STUDENTS’ AWARENESS OF GENRE AND RHETORIC
It is a truth generally acknowledged, that post-secondary writing instructors believe that entering students know little about what is appropriate for “COLLEGE” writing.

*Pride and Prejudice in College Writing Instructors* (Irene Clark Clark 2012)
Antecedent Genres

People use familiar genres to act within new situations. . . and existing genres serve as powerful antecedents in shaping newly emerging genres.

(Devitt  Writing Genres)
TRANSFER?

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN IN THE CONTEXT OF TEACHING WRITING?
The Issue of Transfer

• How students draw on and utilize what they already know as they respond to new writing tasks
• Idea that writing “knowledge” can be transferred across critical transitions;
• Assumption that what one learns _here_ can be transferred _there_.
• How antecedent genres can help or hinder students as they encounter new writing tasks.
BUT--

WHAT DO WE REALLY KNOW ABOUT WRITING TRANSFER?
Beginning surveys ask:

Which *genres* of writing are students familiar with?

Which *terms* and *concepts* associated with rhetoric are students familiar with (audience, rhetoric, logos, ethos, pathos, etc.)?

What *genres* of writing do students *predict* will be most useful for them in their college classes?
End of Semester Surveys

• Asked similar questions

• Compared responses
THE GENRE AWARENESS PROJECT

• Addressed the issue of antecedent writing genres, rhetorical knowledge, and the issue of transfer.

• Implemented in 5 first year writing classes in Fall 2011.

• Involved 100 students.

• The goal was to help students acquire genre awareness and rhetorical knowledge.
The Genre Awareness Project

It will be helpful for students to

• Understand the rhetorical and social purposes of academic writing--

• Acquire a vocabulary that enables them to discuss writing, rhetoric, and genre in multiple contexts—

• Abstract principles from one rhetorical situation and apply them to another.
Students encouraged to

• Understand rhetorical concepts such as ethos, pathos, logos, exigence, rhetoric, rhetorical situation, audience, counterargument
Students encouraged to

• Develop metacognitive awareness

• Occurs when students “not only know what they know, but they are also more likely to recognize how they know it”

Adler-Kassner, Majewski, and Koshnick
GENRE AWARENESS

• Not the same as explicit teaching of a particular genre

• Explicit teaching = “Do it like this.”

• Genre awareness involves metacognitive insight.
THRESHOLD CONCEPTS

• Meyers and Land

• A threshold is “akin to passing through a portal” or “conceptual gateway’ that opens up “previously inaccessible ways of thinking about something”
Qualities associated with a Threshold Concept

- **Transformativity**—will change the way in which a student understands a discipline.
- **Troublesomeness**—likely to be “troublesome, ” when it is unfamiliar, different from how the learner customarily sees things.
- **Liminality**—a suspended state of partial understanding, or ‘stuck place’, in which understanding approximates to a kind of mimicry.”
Transformativity

Changes the way in which a student understands a discipline.
Troublesomeness

• Can be counter-intuitive

• Can challenge existing beliefs or past experiences

• Can be conceptually difficult
Liminality

• Portals through which learners must pass
Liminality

- Movement through liminal portals does not happen in a straight line but instead in iterative and recursive stages.
THRESHOLD CONCEPTS IN COMPOSITION

• Adler-Kassner, Majewski, and Koshnick

• Derived from work in genre

• All writing is situated.
THRESHOLD CONCEPTS IN COMPOSITION

• Genre are not just forms of writing. They are the mediating tools (Vygotsky) that bind academic and disciplinary communities. They reflect the values of those communities; at the same time, they shape, contribute to, and perpetuate the values associated with them, as well.
# Table 1—Genres used before college entrance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Used</th>
<th>Not Used</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 Paragraph Essay</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lab Report</td>
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<td>Descriptive Essay</td>
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</table>
Table 2 On entrance to the university, what genres did students predict they would need in their college classes, compared to the genres they found most useful after their first semester.
Why?
Possible Reasons for the persistence of the 5-paragraph essay

1. All writers, especially novice writers, are comforted by form.
2. The Writing Proficiency Exam (WPE)
3. Other colleagues, other classes.
4. Habit pertains.
5. Provides scaffolding for an essay.
Familiarity with Rhetoric

• Familiar with audience, thesis, genre, and counterargument

• Not familiar with logos, ethos, and pathos
Table 3 Familiarity vs. Useful

<table>
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<th>Rhetoric</th>
<th>The Rhetorical Situation</th>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Thesis</th>
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<tr>
<td>Useful (Post Survey)</td>
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The Rhetorical Situation

Thesis
Table 4: Familiarity versus Useful

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Logos</th>
<th>Ethos</th>
<th>Pathos</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Counterargument</th>
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<td>Counterargument</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- Logos: Familiarity (Pre Survey) vs. Useful (Post Survey)
- Ethos: Familiarity (Pre Survey) vs. Useful (Post Survey)
- Pathos: Familiarity (Pre Survey) vs. Useful (Post Survey)
- Genre: Familiarity (Pre Survey) vs. Useful (Post Survey)
- Counterargument: Familiarity (Pre Survey) vs. Useful (Post Survey)
Concepts associated with Rhetoric

Students found them useful!!
Table 5 Rating yourself as a writer/ Anxiety Before and After

![Bar chart showing the comparison of self-rating as a writer and anxiety before and after a survey. The chart uses blue and dark blue bars to represent pre-survey and post-survey data respectively. The y-axis represents the rating scale, and the x-axis represents the categories 'Rate Yourself as a Writer' and 'Anxiety'.]
Many Questions

• What do students mean when they say a particular genre was “useful?”

• Does genre and rhetorical awareness enable students to write more effectively?

• Does familiarity result in user ability?
A Necessary Combination

• Genre Awareness

• Situated Practice
Students need to build--

• On prior knowledge