

DISCIPLINARY WRITING FAQ WEBSITE OR SEMINAR PAPER

Due: December 15, 11:59 p.m. – submit electronically via Blackboard
Length: As long as necessary, within reason

This assignment emphasizes the art of asking smart, focused scholarly questions, and it requires you to begin the process of gathering materials with which to answer such questions. Inspired by the “CompFAQ” database/wiki (created by the makers of CompPile – the premier online composition research database; available at <http://comppile.tamucc.edu/wiki/CompFAQs/Home>), this assignment allows you to explore a question of interest to you and to the wider composition community. Unlike the CompFAQs collected online, however, your final project will include a rationale and a conclusion, in addition to the list of resources you collect.

For this assignment, I expect you to begin with a genuine, but somewhat amorphous, question and then to refine your thinking and questioning in order to produce a useful resource guide for yourself and your colleagues. In other words, the writing and research for this project will inevitably be recursive – you should start with a general interest or topic, and begin asking questions as you skim bibliographies, journals, and other resources. As you become familiar with the general domain, you will need to narrow your focus to a specific research question that can be presented succinctly and coherently.

Your FAQ will be presented as a website and addressed to a scholarly audience – individuals familiar with the research we have discussed this semester, but not necessarily with the specific scholarly area of your question.

Note: You may substitute a traditional seminar paper (20-25 pages, double-spaced) on a topic relevant to the study and teaching of professional/technical writing for this assignment. If you wish to do so, please submit an informal project proposal (a brief written outline of the project you intend to pursue, which we will discuss in person) by November 1, 2008.

Minimum Requirements (feel free to expand on these):

Your final website should accomplish the following five tasks:

- (1) Develop a focused, specific, and relevant question about disciplinary writing and research. Phrase it as a question that you might post to the members of the ATTW-L or another scholarly group, in other words, write a single, concise paragraph that introduces and states your question. *Note:* See attached email to the WPA-L – a query about the “History of the Academic Job Search.” You can search the WPA-L archives (link on Blackboard) to see the responses this query generated. This email covers some of the basics: context, question statement, prior research already conducted (to avoid the simplistic answers from colleagues).
- (2) Provide a justification for the relevance and timeliness of the question. To do this, you will need to do some preliminary research in bibliographies, on discussion lists, and especially in recent composition journals (see attached list). This section should make clear to whom the question most applies. This is your answer to the question: Who Cares? Why should scholars bother to answer you? This section should contain specific citations to composition and/or other scholarship that contextualizes your question and justifies its relevance/importance/value.
- (3) Include a 12-15 work annotated bibliography (which may be sorted in such a way as to clarify schools of thought or viewpoints – in other words, feel free to organize the bibliography non-alphabetically). This bibliography should include the “best of” in your research list – I expect you will consult far more than 15 works in the process of developing your question; choose the texts that provide the best

overview and specific information about your question. For examples of useful annotations, consult the Bedford Bibliographies (available through Blackboard).

- (4) Include 5-7 websites, organizations, or other resources (including individual scholars, if appropriate) that relate to your question/topic. Provide brief annotations for these entries. This section is included to allow you to branch out from “traditional” scholarly sources – include websites, scholars, organizations, etc.
- (5) Draw some conclusions about your question. Some questions (e.g., What are national trends in TA compensation?) will have concrete answers – to the extent that you can, answer your question. Other questions (e.g., What is the best way to teach argument to non-native speakers of English?) will not be definitively answerable – in this case, summarize the main points of view and assess the state of the scholarship (i.e., describe questions left to be answered, directions for future research, etc.). This section of the final project serves as your opportunity to explain the complications, challenges, and opportunities that your question opens for composition scholars. It synthesizes the research collected above. It should cite and quote¹ from specific sources (in and/or beyond your annotated bibliography – if you cite sources not included in your annotated bibliography, include citation information in a footnote). You may want to think of this as the “argumentative” section of the FAQ – make a claim (and support it appropriately) about how you would answer your question. If your question doesn't lead you to a conclusion, consider this section a “working hypothesis” and explain both the hypothesis and what the next steps would be to move toward a conclusion.

What You Will Turn In (by 11:59 p.m., December 15, 2009):

1. An email with a link to the FAQ website or a traditional seminar paper (electronic submission is fine).
2. A CD with all of the files for this (and the Discipline website, if you have not already turned that in) site. Please label the CD with your name and the title(s) of the website(s) included and leave it in my Guilford mailbox by or before December 16th (5:00 p.m.).

¹ There's a subtle difference between *citing*, where you “tip your hat” to other scholarship, and *quoting*, where you engage directly with another's text. Citing offers you a chance to contextualize your work in broad strokes, for example:

Recognizing that genres exist and are interpreted in part through their interactions with other genres, theorists have developed concepts like genre systems (Bazerman), activity systems (Russell) and ceremonies (Freadman). This understanding of genres as parts of larger, overlapping communicative systems allows theorists and students alike to see their interactions as participating in several activities at once.

Quoting offers a more detailed engagement with a specific text (and is probably more familiar). Both are really important skills and valuable to this project!

APPENDIX A: SAMPLE WPA-L EMAIL

Subject: History of the Academic Job Search
From: "I. Moriah McCracken" <ila.moriah@SBCGLOBAL.NET>
Date: Wed, 05 Sep 2007 19:18:31 -0500
To: WPA-L@ASU.EDU

Greetings.

I am looking for historical/contextual information on how and/or why the academic job search transitioned from the "network" method -- your advisor hears of an opening from a former colleague and writes a letter for you -- to the current job search "machine" -- universities and colleges run ads in the JIL (and similar published resources) in October, interviews with schools begin at the MLA Convention in December and continue on campus in early spring, and offers are accepted by March or April. Voila! You have a job. [I'm oversimplifying, but you all are more than familiar with the process.]

I hope this list can compile its collective (and historical) memories, which will then either lead me to sources that I'm overlooking or confirm for me that no one has traced how the job search process became what it currently is. Again, I'm not looking for sources offering advice (I've found those!); I'm searching for information on how and why the current methods were put in place.

I know the Job Information List (MLA) began in 1971, but the references I've found refer to the year it began and don't offer an explanation. I've tried The MLA Guide to the Job Search, The Academic's Handbook, The Chicago Guide to Your Academic Career, Disciplining English, Professing Literature, and even Homo Academicus. I suspected disciplinary histories of rhet/comp might mention the job search, but the histories on my shelves don't include such discussions.

Thanks, in advance, for any and all recollections/suggestions/memories.

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APPENDIX B: TECHNICAL WRITING JOURNALS

The following list includes many of the major journals that publish research in disciplinary and technical writing – it is not exhaustive. Consult a reference librarian for additional suggestions (and please let me know what you find!).

Academic Writing

<http://aw.colostate.edu/submission.htm>

Assessing Writing

http://www.louisville.edu/a-s/english/assess_writing/

BCQ

Business Communication Quarterly

<http://bcq.theabc.org/>

BWe

Basic Writing e-journal

http://www.asu.edu/clas/english/composition/cbw/journal_1.htm#info

CBWS/CBW Newsletter

Conference on Basic Writing (formerly Conference on Basic Writing Skills)

http://www.asu.edu/clas/english/composition/cbw/Newsletter_Archive.html

CCC

College Composition and Communication

<http://www.ncte.org/journals/>

College English

<http://www.ncte.org/journals/>

Composition Studies

<http://www.depaul.edu/~compstud/>

Computers and Composition

<http://corax.cwrl.utexas.edu/cac/>

Currents in Electronic Literacy

<http://www.cwrl.utexas.edu/currents/index.html>

IWJ

The Internet Writing Journal

<http://www.writerswrite.com/>

JAC

Journal of Advanced Composition

<http://jac.gsu.edu/>

The Journal of Computer Documentation

<http://www.acm.org/sigdoc/journal.html>

JCMC

Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication

<http://www.ascusc.org/jcmc/>

JEP

Journal of Electronic Publishing

<http://www.press.umich.edu/jep/>

JLT

Journal of Literacy and Technology

<http://www.literacyandtechnology.org/>

JTW

Journal of Teaching Writing

<http://www.iupui.edu/~jtw/>

Philosophy and Rhetoric

<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/par/>

POROI

Project on Rhetoric of Inquiry

<http://inpress.lib.uiowa.edu/poroi/>

TC

Technical Communication Online: Journal of the Society for Technical Communication

<http://www.techcomm-online.org/>

TCQ

Technical Communication Quarterly

<http://www.attw.org/default.asp>