. 54-72 and 98-123.

For your letter: Does Harris's book help you think about rewriting in ways that will help you write papers? Are there insights that might help you respond to others' papers and suggest opportunities for meaningful revision? Do you do different things with texts depending on the discipline in which you write them?

**Sept. 20** **Workshop on Bowdoin papers**

Read the sample Bowdoin papers (available on Blackboard) and think about how you might help the writer use texts more productively to revise and develop his or her own ideas.

**Sept. 25** **Collaborative Learning: Theory and Practice**

Kenneth Bruffee, "Collaborative Learning and the Conversation of Mankind," College English, 46/7 (November 1984) 635-652.

Muriel Harris, "Talking in the Middle: Why Writers Need Writing Tutors," College English 57/1 (Jan. 1995) 27-42.

In your letters, write about these theoretical arguments for collaborative methods of teaching and learning. Which do you find most compelling? Which do you question? What are the challenges of translating the theory into practice? What are the crucial factors for success, and what factors can

obstruct collaborative learning? (*Start to think about your own experiences with collaborative learning to prepare to write an essay due a week from today.*)

### **Sept. 27 Collaborative Learning (continued)**

Leigh Ryan and Lisa Zimmerelli, Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors, Chapters 1, 3 and 4.

Gary Lichtenstein, "The Ethics of Peer Tutoring," Writing Center Journal 4/1 (1983), 29-32.

Susan Hubbuch, "A Tutor Needs to Know the Subject Matter To Help a Student With a Paper...," Writing Center Journal 8/2 (1988) 23-30.

For your letters: How does peer tutoring, as presented in these readings, correspond with your expectations for the role of Writing Assistant? What surprises you? What seems most useful? What would you add or critique based on your experience as a writer or tutor in the past? If you have observed a Workshop conference, please comment on the benefits and challenges for writer and WA. What questions and comments do you have at this point about conducting conferences?

### **Oct. 2 Responding to Writing: Insights from Writing Teachers**

Nancy Sommers, "Responding to Student Writing," College Composition and Communication 33/2 (May 1982) 148-156.

Lil Brannon and C. H. Knoblauch, "On Students' Rights to Their Own Texts: A Model of Teacher Response," College Composition and Communication 33/2 (May 1982) 157-166.

Donald Daiker, "Learning to Praise," Writing and Response: Theory, Practice, and Research (Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1989) 103-113.

No need to write a letter for today, but think about how these insights from teachers of writing might apply to tutoring. Which principles will you adopt and/or adapt? Which approaches don't fit tutors as well? Do these reflections remind you of responses you have received from teachers in the past?

*Instead of today's letter, please gather and review the letters you have written so far and give them to me with a brief cover letter that introduces them. What do you notice when you review them? What do you want me to notice? Have you learned anything by writing them? Has writing these informal reflections affected your process for writing more formally?*

### **Oct. 4 Case Studies of Collaborative Learning in Theory and Practice**

Draft an essay (3-5 pages) on your own experience(s) with collaborative learning. Describe a specific collaborative activity or set of activities from high school or college and describe how it lived up to the ideals presented in the articles we've read and/or how it fell short. Using these articles, analyze and argue WHY the learning activity succeeded or did not. **BRING TWO COPIES OF YOUR DRAFT TO CLASS.**

*Have a good Fall Break!*

**\*\*\*Fall Break\*\*\***

*You should hold conferences with your writers from Film Studies 101 by Sunday, October 15.*

**October 11    Disciplinary Conversations and Conventions**

David J. Klooster and Patricia L. Bloem, “Learning Academic Languages: Joining the Conversations of Scholars, Chapter 2 from The Writer's Community (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995) 37-48.

Sam Wineburg, “Teaching the Mind New Habits,” Chronicle of Higher Education, April 11, 2003 (handout).

You don't need to write a letter on this topic, but do reflect on a time when you have come up against the conventions of a new discipline. Think also whether and why the conventions of a particular discipline appeal to you—or not. Why do you think that particular conventions have become established in particular fields? Which disciplinary methods and values might motivate them?

*Please revise your essay on Collaborative Learning and post the revision on our Blackboard blog.*

**Oct. 16:        Writing in the Sciences (Prof. Lisa Mangiamele)**

Gopen, George and Swan, Judith, “The Science of Scientific Writing,” American Scientist 78, November- December 1990, 550-558

Kuyper, Barbara, “Bringing up Scientists in the Art of Critiquing Research,” BioScience 41/4, April 1991, 248-50.

“Writing a Scientific Paper,” Bowdoin College Biology Department (handout)

Consider any questions you have for our guest, whether from a perspective inside or outside the sciences. Begin thinking about the writing assignment due on Tuesday, Oct. 23 (see below).

**Oct. 18        Disciplinary Conventions: Workshop on Bowdoin papers**

Read the sample papers from different disciplines and consider how to respond. Consider whether and how the papers reflect the conventions of a particular field. How would your understanding of the methodology and conventions of the discipline affect your plan for the conference?

*(Begin work on a blog post introducing first-year students to writing in a discipline with which you are familiar.)*

**Oct. 23        Blog post on Disciplinary Conventions**

Using some of the categories suggested by Klooster and Bloem in the chapter on academic languages and any you'd like to add, draft an introduction to the writing conventions of a discipline with which you are familiar. Your brief introduction is designed to be posted to a blog for students taking

courses in that department. (That's in theory; in practice it will be posted on our course discussion board). Please note whether the expectations for student writing differ from those for professionals writing in the field. You *may* talk with a professor, scan the internet, or look at model publications in the field, but you should write primarily by reflecting on your own experience writing in the discipline that you choose. **BRING TWO COPIES OF YOUR DRAFT TO CLASS.**

### **Oct. 25      Language Conventions—Editing for Grammar**

Curzan, Anne, "Says Who? Teaching and Questioning the Rules of Grammar," PMLA 124/3 870-879

Emily Meyer and Louise Z. Smith, "Sentence-Level Errors: Making Connections," The Practical Tutor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) 159-177.

Rules for Writers chapter on Grammar (sections 19-27). (You may skim these sections, honing in on grammar about which you have questions or which you're not sure how to explain.)

St. Martin's Handbook 20 most common errors (online).

*Bring questions about grammar to class—those that bother you as you write and your "pet peeves"—the grammar mistakes that most annoy you-- when you read. You may skim some of the sections of Rules for Writers, but please do read sections that address issues you're less familiar with. Even where you are familiar, please shore up your vocabulary for talking about grammar and style and note how they are presented. Please read all of the Meyer/Smith chapter and Curzan article.*

### **October 30    Language Conventions---Editing for Style**

Rules for Writers sections on Clarity (chapters 8-18)

Bring a favorite guide for writing style if you have one. (Strunk and White? Joseph Williams' Style?)

Review Richard Lanham's essay from September 15 ["Where's the Action?" Revising Prose, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (New York: Macmillan, 1992)].

*Revise your essay on writing in a particular discipline and post it on our Blackboard "blog."*

### **November 1    Language Conventions and Cultural Contexts: Responding to writing by multi-lingual and –cultural students**

Muriel Harris and Tony Silva, "Tutoring ESL Students: Issues and Options," CCC 44/4 (Dec. 1993) 525-537.

Robin Murie, "Building Editing Skills: Putting Students at the Center of the Editing Process," New Directions for Teaching and Learning 70 (Summer 1997) 61-68.

Rules for Writers, section on ESL Grammar, 243-270—skim to get an idea of typical challenge areas.

Start another letter exchange. For this first letter, share what you know from your own experience or from a conversation with another writer who spoke or wrote another language before English. What has been your/his/her experience writing at Bowdoin? What difficulties have arisen? What kind of help has been most beneficial? If the writer learned to write in another country, did he or she learn a different set of cultural expectations for writing?

**Nov. 6            New Words/New Worlds: Cultural and Political Aspects of Literacy**

Joanne Kilgour Dowdy, "Ovuh Dyuh," The Skin That We Speak: Thoughts on Language and Culture in the Classroom, ed. Lisa Delpit and Joanne Kilgour Dowdy (New York: New Press, 2002) 4-13.

Amy Tan, "Mother Tongue," The Contemporary Essay, ed. Donald Hall, 3rd ed. (Boston: St. Martin's Press, 1995) 528-534.

bell hooks, "Language: Teaching New Worlds/New Words" Teaching to Transgress (New York: Routledge, 1994) 167-175.

Write a letter to your partner describing and reflecting on the cultural context(s) of your language learning. How have familial, cultural, and educational influences shaped your speaking, reading, and writing—the way that you relate to and use language? How have those contexts shaped the reading, speaking, and writing that you do at Bowdoin?

**Nov. 8            Different Worlds in the Same Classroom: Cultural, Political (and Psychological) Aspects of Literacy**

Mike Rose, "The Politics of Remediation," in Lives on the Boundary: The Struggles and Achievements of America's Underprepared (New York: The Free Press, 1989) 167-204. (handout)

In your letter, try to tease out the various strands of Rose's chapter. What does he say about the psychology of remediation and about the political contexts within which it occurs—national educational politics and the institutional politics of higher education?

**Nov. 13           Different Worlds in the Same Classroom: Developmental Models for Learning, Thinking, and Writing**

William Perry, "Different Worlds in the Same Classroom: Students' Evolution in their Visions of Knowledge and Their Expectations of Teachers," On Teaching and Learning (May 1985): 1-17.

Ann Penrose and Cheryl Geisler, "Reading and Writing Without Authority," College Composition and Communication 45(4) December 1994.

For your (last!) letter: (How) Do the cognitive developmental stages posited by Perry play out in Bowdoin classrooms and/or writing conferences? Is his model a useful frame for understanding student writers? Does a student's sense of authority affect his or her writing? How might writing assistants help students develop that sense? Should they?

**Nov. 15      Learning Styles, Differences, and (Dis)Abilities**

Shoshana Beth Konstant, "Multisensory Tutoring for Multisensory Learners," St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors, ed. Christina Murphy and Steve Sherwood (Boston: St. Martin's Press, 1995) 109-111.

Jan C. Thompson, "Beyond Fixing Today's Paper: Promoting Metacognition and Writing Development in the Tutorial through Self-Questioning," The Writing Lab Newsletter (23/6) February 1999, 1-6.

No letter for today, but consider your learning style and how it might or might not mesh with that of students with whom you work. What might you do to meet the learning needs of students who learn differently from the way that you learn and think about writing?

*The next draft for Film Studies 101 will be handed out in class today. The final draft is due on November 29. You should hold your conferences BEFORE Thanksgiving.*

**Nov. 20      Workshop on Bowdoin papers—yours and “theirs”**

Read the sample Bowdoin papers and prepare a response. *Be ready also to exchange ideas on topics for your final essay (assignment handed out, see time frame below).*

*For Wednesday, November 30, by 5:00 p.m.:*

Join the conversation of teachers and scholars of composition and education by drafting your final essay on a topic that has captured your interest during your reading, writing, conversations, and/or tutoring sessions this semester (assignment distributed separately).

**THANKSGIVING BREAK---Eat turkey, then sleep--lots.**

**Nov. 27**      Optional consultation time if you want to talk about your final essay with me (during class time or at another convenient time). **You must complete your draft by Wednesday at 5:00 and exchange it with two classmates (previously assigned).**

**Nov. 29**      Read the two drafts you received yesterday, write comments to their writers, and prepare conferences. **PLEASE PREPARE GOOD, STIMULATING CONFERENCES TO BOOST YOUR CLASSMATES INTO THE REVISION PHASE!!**

**Dec. 4      Presentation of final essays**

**Dec. 6      Presentation of final essays**

**Dec. 10**      Turn in a portfolio that includes your three essays, your letters, and a letter that annotates the contents of the portfolio. What does the portfolio show about the knowledge, both cognitive and practical, that you have gained this semester? Does it reveal a change in your writing,

learning and/or thinking? What does it reveal about how you will approach tutoring (writing assistance) next semester and beyond?

That's it for the semester, but your learning is just beginning. We will meet in January during the first week of classes to match you with courses and set up procedures for the spring. All the best to those who will study away! We look forward to working with you in the fall.