The Genre Challenge Project

Overview: Students often struggle with writing in genres that are new to them, so it is important for you as teachers to be able to identify and understand the challenges that your students will face. It is also important for you to develop your own skills in writing in a range of genres. Your task is to research and attempt a type of writing that you might want your students to try, but that you aren’t very familiar with as a writer. This project will allow you to expand your writing repertoire while also experiencing and thinking about some of the new writing situations that your students may face.

Goals: The main goals of this project are for you to:

- write in a genre that challenges you as a writer and preservice teacher.
- use genre study as a writing strategy.
- empathize with students who find writing to be a challenge.
- learn more about assigning, teaching, and assessing student writing, especially in your genre.

Audience: You and your future students are the primary audiences for this work; you should create materials that will be truly useful for your future writing instruction. Secondary audiences include your classmates (who will be interested in the ways that your work informs theirs) and me (as an instructor who is interested in your learning as a writer and preservice teacher). A version of this project may also be posted to your Web portfolio for this course.

Procedures and Requirements:

1. Begin your reflective journal. Every time you work on this project, reserve 5 minutes to journal about your experiences. Don’t think of your journal as a work log; the point is not to list the things you did that day. Rather, use the journal as a place to think about your writing process and the composing that you are doing. What are you thinking about and feeling as you write? What strategies and processes are you using? How are others responding to your writing? What challenges are you facing? What insights are you developing about writing, teaching, and learning? Type your entries in a single document, starting each entry with the date of your writing.

2. Choose a type of writing that you may want your future students to try but that you aren’t very familiar with as a writer and teacher. Email me about your proposed project before noon on Wednesday, August 31 and state:
   a. the genre of writing that you want to try (be as specific as possible, and please avoid business and technical genres, as we’ll focus on those later in the course);
   b. why this type of writing would be appropriate to assign to your future students;
   c. why you expect this genre to be a challenge for you;
   d. a brief description of any past experiences with reading, writing, and teaching this genre;
   e. and—if you have ideas already—the subject or topic(s) that you are considering.

3. Collect and study at least 4-6 published examples of your selected genre (more for very short texts), as well as at least one published resource to advise you about composing, teaching, and/or assessing this type of writing. Create an annotated bibliography that provides citations and your brief remarks about each of the examples and resources that you study. Your annotations should explain specifics about how each selection will help writers to better understand your genre. (See Bullock, “Annotated Bibliographies,” for advice and examples.) We’ll workshop drafts of the annotated bibliographies on Tuesday, September 6.

4. Create an assignment handout (such as this one) that explains—in language that your future students would understand—the goals, audience, procedures & requirements, and grading standards for your writing assignment. (If your future students will be early readers, you may write about the assignment as you would in a newsletter to parents or supplement your handout with footnotes that give more detailed explanations about your requirements and expectations.) Add a note to your handout explaining how you will adjust the length and level of difficulty for the writing
that you will do yourself. (Make it appropriate for a 300-level college English course. A paper of 5-7 pages, fiction of about 10 pages, or a collection of about 10 poetry experiments including 3 polished poems would be typical in an equivalent 300-level writing course.) Confer with me about your assignment sheet no later than our September 8 class period.

5. After conferring with me about your assignment sheet, complete the composition in your selected genre by following your own written guidelines. Work through (and keep) multiple drafts.

6. Revise your assignment sheet as necessary to reflect what you have learned about writing and teaching this kind of composition. Label this as the revised draft.

7. Finally, reread your reflective journal and genre piece, and write a summative entry in your reflective journal (about 600 words), discussing what you learned through this project about:
   - composing in the selected genre;
   - using genre study as a writing strategy;
   - working in genres that are challenging to you as a writer and preservice teacher; and
   - assigning, teaching, and assessing student writing, especially in your selected genre.

8. Your completed project is due at the beginning of class on Thursday, September 22. Hand in your completed genre challenge project—including the reflective journal with summative entry, the annotated bibliography, the original and revised assignment handouts (label each), and your genre piece. Also, post a copy of your annotated bibliography and your revised assignment handout to our electronic space. Keep all drafts.

Workshop drafts: Meeting due dates for the smaller assignments and workshop drafts is important for you and for your classmates who will be learning with you. Each time that you miss one of these deadlines or come unprepared for a workshop will result in a full-grade reduction from your project score.

Grading: The Genre Challenge Project is worth 25% of your final grade. I will evaluate your project holistically, meaning I will take all the components together into account. Along with your genre piece, your reflective journal, annotated bibliography, and assignment handouts are all important! A quality project will:

- Show your willingness to take risks in an unfamiliar genre. This should be apparent in your genre writing as well as in your reflective journal.
- Show, in your genre writing and reflective journal, that you have applied strategies from course activities and readings.
- Demonstrate—in all of the components—that you have taken care to research the written conventions that are expected for the genre, and to use these conventions with creativity and insight as appropriate for your genre, audience, purpose, and situation. These will be shown through:
  - Content and rhetorical moves;
  - Structure and organization;
  - Style and voice;
  - Conventions of design, format, grammar, usage, and mechanics; and
  - Documentation for any sources whose words, ideas, or illustrations that are cited or used in the project.
- Present accurate and insightful reflection about what your work on the project helped you to learn about writing and teaching in this genre.
- Exhibit a developed and accurate understanding of the principles addressed in class, in the assigned readings and activities, and in my responses to your work.