

Teaching Philosophy for 110W Peer Writing Consultants

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## **The Role of PWCs**

As peer writing consultants, you play an integral role in helping 110W students grow to understand their learning and writing processes. As experienced students yourselves, you have much to offer them: your experience in the academic community as writers, readers, and students can serve as a model for them. Also, as students you have the opportunity to connect with them on a level that I, as a teacher, cannot. You can model for them ways in which students can work with each other to strengthen their class work and learn how to learn in a university. There are a number of specific ways in which you can do this:

**Writing Assignments:** Students may need your help at several different points in the writing process. You may help them interpret an assignment prompt and decide on topics. You may help them look at a draft (either with or without my comments) and help them determine ways to revise it.

**Self-Evaluation:** Students are required to write about their own writing and class participation at least twice during the quarter. You may help them brainstorm; you may help them come up with a vocabulary to use when talking about writing and class work.

**Collaboration:** Students will have not only written texts to collaborate on but also oral texts to collaborate on. Each peer group is required to do a presentation to the class about a book they have read, so you can help them make decisions about the type of presentation they would like to do, the different ways they can organize the presentation, and how to hold each other responsible for the work. (Please see the 3<sup>rd</sup> page of the syllabus for more detailed explanations on collaboration. I'm *trying* to use these labels when I talk to students about their work.)

## **Introduction to the Teacher**

One of my primary beliefs about students of writing—at any level, but particularly students in 110W—is that anyone has the potential to write because writing is about thinking and communication. If students can understand writing as communication, they can write as people who have something to say, thus creating meaningful pieces of writing.

As a teacher, I'm interested in helping students find a definition of and process for good writing that means something to them. Too often, I think students follow *conventions* of writing that are, to them, meaningless, but they construct essays which follow these conventions because they assume they (five paragraph themes, thesis in the first paragraph, etc.) mean something to others (primarily those grading their essays). I want students to understand that writing that really means something is constructed based on what they have to say, that “form follows function” not the other way around. That's one of the reasons I have them write ethnographic projects: there is no set structure for such write-ups of their ethnographic research. Structure and organization is determined by the research data they collect. (For you as PWCs this may be frustrating because you won't be able to directly answer students' questions about how to pull their work together. Think of it as not having to take on too much responsibility and instead relying on your skills as a reader and thinker.)

One of the ways my desire to have students discover meaning can probably best be *seen* is in classroom discussions. I really try to get the students to answer their own questions, to puzzle through a problem, since figuring something out oneself often makes it easier to remember. Because of this, I constantly ask students to look to each other, the text, their notes—or to experiences with their peer groups—rather than seek out a “right” answer from me (which doesn’t mean they shouldn’t *ask*, just that I may not be the person with the answer; they probably have it).

### **SOME SPECIFICS ABOUT 110W**

One of the most important lessons 110W students can learn about writing is that different writing situations call for different types of writing. As members of the university community, they need to learn to write for readers in the university community, but those readers aren’t always only professors: they are also students in their classes and maybe even students outside their classes. 110W provides first-year writers the unique opportunity to have different readers—the teacher, their classmates, and you, their Peer Writing Consultants—who give feedback on their writing.

#### **Concepts and Ideas to Consider**

This quarter, my students’ primary writing project will be ethnographic portfolios. They will each research and write about a community, becoming experts on “their” community and its culture (its language, artifacts and behavior). There will be informal writing assignments (box assignments from the text, fieldnotes written during their research) that will relate to their research; some informal assignments analyzing and evaluating their own processes of reading and writing; and a long (often 15+ pages in its finished form) ethnography, pieced together from three “formal” assignments and a number of informal ones, all of which will be revised into a single text.

Each peer group will also be reading an additional book chosen from the bibliographies in *FieldWorking*, the class text. They will discuss this book outside of MWF class time (maybe in group, maybe in other informal meetings) and do a collaborative presentation for the class about how the book relates to ethnographic research.

### **CONCRETE WAYS OF KEEPING IN TOUCH**

To make our work with the students as effective as possible, you as PWCs and I need to make clear to the students that the two “parts” of 110W work together to give them a well-rounded writing experience. Keeping the lines of communication open is an important element of this. You are always welcome to attend class to observe and interact with your group in the larger class setting. I will let you know, via e-mail, if there are any changes to the class syllabus or if something comes up in class discussion that would be useful to know about in group. In return, I ask that you keep me informed about attendance and any issues or questions you have about the group and assignments.