

EXTENDING TRANSFER IN COMPOSITION:
EXPLORING A MODEL FOR CONCEPTUALIZING RHETORICAL PROBLEMS

by

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“Convention forbids us to express in words
things that are lawful and natural; and we obey it.”

~Michel de Montaigne

Writing is a journey that is rarely undertaken alone. My research adventure on transfer this past semester would not have been complete without the assistance and encouragement of a strong committee. On that note, I would like to offer my thanks to Dr. Michelle Payne and Dr. Dora Ramirez-Dhoore. As they read through my drafts, both professors asked important questions that helped me re-envision my stance as a researcher. Re-envisioning research and re-writing is at the heart of making meaning, which is what makes composition so valuable—we are a community of writers teaching one another, and as we teach, we learn. I offer my thanks to Dr. Payne and Dr. Ramirez-Dhoore for their willingness to teach me.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the use of a new rhetorical problem-solving model for writing instruction to create opportunities for abstract thinking and extend the transfer of rhetorical knowledge. The author conducts a qualitative research study on the transfer of rhetorical knowledge by interviewing former students and evaluating their writing samples written in their courses beyond composition. By revisiting the early cognitive writing process research of Linda Flower and John R. Hayes, evaluating the differences between novice and expert writers, and creating corollaries with David Perkins and Gavriel Salomon's theories on transfer, the author identifies markers for transfer within the rhetorical situation and suggests teaching writing as rhetorical problem solving to extend this transfer to new contexts.

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INTRODUCTION

Find your star—create your own constellation.

~Mike Mattison

My initial interest for studying transfer came about when I stepped into graduate school a few years ago; I had a difficult time adjusting to the various writing situations in my classes. Because I was an older student and had been away from academia for twenty years, I thought that my struggles were unique. However, when I started teaching composition and working with student writers, I paid close attention to what I taught each day in the classroom. I listened to hear what students were learning, what they were struggling to understand, and I thought about how they moved among the various writing situations in our composition course, as well as their other classes. This movement through their classes gives students opportunities to transfer rhetorical knowledge from one context to the next. I wondered whether and how students transferred rhetorical strategies from composition to other academic courses. As my interest in transfer grew, I did what most teachers do, and began reading the research on transfer. After listening to the conversations taking place in the field of composition, I learned that transfer is a complicated cognitive process and is influenced by much more than daily lesson plans or writing assignments. I also learned the field of transfer research in composition is relatively uncultivated and many opportunities for research exist. While contemplating

my inquiry on transfer, I developed questions to help frame a research study to answer my questions.

The research study was also influenced by a research methods course I took my first year of graduate school. This class introduced proper research methodology, provided an overview of research studies in the field of composition, and shaped the way I thought about research—as an exploration. Throughout the semester, Mike Mattison, our professor, led the class through a wide range of qualitative and quantitative composition studies. Mike genuinely loved teaching composition and encouraged us as students to follow our inquiry and trust that our questions would lead us to insights for research. A few weeks before my classmates and I presented our research proposals, Mike entered the classroom and began drawing black stars on the whiteboard. With every star, he attached the name of a composition scholar: James Berlin, Linda Flower, John R. Hayes, Donald Murray, Sondra Perl, etc. Then Mike exchanged the black marker for a red one and drew a single small red star in the midst of the scholars' stars. The red star represented each student in our class as we positioned ourselves within the research on composition. Mike created an elaborate pattern by drawing lines from the red star and connected it with various black scholars' stars. After finishing, he turned to face us and said, "Find your star—create your own constellation." Through Mike's own composition research and his teaching experience, he knew that each of us had a unique perspective on the scholarship we read and that this perspective would instigate our research, which would lead to connections enabling us to create our own constellation. This thesis project is my research on the scholarship of transfer and composition at Boise State, and the connections I make to create that constellation

Chapter Overview

Chapter 1: This chapter is a reflection of my pedagogy for English 102, Boise State's research writing course. The chapter explains what I taught as a composition instructor and what my students told me they learned, which eventually led to my inquiry and the impetus for my study on composition transfer.

Chapter 2: This chapter provides an overview of the research on transfer in composition. Initially, I revisit the writing process research of Linda Flower and John R. Hayes. In particular, I focus on their theoretical framework for the rhetorical situation and the rhetorical problem. With the research of Flower and Hayes, I make connections to David Perkins and Gavriel Salomon's research on transfer theory, and then create additional connections to the current research on composition transfer.

Chapter 3: This chapter consists of my research methodology and my study of transfer at Boise State, and I presented the data as mini-case studies. I close chapter 3 with initial findings of my research study. The results from chapter 3 are analyzed in more detail in chapter 4.

Chapter 4: This chapter synthesizes chapters 1-3. Based upon the results of my transfer study, this chapter is an article that argues for the use of a rhetorical problem-solving model in composition to improve the transfer of rhetorical knowledge.

Chapter 5: This chapter is a reflection of my research on transfer, preliminary results of teaching with the rhetorical problem solving model, and the implications for composition instruction.

CHAPTER 1: RESEARCH WRITING, PEDAGOGY & TRANSFER

Research Writing and Transfer

In the spring of 2009, halfway through my first semester of teaching English 102 (a research-based writing class), I began contemplating what rhetorical knowledge my students would remember and utilize in their future courses. As a new instructor of composition, I naturally questioned my pedagogy and pondered the implications for the fifty student writers enrolled in my classes. Due to writing experiences I had encountered in my undergraduate, and graduate studies, as well as my professional life, I could identify writing strategies and research processes that could potentially transfer to the students' future courses of history, philosophy, anthropology, or business. Yet, how would I know if my students made these connections? This question generated further questions regarding the transfer of rhetorical knowledge. How would I know if the students would apply the writing and research processes I stressed in our English 102 class to the writing assignments required in other classes? What rhetorical knowledge (if any) would transfer to the writing they did in other course work? These questions and many others led to the research that follows.

First though, I will offer a brief summary of Boise State's first-year writing goals and then provide an explanation of my classroom instruction for English 102—Boise State's research-based, second semester first-year writing course, which provided the impetus for my study on transfer.

Boise State First-Year Writing Goals for English 102

Boise State's First Year Program goals for English 102 are similar to many research-writing courses required in first-year writing programs across the nation. The research-based first-year writing class at Boise State has the following outcomes:

- understand academic work as a recursive process of inquiry, using writing and research to form new questions and pursue existing enduring question;
- craft questions that guide research, making their process manageable and likely to yield insights;
- find, read, evaluate, analyze, and synthesize appropriate sources;
- integrate evidence in their own writing in a way that complicates (develops, refines, extends, refutes, and deepens) their own ideas;
- produce research-based writing in formats appropriate to the context, purpose, genre, and audience;
- implement a variety of research strategies and resources as appropriate to their inquiry;
- use a variety of media (print and digital) to address different audiences, as appropriate;
- understand genre expectations for some research-based writing contexts within the university;
- use an academic documentation style consistently and appropriately;
- articulate the rhetorical choices they have made as a writer and researcher, illustrating their awareness of a writer's relationship to the subject, context, purpose, and audience;
- produce prose without surface-level convention errors that distract from attending to the meaning and purpose of the writing.

(Boise State First Year Writing Program)

These first-year writing goals were the guideline for my instruction of English 102-research writing. At the time I created my syllabus, I was not considering the transfer of rhetorical knowledge, and thus, I did not intentionally teach for transfer. My focus was on teaching thorough research practices, critical reading and writing strategies, the conventions of exploratory writing, argument, and writing in digital mediums in a variety of rhetorical situations. To design a syllabus for the First Year Writing goals, I chose to frame all our learning with inquiry. Questions naturally lead to additional questions,

which is an effective avenue for researching, learning, and generating material for writing. This same inquiry model instigated my own questions regarding rhetorical knowledge and transfer.

Research Writing: A Pedagogical Reflection

Along with framing our learning with inquiry, the use of three books guided our course: *The Curious Researcher* by Bruce Ballenger, *A Rhetoric of Argument* by Jeanne Fahnestock and Marie Secor, and *The Everyday Writer* by Andrea Lunsford. We utilized these books to understand and break down the research processes, learn strategies and steps for proper research, understand the conventions of argument, and identify and use appropriate MLA formatting. To engage the students in research writing throughout our semester together, the syllabus I designed required that students write for the following three rhetorical situations:

- **Unit 1:** Students wrote an exploratory research essay (an essay that modeled and demonstrated their inquiry and research processes) for an audience (their choice—self, teacher, classmates), about a topic of their choice. This essay required six primary and/or secondary sources.
- **Unit 2:** Students took the research and the six sources from the exploratory essay, evaluated how the research exploratory essay exposed alternate perspectives, and then generated additional questions to research. The students then answered these new questions with their original research sources and found four additional primary (an interview when possible) or secondary sources. At this point, the students compiled their research and wrote an argumentative essay for an audience (audience of their choice) that supported their stance regarding the research. The students wrote the thesis more subtly for the argumentative essay written; the students were encouraged to consider a creative nonfiction approach (models provided) and consider other genres (journalistic article, letter, diary etc.).
- **Unit 3:** In the final unit, the students took their research from unit 1 and unit 2 and focused on three particular strands they found most interesting. Using these three research strands, students created a website for both an audience and purpose of their choosing. They explored text, color, images, genres, digital rhetoric, and linked their research WebPages to other conversations taking place on three credible websites.

Before launching into each unit, the students wrote a proposal for each rhetorical situation. These proposals required the student to consider their goals, purpose, and audience for each rhetorical situation, and articulate their strategies to accomplish the writing task. I should add that these units were the three major assignments for the course, and that all of the units had multiple research and writing activities embedded within them. And, at the completion of each unit—as is standard practice in Boise State’s first-year writing courses—the students wrote detailed reflections letters to articulate their learning. This outline of major writing projects (units) met the goals for the first-year writing program’s research writing course and allowed the students opportunities to engage in research as a community of writers: participating in peer review at every stage—drafting proposals, drafting of essays, and peer review of final unit projects.

As a new instructor of research writing, I am aware my instructional methods were not exceptional. In fact, I am sure my instruction was average, and perhaps, at times chaotic, as I tried to become an effective teacher. I also realize I have many areas for improvement, which certainly contributes to my study on transfer. Although new to both the instruction of research writing and graduate studies in rhetoric and composition, I can say that my research processes are interesting and exciting—I am an engaged and committed learner and love the expansiveness research provides, which made teaching research writing incredibly enjoyable. Teaching and working with students is a dynamic interaction that requires constant attention and awareness of the energy movement within the classroom. When students shared their research processes, their progress, their questions, and their confusion and frustrations with me, they, in essence, taught me how

to teach them—they told me what they needed. Over the course of the semester, as the students continued to “tell me what they needed” both verbally and in their reflection letters, my thoughts turned toward transfer. I made the decision to require a meta-narrative at the end of the semester in an attempt to learn how to improve as a writing instructor.

Boise State’s first-year writing program emphasizes revision and thus places a large percentage of a student’s final grade on the end of the semester portfolio. One of the components of the portfolio is an extensive reflection letter that allows a student to reflect on their learning over the semester, and project future applications of this rhetorical knowledge. The meta-narrative I required had these same requirements, but also required that students cite themselves in the text, quoting their statements of *learning* (drawing from their semester of unit reflection letters, research and writing responses, free writes and notes) and reflect on these quotes to evaluate how their perspectives had further changed.

Reflection in the classroom to bring about a growth of consciousness, to monitor knowledge, and articulate the awareness of this growth has shown to be effective for enhancing learning and transfer (Perkins 1992, Yancy 1998, McAlpine 1999). Many students’ ideas about inquiry and research had changed—students surprised themselves. For example, a student learned that “good research means you are carefully examining the information related to your topic as well as learning...exploring ideas, planning, and evaluating ideas,” or “true learning can never occur without a question and a drive.” One student discussed the influence inquiry had on his approach to research writing by saying, “Now that I am questioning, I am expanding on facts with my own ideas more. This

leads to new directions to take a topic. I see now that research is a continuous process.” There was also the realization that researching and learning changes identity; another student said, “I am constantly evolving every time I research because I am willing to take in new material and to change...I evolve every time I write.” By writing an extensive meta-narrative, the students were applying their research strategies in a meta-cognitive approach to their own learning, a learning that equated to a shift in their thinking.

Thesis Overview

As I looked back over my experience teaching research writing and as I read the student meta-narratives at the end of the semester, I was encouraged by what they told me they had learned in the class. The students articulated changes in their attitudes on research writing and increased confidence for writing lengthy research essays in a variety of genres. Their understanding of credible sources was clearer and they felt comfortable incorporating source material to extend their thinking and create a conversation in their writing. Reading the meta-narratives provided a sense of accomplishment for me because the students had achieved many of the goals for the research-writing class. Yet, as I thought about studying composition transfer, I wondered what rhetorical knowledge they would still remember in their fall semester and what they would find applicable for writing in other courses. Teaching research writing and interacting with student writers was the impetus for this thesis—to research studies on composition and transfer.

Like most instructors of composition, every time I complete a lesson and exit the classroom, I reflect on the insights my students provide for how I can modify my instruction for the next time I teach that lesson. Students never fail to offer their opinions

to help me improve as an instructor, which lets me help them as writers. Yet for this thesis project, I needed to hear from other voices in the field of composition, voices other than student writers. For this project to be successful, it was necessary to spend time with many scholars and learn from their research on transfer.

CHAPTER 2: UNDERSTANDING WRITING & TRANSFER

Rhetorical Situation and the Rhetorical Problem: A Retrospective.

In this chapter, I introduce and provide an overview of some of the relevant scholarship on writing and transfer. However, before I launch into the scholarship on transfer, I revisit the early writing-process research of Linda Flower and John R. Hayes. Their theoretical research provided a unique lens for the way I eventually interpreted the results of my own research project on transfer. After reviewing the rhetorical problem solving research of Flower and Hayes, I then move into the educational transfer research of David Perkins and Gavriel Salomon, who developed a theoretical framework for discussing types of transfer. The goal for this next chapter is to share my lens for viewing transfer. This lens evolved from the connections I made with the research of Flower and Hayes, Perkins and Salomon, and current composition scholars studying transfer. This literature overview will also allow you see how these scholars informed the design of my Boise State transfer study in chapter 3.

I want to demonstrate how Flower and Hayes helped establish the lens for how I view composition transfer. For me to accomplish this task I need to begin by revisiting the original definitions of the rhetorical situation and the rhetorical problem provided from the composition research of Linda Flower and John R. Hayes (1980, 1981). The distinction that Flower and Hayes established between the rhetorical situation and the rhetorical problem, I believe, contributes a new perspective to the research on transfer today.

Back in the late 1970's and early 1980's, research on the composing processes of writers emerged in the field of rhetoric and composition. Extending studies from cognitive psychology to composition, Linda Flower and John R. Hayes were key contributors to revelations of the composing processes of writers. In "The Cognition of Discovery: Defining a Rhetorical Problem," Flower and Hayes (1980) analyzed, through protocol analysis, the composing processes of both expert and novice writers. In this study, Flower and Hayes recorded the composing processes of expert writers and novice writers as they worked on the following task: "write about your job for the readers of Seventeen magazine, 13-14 year-old girls" (23). The expert or experienced writers were teachers of writing and rhetoric, and the novice writers were college students. By doing protocol analysis (think aloud protocols, where researchers observe, record, and read the writers work as they compose), Flower and Hayes discovered an important difference in the way that expert and novice writers use rhetorical strategies for a given writing task. The novice writers, who were more limited in their rhetorical knowledge, limited their writing focus to the rhetorical situation (fig. 1), which Flower and Hayes defined as the assignment (topic), audience and the writer' writing process for generating ideas (24).

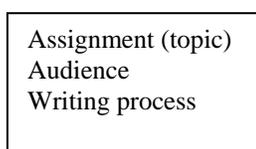


Figure 1. The Rhetorical Situation

When Flower and Hayes observed the novice writers in the act of "writing about their jobs to the readers of Seventeen magazine," they found these writers referred back to the assignment and attached themselves to the topic, never really moving beyond the "sketchy conventional representation of audience and assignment with which they

started” (26). This emphasis on the topic resulted in writing that was underdeveloped and flat. The novice writers in Flower and Hayes study are very similar to many first-year writers; their rhetorical knowledge and writing experience is limited and as I have observed in my classroom, the students attach themselves to their topics. Flower and Hayes found novice writer’s attachment to the topic kept the student focused on the rhetorical situation. The emphasis that novice writers placed on the rhetorical situation is an aspect I will refer back to after looking at the expert writers in Flower and Hayes’ study.

In their observation of expert writers, Flower and Hayes found they relied on their rhetorical knowledge or “stored problem representations” to create and solve a more complicated rhetorical problem than the student writers (25). The rhetorical problem, defined by Flower and Hayes (figure 2), encompasses the rhetorical situation, but it also includes the writer’s purpose or specific goals and sub-goals the writer sets for accomplishing the writing task.

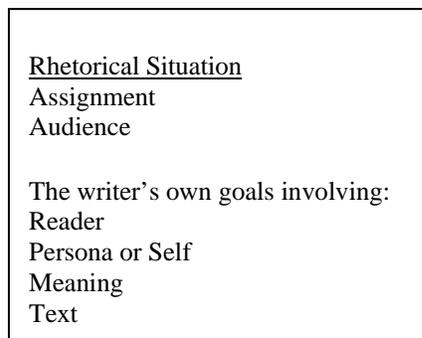


Figure 2. The Rhetorical Problem

These goals referred to in the rhetorical problem are complex with writers actively thinking about their affect on audience, their imagined persona, the text or genre conventions, and the meaning they are trying to make with their writing (27-29). Within the rhetorical problem, expert writers spent more time thinking about and commenting on their specific goals as they composed while the novice writers spent more time in the rhetorical situation (in particular their topic and writing process). In their results, Flower and Hayes found that expert writers represent a problem as a complex network of abstract goals and “respond to *all* aspects of the rhetorical problem” (377, 29-30). For example, they considered how to connect to the audience of 13-14 year old girls, how the reader might perceive their writing (persona), the genre conventions of the magazine, along with the purpose and subject matter. The ability to think abstractly is a critical link in the studies of transfer, as you will see in the next section, because it demonstrates the ability to transfer knowledge. Expert writers have far more writing experience that enables them to create abstract goals and apply them to a new writing task. They draw upon their knowledge base, goals, writing process, and audience awareness to write within and solve the entire rhetorical problem, which is a skill novice writer’s lack. In the next section, as we evaluate transfer in composition, I will use Flower and Hayes’ research and theories on the rhetorical situation and rhetorical problem as a means of framing and sharing the lens through which I view transfer studies.

Transfer: Cognitive Psychology and Educational Research

Although most of the early research on transfer is in the fields of cognitive psychology, educational psychology, and education, studies of transfer in rhetoric and composition surfaced in the 1980’s and the research has steadily increased—particularly

in the last ten years. It is for this reason that I will begin my overview of transfer with educational and psychological research before introducing transfer research in the field of rhetoric and composition. In addition, the scholarship of transfer has several different theoretical perspectives and each researcher has their own language for discussing their theoretical perspective of transfer. When I delved into composition studies on transfer, I found many scholars relied on the research of David Perkins and Gavriel Salomon. Because Perkins and Salomon's work is well recognized and frequently cited, I will also use their research for discussing transfer.

Over the past twenty-five years, Perkins and Salomon have been researching transfer in education, cognitive psychology and mathematical problem solving. The "Transfer of Learning" (1992) is a synthesis of their work that provides a theoretical understanding of transfer. For a definition of transfer, they state that "the transfer of learning occurs when learning in one context or with one set of materials impacts on performance in another context or with other related materials" (par. 1). Perkins and Salomon offer the analogy of students learning mathematical formulas and transferring this mathematical knowledge for studying physics. It would be easy to apply this analogy to students who learn to write an argumentative essay in composition and who then apply this rhetorical knowledge to write an argumentative essay in their history course; the history course is a completely new context. And this analogy does apply, yet Perkins and Salomon break down transfer into two distinct types of transfer, near transfer and far transfer. These two theoretical views of transfer are the keys for connecting to the research of Flower and Hayes on the rhetorical situation and the rhetorical problem,

and together, these two strands of scholarship provide the lens through which I view transfer.

To place Perkins and Salomon theories into the context of composition, I will draw from two of their studies, “Teaching for Transfer” and “The Transfer of Learning.” From these studies, Perkins and Salomon would categorize a student’s ability to write an argumentative essay learned in composition and their ability to apply this rhetorical knowledge for writing an argumentative essay in history as “high road” or “far” transfer. This type of transfer “depends on deliberate mindful abstraction of skill or knowledge from one context for application in another” and these contexts “on appearance, seem remote and alien to one another (25, par.6). In this case, writers must be able to take their rhetorical knowledge for writing an argumentative essay from the context of composition and apply “abstract” this knowledge to the new context of history. The ability to move from one context to another has what Perkins and Salomon refer to as “reflective thought in abstracting from one context and seeking connections with others,” which results in far transfer (26).

The ability to think abstractly and make connections to new contexts is analogous to the problem solving strategies expert writers used in the study by Flower and Hayes. Expert writers had the ability to recall “stored representations” of rhetorical knowledge and make abstract connections for writing in the new context. Remember, the “transfer of learning occurs when learning in one context or with one set of materials impacts the performance in another context or with other related materials,” which correlates to the rhetorical problem expert writers were solving. Expert writers rely on their rhetorical

knowledge to move beyond the rhetorical situation and make connections from one context to another that “might on appearance seem remote or alien to one another” (26).

The other type of transfer Perkins and Salomon define is “low road” or “near” transfer. Near transfer “reflects the automatic triggering of well-practiced routines in circumstances where there is considerable perceptual similarity to the original learning context” or stated more simply, “transfer between similar contexts” (25, par. 6). I will use the example of an annotated bibliography taught frequently in composition to discuss near transfer since many instructors across the disciplines assign research papers that require an annotated bibliography. Students who learn how to write an annotated bibliography in composition will usually approach this writing task the same way in a history class. Even though the student has moved from composition to the new context of history, there is still “considerable perceptual similarity to the original learning context” (25). To connect near transfer to Flower and Hayes’ theories, writing an annotated bibliography resides within a similar rhetorical situation because the rhetorical strategies that the writer transfers to the history class are the writing process, topic and audience for the writing task, whether they are in composition or history. By Flower and Hayes’ definition, these components of the writing process, topic and audience for the task are within the rhetorical situation.

Perkins and Salomon’s definitions of near and far transfer are similar to the social educational research of King Beach (1999) and Lucille McCarthy (1985) when looking at writing across social contexts—from school to work. As I mentioned earlier, many scholars use the language and theories of Perkins and Salomon’s far and near transfer for their research. However, a few composition scholars choose to use the social theoretical

framework of King Beach. Therefore, before I shift from transfer theories to transfer studies in composition, I should briefly clarify Beach's theory and language. Beach uses different language for describing his theories and advocates a shift away from the transfer metaphor toward thinking of transfer as a socially cultural interaction where "learners and social organizations exist in a recursive and mutually constitutive relation to one another across time" (111). Beach found transfer to be a complex set of generalizations that consists of a set of interrelated social and psychological processes. His theory originated from his research analyzing arithmetic reasoning with adolescents, and adults transitioning from school to work in rural Nepal. Similar to Perkins and Salomon's "far" transfer, Beach observed a type of "general" knowledge transfer occurring between contexts that, on appearance, "seem[ed] remote and alien to one another" (Perkins 3, Beach 112). Beach also found "local" transfer occurred when a student/adolescent/adult (depending on the study) was working within a new but similar context, which again is similar to Perkins and Salomon's definition of "near" transfer (111). Although Perkins, Salomon, and Beach have theoretical similarities on transfer, they would not equate "far" to "generalizing" and "near" transfer to "local," but because their perspectives are theoretical, I think of them in a similar way, but not equal. I think of the language and the type of transfer between Beach and Salomon and Perkins as a variation of a theme—they are talking about transfer in similar ways, but their context is different. Beach relies on social interactions for his research, and Salomon and Perkins rely on educational research. In the following section on transfer in composition, I make use of the terms near/local, and far/general (generalizing) when discussing transfer.

Bridging Transfer and Composition

A helpful starting point for exploring learning, transfer, and writing is Julie Foertsch's 1995 study, "Where Cognitive Psychology Applies." Although there are earlier studies alluding to transfer, Foertsch bridges cognitive psychology theories regarding transfer to composition instruction. Foertsch defines transfer as "using information learned through problem solving in one context to solve a conceptually similar problem in a new context," which connects with the early rhetorical problem solving research of Flower and Hayes as well as Perkins and Salomon's definition of far transfer and King Beach's definition of general transfer (371). In Foertsch's study, she explores *how* and *why* students write for various situations, and the necessity for teaching writing on both a local (near) and general (far) knowledge level to stimulate the students' problem solving abilities(emphasis mine). Foertsch draws from the analogical mathematical problem solving research of L.R. Novick (1988) and the cognitive work of Flowers and Hayes (1981). She creates parallels with how expert writers/learners rely on previous problem solving experiences to tackle new problems in new contexts (discourse communities), and argues that student writers should have more general problem solving opportunities to instigate connections for transfer (371, 362). Foertsch noticed that when students focused on the rhetorical situation, this emphasis inhibited their awareness of the rhetorical problem and limited their success in accomplishing the writing task. Similar to Beach, Foertsch outlines teaching local knowledge by emphasizing writing instruction within discourse communities, and general knowledge writing instruction by emphasizing teaching generalizations (social interactions and general knowledge) in correlation with problem solving across discourse communities (361-362).

Although it might be easy to assume that at the very least we would observe that basic writing knowledge transfers from one rhetorical situation to the next (similar contexts), this is not always the case (Wardle 2007, Kutney 2008). Lucille McCarthy's 1985 study, "A Stranger in Strange Lands: A College Student Writing Across the Curriculum," followed the writing of a single college student for two years. The subject of her study, Dave, failed to recognize rhetorical similarities and interpreted the writing assignments in each of his classes as different even though they were quite similar (243). Through observations, text analysis, compose aloud protocols, and interviews, McCarthy found Dave struggling to recognize similar rhetorical situations as he moved through different discourse communities.

Writers not only struggle with transferring rhetorical knowledge across discourse communities, they also have difficulty transitioning from one composition course to the next. Holly Hassel's (2009) study offers a unique perspective because she looked at underprepared student writers as they transitioned from their English 101 courses to an English 102 research-based writing course. In "Transfer Institutions, Transfer of Knowledge: The Development of Rhetorical Adaptability and Underprepared Writers," Hassel found students lacked "rhetorical adaptability," the ability to identify and write for both new rhetorical situations and new rhetorical problems (38). Hassel's study was of students attending a two-year, open admission institution and she followed fourteen precollege level writers in a bridge class for research writing in preparation for entering core English 102 courses. Of the fourteen students, she studied three cases more closely because these students were asked to "adapt to both a new rhetorical situation and engage critically with an unfamiliar text" (29). Hassel evaluated the students through their

writing assignments, reading requirements, and their writing samples. Although each of these students performed well in the bridge course, when the students stepped into English 102, Hassel found the students failed to make connections and meet expectations due to their lack of rhetorical connection and adaptability (29-30). Rhetorical adaptability, goal setting, and problem solving were the missing links for students who failed to make connections and transfer rhetorical knowledge.

Looking at rhetorical knowledge and its transfer beyond composition to other writing-intensive courses in other disciplines was the impetus for a pilot study by Gerald Nelms and Ronda Dively (2008). Both professors are actively involved in the writing across the curriculum program at the University of Illinois-Carbondale and designed an exploratory research project to identify and characterize variables that could influence transfer from composition courses to discipline specific writing-intensive course. This study consisted of two phases. The first phase involved surveying 38 graduate teaching assistants to determine the predominant rhetorical strategies taught in their English 101 and 102 courses. A summary of the results showed the emphasis of instruction as process paradigm, drafting/revising, genre awareness, personal and informational writing, and analysis and persuasive writing (220-221). The instructional methods were compared with input from several instructors' observations in phase 2. Phase 2 involved an open discussion with a focus group of five professors who taught writing-intense courses in other disciplines (instructors of: dental hygienists, physician assistants, X-ray technicians, aviation specialists, and computer management consultants). For this particular study, the professors were asked what rhetorical knowledge the students coming from the 101/102 courses lacked. The following five aspects were indicated to be the most

troublesome areas documented in their student writers: student compartmentalization of knowledge and lack of connections, understanding the thesis and support for writing in a variety of genres, time limitations for instructors to write more extensively in classes, student lack of motivation, and vocabulary within a given discourse community (223-226). Like McCarthy, Flower and Hayes, and Hassel, Nelms and Dively demonstrate a similar lack of “rhetorical adaptability” when writing outside of composition courses.

Due to the lack of rhetorical knowledge transfer from composition to other disciplines or discourse communities, David Smit argues for writing instruction to occur solely within the disciplines. In his aptly titled book, *The End of Composition Studies*, Smit claims that “students have learned what teachers have taught and evaluated, that in effect, writing teachers get what they teach for, instruction in particular kinds of knowledge and skill, not broad-based writing,” demonstrating a lack of rhetorical problem solving ability (120). As with the findings of McCarthy, Nelms, and Hollis, Smit claims that composition students have learned something (like the annotated bibliography example) that “can be applied only in very limited circumstances, [which are] similar to those in which they learned that knowledge in the first place” (49).

Most of the studies in composition transfer have focused on the student’s interpretation of a writing assignment and the student’s subsequent writing product for evaluating transfer. While aspects of these features are important for studying transfer, Dana Driscoll’s recent dissertation (2009) looked at student and teacher attitude and the impact on rhetorical knowledge transfer. Following 39 composition instructors and 153 students from 8 different composition sections, Driscoll gathered extensive data through interviews, surveys, classroom observations, and writing samples. Driscoll’s results

showed that students' beliefs and attitudes significantly affected their interpretation of the contexts in which transfer can take place, and their attitudes impaired their awareness of possible connections to writing in other courses (171-174). Driscoll also noted that bringing a student's background knowledge and attitudes to the forefront of the learning situation and building from them could help bridge connections for transfer. With the instructors in this study, who taught similar pedagogies, the qualitative results indicated that explicit teaching about future writing contexts and building connections for the students can foster transfer of writing knowledge (179). Driscoll (with Anne Beaufort) took the results of her dissertation and designed a composition curriculum for building rhetorical connections and teaching for transfer.

Anne Beaufort has examined writers' learning processes, the rhetorical connections they make, and the implications for composition instruction. In a recent book, *College Writing and Beyond: A New Framework for University Writing Instruction*, Beaufort offers yet another perspective on transfer and proposes a writing curriculum for teaching for transfer. Beaufort's 2007 study followed a single student, Tim, through his First Year Composition (FYC) courses, as well as his history, engineering, and post-college writing situations. In Beaufort's case study, she found Tim was a bright and motivated student; he had a strong sense of his writing processes, applied himself to learning the subject matter, and made rhetorical connections. Yet, in her observations, interviews, and analysis of writing samples, Beaufort noted that Tim's FYC course and writing knowledge did not transfer or appear to help him for writing in other courses. For example, in his FYC course, the initial writing emphasis was on narrative or journalistic projects. When Tim's course work shifted to academic writing of

argument, Beaufort found the requirements for the academic writing in his first year were not as rigorous as requirements in other courses, in particular juggling multiple sources and writing to support his thesis. Tim's initial history essays "revealed a lack of ability to sustain a clear focus" (80). She found he lacked connections for applying writing strategies for both rhetorical situations (although not every situation) and rhetorical problems, but his greatest deficiency was with meta-awareness of discourse communities and genre knowledge (77).

Beaufort is careful not to over-generalize from this case study, but she offers suggestions for designing a conceptual framework for writing expertise to test in other settings. The results of her study promote teaching discourse community knowledge, which offers a broader lens for learning. Under the umbrella of discourse community knowledge, Beaufort includes four sub-categories: writing process knowledge, subject matter knowledge, rhetorical knowledge, and genre knowledge. All four of these "knowledge domains" offer specific information for researching, understanding, and teaching for transfer (19). This framework, teaching discourse community knowledge and providing opportunities for the students to study and evaluate writing, has the potential to improve their ability to solve rhetorical problems like the expert writers in Flower and Hayes' study.

Beaufort's conclusions coincide with the preliminary results from Elizabeth Wardle's ongoing study, "Understanding 'Transfer' from FYW: Preliminary Results of a Longitudinal Study." Instead of discourse communities, Wardle's research interests lie at the intersections of activity theory, first-year composition, and transfer. Wardle relies heavily on Beach's definition for "generalizing" knowledge for transfer, suggesting, "it is

the nature of the activity system in which the problems and the learner's interpretations are embedded that makes the difference in whether people generalize learning" (68).

Wardle followed (and continues to follow) seven of her students from a FYW honors English class. Wardle found her students had near transfer occur within the domains of writing process knowledge (planning generating material, organizing), subject matter (research), the rhetorical situation, but failed to make the connections for solving rhetorical problems. From her preliminary results, Wardle, like Beaufort, advocates using a meta-lens and teaching composition as an "Introduction to Writing Studies" to enhance students' ability to problem solve as writers.

The most surprising aspect of Wardle's study was the type of writing required of the students during their second year while completing courses in other disciplines. They wrote very little—far less than I would expect, and far less than Tim in Beaufort's study, Dave in McCarthy's study, or the original fourteen writers Hassel followed. When the students in Wardle's study did write, they "did only what was necessary to earn the grade" and made many personal choices to "avoid challenging assignments...because they were unwilling to put forth the effort required to generalize previous writing experiences, knowledge, and abilities" (73). From Wardle's interviews, she found students lacked motivation for writing and that teachers assigned fewer writing tasks. Even though these honors students conveyed they didn't write as much and weren't as engaged in writing, the interviews and conversations Wardle had with them assisted in illuminating some transfer connections for rhetorical situations.

The study of transfer in composition is complex. Many factors influence students' writing abilities and the rhetorical connections they make moving through the

disciplines. There are social interactions to consider, discourse communities, student attitudes and interests in writing assignments, and teacher expectations to name a few. It is impossible to look at every possible scenario to evaluate and document transfer. Yet, every study on transfer adds a new piece to the puzzle of transfer in composition. In the next chapter, I will give an outline of my research project and the design of my study.

CHAPTER 3: STUDYING TRANSFER AT BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY

After reading some of the research on transfer and composition, I am more convinced that we should explore avenues for improving the transfer of rhetorical knowledge. I value writing as a mode of thinking and learning, and I want my students to reap the benefits of writing in courses outside of composition. So, how do we do this? As an instructor I want to find a way to help my students conceptualize rhetorical connections that will allow them to take their rhetorical knowledge and adapt it to writing in other courses. Because the study of transfer is a relatively new field, the research potential is unlimited, which means that my students can add to the conversation and possibly provide a missing link to improve composition instruction and increase transfer. I am not in the classroom with students to pass the time; I want to provide students with rhetorical knowledge that moves beyond the walls of our classroom. The study that I have designed to look at rhetorical transfer is simple, but the student voices that speak are complex. This study on transfer is an opportunity to listen and learn from the voices of student writers.

Wardle's study evaluated seven extremely competent students from a competitive honors program, Beaufort followed a single student, and Hassel evaluated three underprepared writers. Because I teach first-year writing to all incoming students, I chose to study five students placed in the English 102 class required for all these incoming first-year students. These students represent a more typical population of first-year writers. For my study, I looked at the rhetorical knowledge my students take into

their courses for writing, but I also be evaluated their responses on transfer through Flower and Hayes' rhetorical problem solving lens. The questions I focused on are:

- What rhetorical knowledge do students remember from English 102-research writing?
- What rhetorical knowledge do students recall and use in their courses?
- What kind of writing are students doing in their courses?
- What are the connections/disconnections between writing tasks in English 102-research writing and their current courses?

Research Methods Overview

My goal for this study was to determine what rhetorical knowledge, writing strategies, and writing techniques my students learned in English 102, and if they applied this knowledge to writing assignments in their other courses. In order to answer these questions, I designed a qualitative study generating questions from my own teaching instruction and the studies of Wardle (2008), Beaufort (2007), and McCarthy (1987). Each of these researchers demonstrated how generative both group and individual interviews were for composition studies on transfer. Beaufort also stressed the importance of collecting a writing sample with the instructor's assignment guidelines to evaluate a student's interpretation of a writing task. Consequently, I conducted the study using qualitative data collected through interviews, writing samples, and assignment guidelines for the writing sample. The 3-5 base questions I used for interviews (appendix A and B), were specific, but open-ended, which allowed the students to recall and elaborate on various writing strategies utilized in their courses.

After sending out an invitation to all of my former students, five students (2-female and 3-male) from my 2009 spring semester English 102 classes agreed to

participate in this study on transfer (appendix D and E). I designed the study to collect data from cluster interviews (which involved two or more students), individual interviews, a writing sample, and an online survey. In the interviews, I asked about the writing strategies they remembered from our research-writing class and also asked them to elaborate on how they were using those strategies in their classes (appendix A and C). Gathering and collating the data from the interviews illuminated the need to redirect the research project. During the cluster interviews, for example, the students elaborated on writing tasks in their various courses, which provided unexpected insights on rhetorical connections and disconnections pertaining to our research-writing class and transfer. The cluster interviews instigated conversations on a variety of writing tasks that could be connected to the students' recall of rhetorical knowledge, the rhetorical situations encountered for writing in English 102-research writing and, at times, the individual interview and writing sample. Therefore, the first necessary change was to spend additional time with the interview conversations (transcripts).

The other change in my data collection occurred with the online survey. Initially, I thought the anonymous online survey would provide triangulation for the study. Unfortunately, there was no way to trace this quantitative data back to each individual student's conversations during the interviews. The survey was ill designed for the purpose of this study and thus, the data eliminated. Although the modifications resulted in a lost data point, I was still able to provide sufficient triangulation with the interviews, writing samples, and assignment sheet. This qualitative approach for studying transfer is similar to that used by both Wardle (2007) and Hassel (2009).

Along with adjusting the processing of qualitative data for the study, I encountered two other complications. Sam removed himself from the study because he did not have a writing sample to submit. In addition, Carl wrote business letters and several personal opinion pieces, but did not have any research writing during the fall semester. Due to the modifications of the participants and data collection, I focus on the conversations with Jen, Kathryn, and Billy in the cluster interviews, individual interviews, and the discussion of the writing sample. In this chapter, I present each student as a mini-case study. For each case study, I reviewed the transcripts from the cluster interview to look at each student's recall of rhetorical knowledge: what did they remember from our research writing class? Then I reviewed the application of this knowledge for writing in their courses. Finally, I reviewed the student's individual interview discussing a specific writing sample (chosen by the student), evaluated the writing sample for rhetorical connections, triangulated these data points back with the cluster interview (students invariably discussed the individual assignment in both interviews) and again, made connections/disconnections to English 102-research writing course. Following the presentation of each case, I close this chapter with a brief summary of the results.

Case Study: Jen

Jen, a journalism/communications major, entered my research writing class overly confident in her writing abilities, which made her a tough customer for inquiry and research writing. However, Jen was also a diligent student who managed her study time and research processes to complete each writing task thoroughly and ahead of schedule.

Additionally, when given the opportunity this past fall to participate in the study on transfer, she was more than willing to contribute.

In the cluster interview, Jen recalled the following list of rhetorical knowledge from our research-writing course (questions in appendix A).

- writing research
- knowing credible/legitimate research (search engines/academic premier)
- rewriting and rewriting
- doing additional research
- changing the perspective of what we're writing about
- looking at things from different aspects

To find out which of the above research strategies Jen applied in her current courses, I asked her to “describe the writing you are doing in other classes this semester.” This question, during the cluster interview, provided an example of how generative interviews are for gathering data on transfer. Jen elaborated on an assignment in her journalism course, which eventually required a change in stance or perspective by the writer. The students in the class had interviewed one another for learning the craft of writing a personal interview. Jen interviewed a classmate and wrote her story. Then, Jen had an opportunity to re-interview the student and rewrite the story.

The rhetorical situation that Jen describes is similar to an assignment we did in our research writing class; the assignment was an argumentative essay. The emphasis for our class assignment was good research writing, but also rereading the sources to reconsider their original stance and write the essay as a creative nonfiction piece. Yet, although the rhetorical situation of changing your perspective or stance with your research was similar to our unit 2 argumentative essay, Jen did not see any connections in this new context—she did not see the similarities between the rhetorical situations. When

I asked about connections she might make with our research writing course, Jen responded, “it’s not like the writing we did...it’s very different from the writing that we did that involved researching and rewriting from different perspectives.” As I encouraged Jen to discuss the journalism assignment further, she did recognize some rhetorical similarities: rewriting and writing a journalistic creative nonfiction piece. Yet again, Jen interpreted the revision as “different,” she continued, “I’m doing a lot of rewriting and revision, but it’s different from the rewriting and revision that we did with our research papers.”

Jen did acknowledge the interview as a source of research: “there’s one time we got to interview them [the classmate] further, but for the most part, she [the instructor] has us change the way we write the story based on the same notes that we took. So we are rewriting and redoing things, but it’s at a stagnant point.” The implication of her response is that Jen considered the interview a limited source of research, or that the additional interview did not offer new insights for her research. The question that arises is why didn’t Jen see the similarities between these two writing assignments? The rhetorical situations are very similar, but Jen is recognizing a difference she is unable to articulate. I should note that in our research writing class, Jen worked with up to ten sources in the argumentative essay, which was very different from a single interview and could explain her disconnect with altering stances and the limitations of working with a single source. Additional information (the instructor’s assignment sheet and the final writing sample of the interview) could provide clarification for connections to the argumentative essay from our research writing class and disconnects within the context of the journalism class.

Individual Writing Assignment

The next writing assignment Jen chose to share was from her theatre class, which we discussed and evaluated in several ways: through the cluster interview, individual interview, the writing assignment, and the writing sample. For this informal writing assignment, the students were required to attend and write a critique on a theatre performance. In the cluster interview, Jen shared that the instructor was very explicit about restrictions; because she had so many students, she did not want any more information than necessary in the critique.

She [the instructor] gave us very strict guidelines as to each paragraph...first paragraph was our introduction with our thesis, the second paragraph, plot summary, the third—discuss the acting in the play, the fourth and fifth, pick two design elements and discuss, and the sixth paragraph was just our conclusion with our thesis restated.

In describing her process for writing this paper, Jen shared that she attended the theatrical performance a week before the paper was due, wrote down a few notes after she saw the performance, and wrote the final paper two days before it was due:

So then I sat down and figured out the two design elements that I wanted to use, which were the songs, and the lighting they used was very distinct. And I had really strong feelings about the acting in the play. And so it really wasn't that difficult for me to discuss any of it. So I just kind of came up with a thesis and let it roll from there and then...it was really quick, it was only six paragraphs.

When I asked Jen if she used any strategies from our research writing class, she replied, "I don't think with this paper specifically because it wasn't really a research thing... [and] ...it just didn't need a lot of time." Even though she wrote the paper relatively quickly, Jen said she revised it two times, but, again, she felt it did not really need a lot of attention. What I found most interesting about this assignment was how accurately Jen captured the intention of this writing task, "it was very cookie cutter...so

there wasn't really a lot of like, what do I want to say...thought...it wasn't that difficult."

Consequently, in Jen's critique, "A Question of Talent," she modeled the paper exactly as the instructor required; it is an analysis/critique of a play, and contains all the components as specified in the guidelines.

Case Study: Kathryn

Kathryn's curious smile and quiet confidence was a welcome presence in our research writing class. Kathryn, like Jen, was comfortable as a student. She understood hard work, and by the end of the semester discovered, she actually "liked" research writing. Over the course of our interviews together, Kathryn was pleased as she reflected on our research writing class and stated that by having each student research a topic for the entire semester, it allowed her to become "a kind of expert on a topic" (her topic was arachnophobia).

When I asked Kathryn what she remembered learning in English 102-research writing, she stated the following:

- preplanning
- writing rough drafts
- editing
- quick writing
- incorporating quotes
- knowing data bases and how to use them
- relying on credible sources
- choosing a topic
- building a web site
- stepping back to look at my writing
- looking at multiple perspectives (topic)
- evaluating perspectives, stances, arguments showed limitlessness of writing
- spending an entire semester becoming a kind of expert about a topic

To find out which of the above research strategies Kathryn applied in her current courses, I asked her to "describe the writing you are doing in other classes this semester."

Kathryn elaborated on an anthropology paper. For this informal writing assignment, the students researched old and new world dig sites. Although Kathryn never mentions the word inquiry in the above list, she applied inquiry to a research assignment in her anthropology course. In doing so, she said, “I applied a lot of the researching, and credible sources.” As she moved into the research process, she adds:

I shortened the process...I did brainstorming...not just jumping into one topic or one idea. Originally, I said, I guess I'll just write about Stonehenge, but everyone knows about Stonehenge. Instead, I ended up doing an older site that wasn't very well known and it made it fun for me to write about...I learned something new and had a new understanding for it.

Here Kathryn articulates her understanding that research is about inquiring beyond the obvious—learning, and expanding perspectives on topics. She used the following rhetorical strategies: preplanning to decide on an interesting topic, databases and search engines for credible sources, and revising. Using the transfer definitions of Perkins and Salomon, these rhetorical strategies are a type of near transfer and reside within Flower and Hayes' rhetorical situation, where the writer spends time with their writing process (generating ideas and rewriting), and the topic.

Individual Writing Assignment

For the individual writing sample, Kathryn chose a paper from her engineering course, which we discussed and evaluated in the following ways: through the cluster interview, individual interview, the writing assignment, and the writing sample. This informal writing assignment was given during a unit on engineering ethics and designing ethics contracts. The students received several articles on corporate catastrophes or disasters and analyzed if the accidents happened through negligence of the protocol process of the ethics contract. For her writing process, Kathryn admitted to

procrastinating and writing this paper two days before it was due. Although short on time, Kathryn applied many rhetorical strategies from our research writing class and refers to these strategies as she talks through her writing process.

Well, brainstorming...that was a huge thing I took from 102, because before I would write something...it would be the first thing I picked. If I started writing and didn't like anything about it, I would still try to write it just to get it over with. But, rough brainstorming and just coming up with as many ideas as you can and narrowing down the ones that catch your interest the best and then narrowing those down further and also outlining was a huge ...I actually outlined a lot for this paper just in the sense that going through all the articles. There were only four articles that they gave us and I went through all four and looked at the different aspects, outcomes, what happened and the ethics that were violated, so that was a big thing.

Kathryn's writing process demonstrates a fair amount of preplanning (brainstorming, outlining, and narrowing her topic choice). She also articulates the desire to find something interesting to write about rather than writing just to 'get it over with.' Once again, Kathryn is sharing rhetorical strategies of the writing process that are transferring to this engineering class. She is preplanning for generating ideas and evaluating the sources provided by the instructor. The rhetorical situation of evaluating sources and generating ideas are similar to what we did in our research writing class. Kathryn continues discussing the details of her writing process and describes sitting down to write the paper this way:

I wrote it all [on Wednesday], just kind of like spilled everything...a first draft and then on Thursday, I went through and made a bunch of edits and kind of just refined the in-text citations and stuff. And then citing and in-text citations and tying in the introduction with your body paragraphs so it's not just sitting there on its own and it has something to do with your writing and it flows together and makes the paper work. I did take a lot of that from 102, making the paper flow and look polished and sound...like you're not just spewing your ideas, you're incorporating other people's ideas, like you said, having a conversation so it makes it more credible and it makes it more interesting to the reader...cause a lot of times if you're reading it and somebody is just giving their opinion, you're like,

why does it matter? ...She [instructor] wasn't very concerned about formatting, so I didn't have to worry about introduction, body, conclusion, thesis statement or anything like that...

Like many writers aware of their processes, Kathryn spills everything, 'a first draft' before returning to rewrite and she is able to make connections that transfer from our research writing class: generating ideas, integrating sources as a conversation, articulating her rhetorical choices, and writing as a recursive process. But, Kathryn is also very aware of her audience; she's actively thinking about her reader and the effect her persona will have on her audience. These are some of the goals expert writers draw upon for solving rhetorical problems. As you'll see below, Kathryn is thinking abstractly and is working through a rhetorical problem. This is far transfer. This meta-awareness of her persona is also present in the following passage. I asked Kathryn what makes her go back and revise, and this is how she responded:

I changed the introduction entirely and I changed a few parts of the ...just because the first introduction that I wrote was a kind of filler ...so I did a few edits, but nothing drastic...Well, the introduction I wanted to change cause the first one I wrote wasn't anything that would grab anybody's attention...it was just was really just stating what I needed to get done in the paper based on the guidelines. So I went back to create a more "attention getting" introduction and then...I added a bunch of facts [sources] into the body and then I just took some fluff out...repetitive sentences, making sure there wasn't anything in there that was being stated over and over.

The details regarding Kathryn's writing process and her awareness of these processes as well as use of research strategies strike me as an exceptional. Kathryn's meta-awareness of rhetorical choices demonstrates her ability to juggle the rhetorical situation of the writing process, topic, audience, and also move into the rhetorical problem of making meaning in the text, considering her persona and affect on the reader, as well as genre conventions. In the past two passages, Kathryn is actively sharing how

she has transferred rhetorical strategies from our research writing class and moved beyond a similar rhetorical situation into a new context—far transfer.

Kathryn spoke above about writing a more “attention getting” introduction for her essay, which is another rhetorical strategy that she learned in our research writing class. Indeed, examining the individual writing sample, Kathryn has a more engaging introduction, putting the reader in media res: “Imagine your-self sleeping soundly on normal December night.” Immediately after setting the scene, Kathryn begins to elaborate on the accident at Union Carbide Bhopal, retelling the story in a journalistic fashion, incorporating quotes, and blending these quotes of the disaster with her language. Kathryn incorporated five quotes from two sources in her first six paragraphs. After giving an overview of the disaster, Kathryn made a choppy transition to discuss the ethical implications of the disaster. The purpose of the assignment was to evaluate the ethical violations by Union Carbide. Yet, the ethical analysis is weak and Kathryn cites a single quote to support her claim that Union Carbide was negligent. The essay is only 703 words and most of the support for claims is in the first half of the paper as Kathryn describes the disaster in scene and incorporates quotes, with little emphasis on the ethical responsibilities.

This assignment to construct an essay that explores the ethical implications of the disaster at Bhopal’s Union Carbide plant is similar to the rhetorical situation of our unit 2 argumentative essay from English 102-research writing. However, Kathryn’s stance on the disaster minimally addressed the ethical implications or responsibilities. It is interesting that Kathryn succeeded by transferring her use of source material and writing more conversationally with this assignment, writing as a recursive process and having

that “expert” ability to consider her persona and affect on audience. Yet, in the final writing product, she failed to thoroughly connect the ethical aspects and responsibilities of engineers to the disaster and support this stance. The interviews with and the evaluation of Kathryn’s essay demonstrate a tremendous amount of awareness and transfer—she is juggling many aspects of Flower and Hayes’ rhetorical problem.

Case Study: Billy

In our research writing class, Billy was quiet, soft-spoken, and reserved. I was grateful that he chose to sit in the front row of our research writing class. Due to his shyness and reluctance to speak out during class, sitting in the front row assured Billy’s voice was heard when he contributed to class conversations. As a research writer, Billy was cautious. Having moved from China to the United States at the age of eight, Billy’s command of the English language as a speaker and a writer was strong, but his cultural background and his shy personality significantly inhibited his participation in class.

As we spoke in the cluster interview, Billy recalled the following rhetorical strategies from our English 102-research writing class:

- using and quoting sources (using sources wisely to support a point)
- structure of the paper/MLA formatting
- rough drafts
- building web sites
- writing long papers (7-10 pages)
- different ways of writing (web sites, creative nonfiction)

Like Jen and Kathryn, to find out which of the above research strategies Billy applied in his current courses, I asked him to, “describe the writing you are doing in other classes this semester.” Billy said he was writing informal lab notes in his chemistry class and writing essays that are more formal in his history class. Since the writing in chemistry

was minimal, Billy elaborated on his history course. In this class, the students had several exams where they were required to write essay responses and support their answers with research sources. Billy said:

Basically, I have to do exactly what he [instructor] tells me to do. He has these requirements that you have to quote and use the sources to answer the questions and MLA, 12pt. font, title, whatever...For the quizzes; each answer has to be like 350 words. Four questions or so... [for each exam]

In this passage, Billy is focused specifically on the assignment requirements of the rhetorical situation. Billy says when he writes these take home exams, he is able to create rough drafts and revise several times.

Individual Assignment

When Billy and I met to discuss an individual writing sample, he chose to continue the conversation on the essays exams for his history class and submitted a sample exam including the questions and guidelines from the instructor. For this take home exam, the instructor was very explicit regarding what to include in each essay. The following are the instructions for the exam Billy took in history.

- Billy was required to choose one question from each section of the test (these contained multiple questions).
- Billy had to answer all the components of the question to obtain full credit.
- Billy had to use only the class textbooks and handouts for sources (no outside sources were allowed)
- Billy had to quote and used the sources to answer the questions (700-word maximum for answering two essay questions).

With every exam Billy has taken, (this is his third) the instructor's specifications for the essay exam are very directive. Billy paid close attention to the directions for the assignment. The following are excerpts of the conversation I had with Billy regarding his writing processes for these take home exams. To begin the process, Billy says,

I just answer the questions that he assigns, for example [pointing to the assignment sheet], like these questions...answers these questions and use the sources or something to quote them to back up the answers... Basically, he [the instructor] knows exactly what we have to work with [for sources...the instructor provides all the readings] we don't need a works cited. We have a book and handouts that he assigns us, that's all we need. He [instructor] can't keep track of something else [referring to outside sources].

This passage shows Billy's attention to the rhetorical situation, specifically the assignment, answering the questions and using the sources provided by the instructor to support these answers. I next asked Billy what he does after reading the questions and answering them. Here, Billy provides a few more details into his writing processes and research processes for completing the exam.

...if I read each part to the question... [reading off the sheet...showing me] I'll answer that and if I don't know the answer, I'll go read it or look for the answer, maybe somewhere in this page or something. When I find it, maybe I'll use a quote from that part to answer it and then talk about it a little bit or something. I go through every part of the question until I am done; I answer every part to it. [Then], I go back and see if it makes sense or not. Am I leaving something out? Or am I leaving something hanging or something? To see if it makes sense or not...cause he says proofread the text or something...try and make sure I don't have any errors or something....if I say something and I didn't really explain it very well, just randomly come out or something... does it connect well to this...like...how do you say this... [Picking up his essay] like I started answering part and then...does it sound good? It can't just be all rambling.

As I reflect on Billy's writing and research processes for this writing task, I see he is able to articulate some connections with our research writing class. Billy says he spends around five or six hours writing up this exam, returns to the research sources and rereads them several times, and then revises the essay 3-4 times over the weekend. Part of his reasoning for investing so much time and energy is the weight the exams have toward the final grade, 'they're worth a lot.' Like Kathryn, near transfer occurs with

Billy for preplanning, drafting process, incorporating sources to support his answers to the questions, and connecting or clarifying his answers.

As I evaluated the writing sample for this exam, I see Billy accomplishes the main goals for the assignment: answers the questions and incorporates quotes (primary sources only—no paraphrasing). Perhaps because his instructor was so explicit with the exam guidelines, the essay reads like a scripted list of answers to the questions. There are no introductions or transitions between the answers to questions. Billy begins writing each sentence with the copied text from the question as instructed and answers it, and then incorporates a quote to support his response. Yet, even though both exam-opening questions read, “Discuss the long-term contacts between the Late Roman Empire... [and] discuss the causes and effects of the “Black Death” in mid-14th century Europe,” there’s no evidence or an attempt to discuss or synthesize the information while answering the questions. I am not sure what Billy’s history instructor means by the word “discuss” in his assignment sheet, but my interpretation and what I taught in the research writing class is that the writer creates a conversation with their sources.

This assignment, as Billy says, was ‘almost similar’ to the writing we did in our English 102-research writing class, ‘except different requirements.’ The assignment is certainly similar to the rhetorical situation of the argumentative essay when the students took a stance and supported their claims with sources. However, with the history exam, Billy simply answered the questions and used the sources to support his claims, disregarding introducing and reflection on the quote/source. At one point in our interview, Billy recalled the importance of “talk[ing] about your quote” and that he was “explain[ing] what this guy [source] is saying.” Yet, in his final paper, Billy incorporates

the quotes of ten primary sources and only offers a reflection on one of them. Billy wrote a 970-word essay, which could be a maximum of 1400 words. With an additional 400 words, there were many opportunities to discuss and elaborate on the answers to the questions (for both short essays), introduce quotes, reflect on quotes, and create transitions, yet this particular style of integrating quotes (that we stressed in English 102) didn't transfer to the writing task in history. For this writing task, Billy stays within the rhetorical situation, focusing on the writing assignment and his writing process. There are no indicators for abstract thinking (at least not revealed in our conversations).

Initial Results

I began this study on transfer as an attempt to answer several questions.

- What rhetorical knowledge do students remember from English 102-research writing?
- What rhetorical knowledge do students recall and utilize in their courses?
- What kind of writing are students doing in their courses?
- What transfers from English 102-research writing and to writing tasks in other courses?

As described in the case studies, students did indeed learn and retain rhetorical strategies from their English 102-research writing class. The rhetorical recall varied between each of the students, from engaging in research and knowing how to use databases, to preplanning and organizing, to recognizing and utilizing credible resources and incorporating source material, rewriting, extending the research, changing stances, and writing in different formats (websites, creative nonfiction). Not all students had opportunities to engage in independent research writing in their current courses, but they did engage in both formal and informal writing tasks with primary or secondary research sources distributed by the instructor. Although the students weren't asked to use their

research processes (specifically searching data bases), the case studies still provide useful data for evaluating rhetorical recall and writing processes. In particular, in the interviews, students articulate their research and writing processes, which provides insight on transfer. Also, by comparing the interviews on individual assignments and the writing sample, connections and/or disconnections are illuminated.

So what specifically transferred? What rhetorical knowledge did students learn in English 102 research writing and utilize in their other courses? Jen, Kathryn, and Billy are each transferring rhetorical strategies that are useful for writing in other classes such as generating ideas, rewriting, evaluating and incorporating sources, and having a meta awareness of their rhetorical choices. These rhetorical strategies are key markers for near transfer because they were utilized with writing tasks that triggered “well-practiced routines” where there was “perceptual similarity to the original learning context,” (Perkins, 25). Now the question is: how do we build off these markers of near transfer and extend students’ rhetorical knowledge to unfamiliar contexts—far transfer? I hope to answer this question as I evaluate the results of my study more closely in chapter 4.

In Chapter 4, I demonstrate the use of the rhetorical problem solving model. This new rhetorical problem model has composition instruction applications for teaching writing as problem solving, which encourages an abstraction of thought (the kind of abstraction Perkins and Salomon suggest for far transfer). Currently, many composition instructors use a model of the rhetorical situation for setting up writing tasks. This model can limit students to the assignment (writing process knowledge), audience, and the topic. A problem-solving model that encompasses the rhetorical situation is the link I explore to

extend near transfer to far transfer. In chapter 4, I will demonstrate the use of this new rhetorical problem-solving model.

Interlude

Thus far, inquiry on composition pedagogy and listening to the voices of student writers for insight on transfer has been driving the narrative arch of this thesis project. As I move into chapter 4, the narrative arch will change as I enter into a new conversation that entails writing an academic article. During the process of writing this thesis, I have actively engaged in my own rhetorical problem. Working through the thesis, it has been necessary for me to contemplate the assignment (my topic of transfer), the audience (my committee members), and to read, write, generate, and organize material. There has been a constant awareness of the genre of the thesis: what are the conventions? How will I enter the conversation? What language will I use to connect with my reader? This demonstration of abstract thinking and drawing upon rhetorical knowledge from my previous writing experiences to this new context is an example of the rhetorical problem solving I argue for in chapter 4. In making this argument, chapter 4 is written as a completely new rhetorical problem—an academic article. You may ask, why do this?

Let me explain. Research in composition frequently stems from an inquiry instigated by personal experience. My own struggle as a graduate student adjusting to various writing assignments is an example of this. Experimentation is a critical component of learning, and as instructors of writing, we are always experimenting on ourselves. The challenge that I have designed for myself in writing chapter 4 is important beyond mere experimentation. First, I will write the chapter as an academic article for

Writing Program Administrators. Stepping into the academy is an essential opportunity to maneuver through William Perry's scheme and contribute to the scholarship on transfer in composition. Second, solving a new and challenging rhetorical problem enables me to experience frustrations similar to the ones my students experience when assigned a different writing task. Finally, chapter 4 allows you to observe my struggles as a graduate student writer negotiating the complex task of solving an unfamiliar rhetorical problem of writing an academic article—a rhetorical problem that feels daunting.

Below is the rhetorical problem solving model I argue for implementing in composition instruction. I will demonstrate the use of this model by writing a paper for chapter 4 of this thesis.

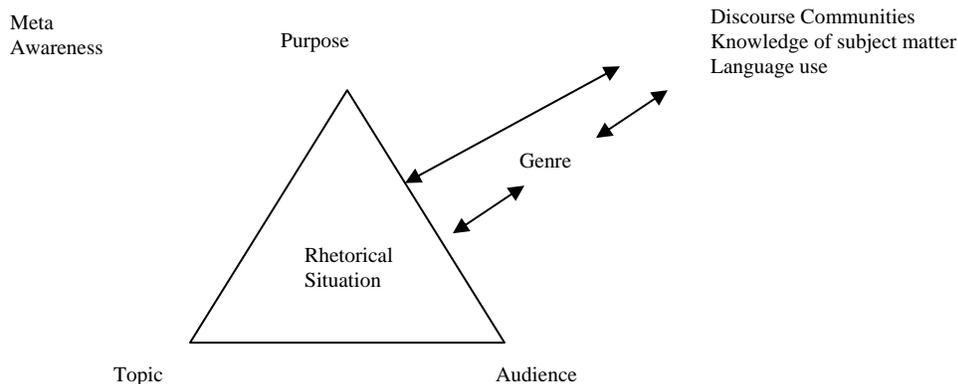


Figure 3. The Rhetorical Problem: An Academic Article.

- Purpose: The purpose of chapter 4 is to write an article arguing for the use of the rhetorical problem-solving model for writing instruction to increase abstract thinking and extend/improve the transfer of rhetorical knowledge to new contexts.

- Audience/Discourse Community: The audience for this article is complex. The immediate audience includes my committee members and myself, but the purpose of the article pushes me to consider a broader audience—the discourse community of scholars, which consists of academic scholars studying transfer. The audience members heavily influence the persona I'm trying to conjure for myself as a writer. I want to sound intelligent and informed, but respectful of those scholars who have far more knowledge on transfer. The audience and discourse community force me to abstract to a new context for writing.
- Topic: The topic for this article is rhetorical knowledge transfer, which is the result of my inquiry question—what rhetorical knowledge from English 102-research writing transfers to writing tasks in other classes beyond composition?
- Genre/Structure: The genre for this is an academic article that uses the conventions of argument. The structure of the article is modeled loosely after the research articles I have read in *Writing Program Administrators*. The article is structured in the following way,
 - open with my thesis (addressing the remix of Flower and Hayes' and how I will contribute to the conversation on transfer)
 - step into my research findings immediately
 - discuss these findings with the ideas of other scholars researching transfer
 - illuminate the remix of the rhetorical problem and its applications for classroom instruction
- Subject matter knowledge: The subject matter is theories of transfer and research on transfer in composition. This ties in closely with my broader audience because I'm aware that their subject knowledge depth is greater than my own.
- Language: In an academic article discussing transfer, I have to move away from the vernacular and use the terms and foundational language on transfer to communicate with my audience (again, a broader scholarly audience). Here, I am also considering my persona and my ability to articulate my ideas with the language of the academy.
- Meta-awareness: This rhetorical problem-solving proposal points out some of the dynamic interactions that occur between the elements of the problem. As I write this article, I will reevaluate various aspects of the rhetorical problem and attempt to work through this complex writing task.

CHAPTER 4: RE-ENVISIONING FLOWER AND HAYES' RHETORICAL
PROBLEM TO INCREASE ABSTRACT THINKING AND EXTEND TRANSFER

It's not like the writing we did...it's very different from the writing that we did that involved researching and rewriting from different perspectives.

~Jen (first-year writer)

Good writers respond to all aspects of the rhetorical problem.
As they compose they build a unique representation not only of their audience and assignment, but also their goals involving the audience, their own persona, and the text.

~Linda Flower & John R. Hayes

The scholarship on transfer in composition has steadily increased in the past ten years, and instructors of composition are looking toward pedagogy that improves connections for the transfer of rhetorical knowledge across the disciplines. The First Year writing program at Boise State University shares this concern and is committed to helping students build rhetorical bridges that enable them to make connections with the writing they do in other classes. While completing a project researching transfer in composition with Boise State first-year writers this past winter, my students' comments on rhetorical recall and writing processes led me to reevaluate the composing process research of Linda Flower and John R. Hayes (1980 1981). Throughout my study of first-year writers and rhetorical knowledge transfer, I found correlations between the types of transfer that occur and Flower and Hayes' definitions of the rhetorical situation

and the rhetorical problem—in particular, that expert writers think abstractly about new contexts during the composing process. These correlations offer insight for improving transfer in composition classes.

Like many academic settings across the country, when students enter college at Boise State University, over 95% of them are required to take the first-year writing sequence. These two core-composition courses are similar to those offered across the nation; “Introduction to College Writing” and “Introduction to College Writing and Research” provide students with a broad overview of academic writing: rhetorical awareness, genre conventions, inquiry and research as a recursive processes, and critical reading. Because most first-year students are required to take composition courses as part of their core curriculum, some compositionists (and many people outside the field) believe that rhetorical knowledge learned in composition transfers automatically to the writing students encounter in other disciplines. However, recent studies (Wardle 2007, Beaufort 2007, Driscoll 2009) indicate that rhetorical knowledge transfer is limited and that changes in teaching might be needed. In order to evaluate my own pedagogy for English 102-research writing—Boise State’s second semester composition course—and to study transfer, I designed a qualitative study and followed three first-year writers into their second year university core courses.

In this article, I present a qualitative research study on composition transfer framing the study within Flower and Hayes’ definitions of the rhetorical situation and the rhetorical problem while placing the study in the ongoing conversation of composition transfer research. I argue for using a new rhetorical problem-solving model for

conceptualizing writing tasks. This remix of Flower and Hayes' rhetorical problem-solving model offers composition students the opportunity to design and conceptualize writing tasks that provide problem-solving opportunities—opportunities that increase abstract thinking, with classroom applications that encourage transfer.

Viewing Transfer: A New Lens

The rhetorical lens I used for this study is a synthesis of the theoretical cognitive composing process research of Flower and Hayes and the research of David Perkins and Gavriel Salomon (1992, 1988), which is a compilation of their educational, psychological and mathematical problem-solving research that resulted in a theoretical understanding of transfer. In order to establish a clear vision for this lens, it is necessary that I first revisit the early cognitive research of Flower and Hayes, and then make connections with the theories of David Perkins and Gavriel Salomon. As I move through the process of connecting Flower and Hayes with Perkins and Salomon, I diagram models to illustrate the connections I see between these theorists.

Over thirty years ago Flower and Hayes (1980, 1981) extended studies from cognitive psychology to composition to discover important differences in the writing processes of expert and novice writers. These differences are what I focus on for my study of transfer. While observing novice writers (students), Flower and Hayes found that these writers limited their composing processes to the rhetorical situation, which at the time Flower and Hayes defined as the assignment (topic), audience, and the writers' writing processes (figure 1). In particular, Flower and Hayes noted novice writers were topic bound. These novice writers are very similar to many first-year writers; their

rhetorical knowledge and writing experience is limited and as I have observed in my classroom, the students attach themselves to their topics.

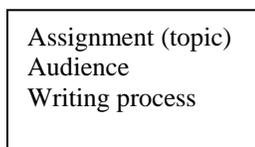


Figure 4. The Rhetorical Situation

Unlike the novice writers, expert writers relied on their “stored problem solving representations” to create and solve a more complicated rhetorical problem (figure 2). The rhetorical problem defined by Flower and Hayes, incorporated the rhetorical situation, but also included a complex network of *abstract* goals (emphasis mine) (377, 29-30). These goals set by experienced writers were much more wide ranging, including the effect on audience, the writer’s persona, the meaning of their writing, and the genre (27-29). This research by Flower and Hayes sheds light on how writers in transition approach new writing situations and how experienced or expert writers solve a *different* and more complex problem than novice writers (emphasis mine) (30).

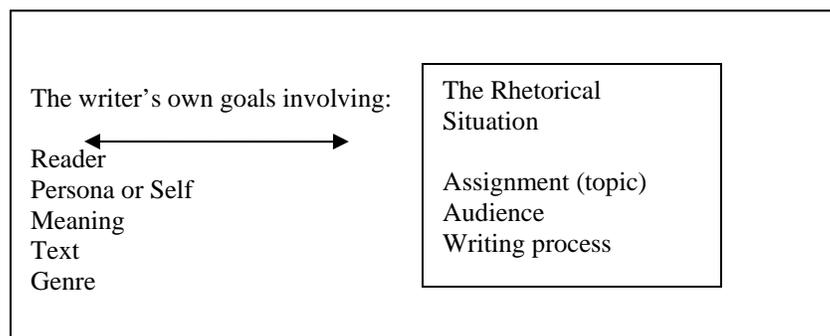


Figure 5. The Rhetorical Problem

Flower and Hayes' observed that expert writers constantly moved back and forth between their goals and the rhetorical situation. The experts vocalized the desire to affect the reader, create a persona, build meaning, and produce a formal text for their intended audience (25). Within the rhetorical problem, expert writers spent more time thinking about and commenting on their specific goals as they composed while the novice writers spent more time in the rhetorical situation (in particular their topic and writing process). This element of the rhetorical problem is a dynamic interaction because expert writers were considering aspects of the total rhetorical problem as they "created a unique, fully-developed representation of this unique rhetorical problem" (25). The unique rhetorical problem that expert writers envision demonstrates abstract thinking and implies the ability to problem solve in different contexts, which is the connection I want to make with theories on transfer (377).

Cognitive Research and Writing Transfer

While cognitive research lends insights on how writers work, research on learning transfer helps composition instructors' re-envision pedagogy. According to Perkins and Salomon, the ability to think abstractly and make connections in new contexts is essential for the transfer of knowledge. They also break transfer down into two distinct types of transfer, "near" and "far."

Near transfer "reflects the automatic triggering of well-practiced routines in circumstances where there is considerable perceptual similarity to the original learning contexts" (25). In Elizabeth Wardle's study (2007), she found students did generalize many rhetorical strategies: writing process related strategies, organization, the management of large research projects, critical reading and analysis, and in-depth research. These strategies were very familiar to her research participants and in Perkins

and Salomon’s theoretical view would be categorized as near transfer because they were “well practiced routines” learned in their first-year writing class. I believe near transfer connects with the study by Flower and Hayes because these strategies demonstrated that novice writers focused their attention on the rhetorical situation and were bound to the assignment (topic) and their writing processes (generating, planning), or “well practiced routines” as they were asked to write in a new context (Perkins, 25).

At this point, it will be helpful to provide you with a contemporary version of the rhetorical situation based upon the models used in composition classrooms today and illustrate the connections I see between Flower and Hayes, and Perkins and Salomon.

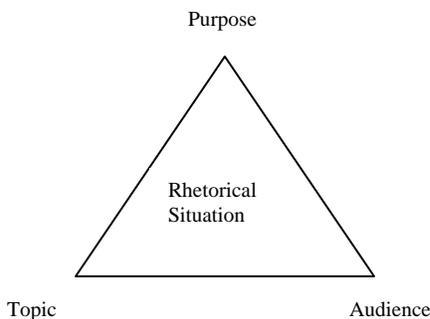


Figure 6. The Rhetorical Situation: Contemporary

In composition classes at Boise State, many instructors routinely have the students write up a proposal for their writing assignment. The students identify their purpose (to explore, to persuade, to inform), and they decide on their topic (subject matter), and then they focus on their audience. With first-year writers, it is common for the students to describe their audience as just “a general audience—anybody can read this.” The role of audience is especially important for writing experts; Flower and Hayes observed these writers “creating a sophisticated, complex image of a reader—half alter ego, half fashion consumer (the prompt was to write about your job for the readers of Seventeen

Magazine) (26). I will discuss this a bit more shortly, but first let me illustrate my vision for the rhetorical model Flower and Hayes were describing at the time of their study.

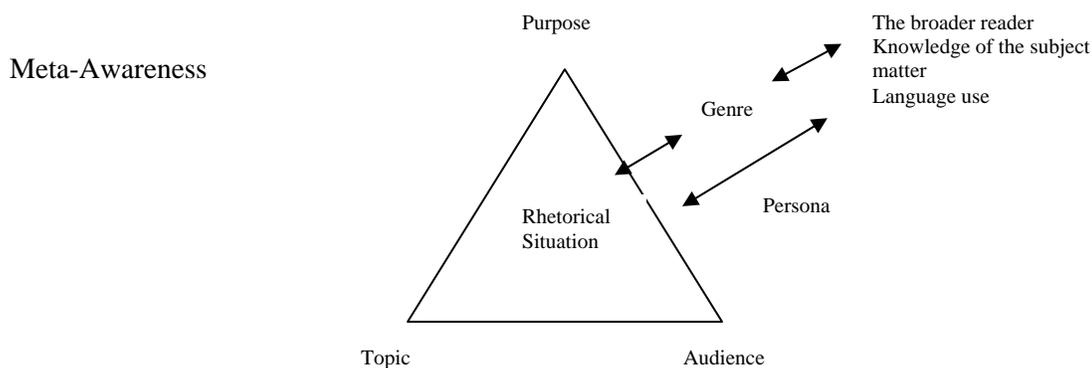


Figure 7. The Re-Envisioned Rhetorical Problem

The rhetorical problem is a much more complex and interactive process for working through a writing task, which Flower and Hayes' documented in their observations. For example, the expert writer considered how to connect to the audience of 13-14 year old girls, how the reader might perceive their writing (persona), the genre conventions of the magazine, along with the purpose and subject matter. The ability to think abstractly is a critical link in the studies of transfer because it demonstrates the ability to transfer knowledge. Expert writers have far more writing experience that enables them to create abstract goals and apply them to a new writing context. They draw upon their knowledge base, goals, writing process, and audience awareness to write within and solve the entire rhetorical problem within a given context, which is a skill novice writers lack (27-29).

So how does the rhetorical problem connect to transfer? Far transfer is the objective for many instructors of composition and “depends on deliberate mindful abstractions of skill or knowledge from one context for application in another,” which is

what the expert writers in Flower and Hayes study were demonstrating as they solved a rhetorical problem (25). This active abstraction of thought to apply rhetorical knowledge from one context to another—solving a rhetorical problem—is a link for teaching for transfer.

During the course of my transfer research study with Boise State students, the connection between Flower and Hayes' rhetorical problem-solving model and the theories of transfer from Perkins and Salomon became more apparent, and I decided to use this lens for evaluating my data. This enabled me to listen to the voices of student writers, as well as analyze a writing sample, and look for how much time they were spending in the writing process versus how much time they were considering other elements of the rhetorical problem (if any). Viewing transfer within the framework of Flower and Hayes' rhetorical situation and rhetorical problem provided insights on where rhetorical connections occurred with my student writers. The analysis of these novice writers provides a method for building upon and teaching for transfer. If we can document when and where transfer occurs, then there are possibilities to build bridges to increase and extend that transfer. In the remainder of this article, I create correlations between the writing tasks of students and Flower and Hayes' rhetorical situation and rhetorical problem. The correlations that my students illuminate instigated my decision to re-envision Flower and Hayes' rhetorical problem and build a model from their research to connect the transfer I see with the writers in my study and the theories on transfer from Perkins and Salomon.

Research Writing & Beyond

To understand how Flower and Hayes' research and theories connect to student recall of rhetorical strategies for transfer, I designed a qualitative study to follow three Boise State students from my spring 2009 English 102-research writing class into their fall 2009-sophomore semester core courses. The students were all traditional first-year students, entering college directly from high school: Jen, a journalism/communications major, Billy, a pre-dental major, and Kathryn, an engineering major¹. In this study, I obtained data from interviews, a writing sample, and the assignment sheet for the writing sample. The questions (appendix A & C) I asked students were generated from my teaching experience—teaching the research writing class, and the transfer studies of Wardle (2007), Beaufort (2007), and McCarthy (1988)². I set out to answer the following questions,

- What rhetorical knowledge do students remember from English 102-research writing?
- What rhetorical knowledge do students recall and use in their courses?
- What kind of writing are students doing in their courses?
- What are the connections/disconnections between writing tasks in English 102-research writing and their current courses?

These questions guided the interviews and data collection as the students discussed the writing they did in history, anthropology, journalism, and engineering. From the transcribed interviews, I was able to create categories to classify the student rhetorical recall, compare this recall to their individual interview, and finally create triangulation with the writing sample. Although the students shared that the research writing that they did in courses after English 102 was minimal, the few writing

¹ All are pseudonyms.

² Details of my methodology are in appendix F.

assignments they were able to discuss with me contribute valuable insights for considering how rhetorical strategies do and do not transfer.

Research Writing Strategies: Foundations for Transfer

Instructors of composition, including me, find affirmation in our abilities when students share concrete examples of rhetorical knowledge they learned in our courses and how their thinking about writing changed. This was the case with the students in my study. All three of the student writers from my research writing class articulated (to varying degrees) specific rhetorical concepts and strategies learned in our research-writing class. The rhetorical recall varied with each student, ranging from engaging in research and knowing how to use data bases, to preplanning and organizing, from recognizing and utilizing credible resources and incorporating source material, to rewriting, extending the research, changing stances, and writing in different formats (websites, creative nonfiction). The fact that students remember many of the rhetorical strategies from our research class means that something in the instruction was working for these writers. Having said this, I understand the recall rhetorical strategies and actual implementation of these rhetorical strategies for writing tasks in other classes may not occur. It was for this reason I wanted to interview my students about a writing assignment in one of their post composition courses and analyze the writing sample to see what really stuck.

Research Writing: Missed Opportunities for Transfer

Although student rhetorical recall is important, not every student had the opportunity to make use of that rhetorical knowledge to demonstrate transfer. In almost all instances, the instructor provided the necessary primary and secondary research

sources and none of the students were required to engage in an in-depth research project. Jen discussed a writing project where she participated in primary research writing doing both a personal interview in her journalism class, and observation (fieldwork) in her theatre class, but none of her fall classes required the use of library research processes: looking up credible sources in the databases, or extending research beyond a single source. As Jen commented to me in the cluster interview, “There’s just not a lot of writing this semester.”

Library research, finding credible sources, and extending research was also unnecessary for Billy as he completed his history essay exams. The instructor for this class provided both primary and secondary sources for all the students. As Billy shared, “We have a book and handouts that he assigns us, that’s all we need.” This was also the case for Kathryn’s engineering assignment for researching corporate ethical responsibility in conjunction with industrial disasters. The instructor for the engineering course, like Billy’s history course, provided Kathryn with primary sources, allowing her to bypass the initial steps of library research.

In light of Flower and Hayes’ rhetorical problem, this lack of independent research is problematic because it removes a component of the research process and limits students to the rhetorical situation designed by the instructor. The lack of independent research reduces the necessary problem-solving steps that require abstract thinking—a critical component for transfer. In fact, one of the main goals of the English 102 class at Boise State is to help writers step into challenging and in-depth academic research and prepare them for writing as they move into other disciplines. If instructors

provide students with the research articles they need for assignments, it keeps the writer bound to the rhetorical situation because elements of problem-solving are bypassed.

Transfer: A Continuum

When the students did have opportunities to apply their rhetorical strategies in other courses, the transfer of rhetorical knowledge is difficult to measure. As Wardle (2007) points out, student recall of rhetorical knowledge and the transfer of rhetorical knowledge are not synonymous. Yet, if we focus on near transfer, categorized by Perkins and Salomon as “the automatic triggering of well-practiced routines in circumstances where there is considerable perceptual similarity to the original learning context,” correlations between writing tasks are possible (25). Many of the rhetorical situations that the students worked through as writers were “perceptually similar” to the context of our research writing class. Working with these student writers, they displayed several examples of near transfer.

Students demonstrated near transfer consistently in their abilities to adjust their research and writing processes depending upon the expectations of the writing tasks (impact on the grade, difficulty of the assignment). For Jen, she engaged in a brief theatrical critique—a detailed writing assignment that required a few hours of observation, minimal field notes, and a few hours to write a highly structured thesis driven analysis as Jen shared in our interview.

She [the instructor] gave us very strict guidelines as to each paragraph...first paragraph was our introduction with our thesis, the second paragraph, plot summary, the third—discuss the acting in the play, the fourth and fifth, pick two design elements and discuss, and the sixth paragraph was just our conclusion with our thesis restated.

Jen's tone reflected boredom as she summed up this writing assignment, "it was very cookie cutter...so there wasn't really a lot of like, what do I want to say?...thought...it wasn't that difficult." Consequently, Jen's critique, "A Question of Talent," is modeled the paper exactly as the instructor required; it is an analysis/critique of a play, and it contains all the components as specified in the guidelines. Her research and writing processes reflect an appropriate time commitment and application of her writing strategies for the assignment. Sadly, Jen was not given the opportunity to engage in research or a writing task that she found stimulating and interesting.

In our English 102 course, Jen spent the entire semester writing about the educational system in the United States after sifting through academic articles and conducting interviews. This research on the educational system was also rewritten in several genres (exploratory essay, creative nonfiction argumentative essay, and a web site), and Jen had conducted additional research over the course of the semester, and revised continuously. Compared to the writing in our research class, the theatre paper was not particularly challenging.

Billy was enrolled in a history course with an instructor that was very specific regarding the structure of the essay exams, and he realized the stakes were high, "they're worth a lot." Billy actively engaged additional time and energy to complete his take-home history essay exam. Due to the impact and effect on his grade, Billy was motivated to thoroughly read, research, and write for the essay. Both Jen and Billy exhibit components of their research writings strategies (writing processes, planning organizing, drafting, and incorporating quotes) that do transfer from composition to other classes, but were only applied if the assignment demanded the use of these strategies.

Kathryn also displayed examples of near transfer as she worked through rhetorical situations that were similar to the unit projects we did in our research class. For a paper she researched and wrote in anthropology, Kathryn said, “I applied a lot of the researching, and [what we learned about] credible sources.” As she moved into the research process, she adds,

I shortened the process...I did brainstorming...not just jumping into one topic or one idea. Originally, I said, I guess I'll just write about Stonehenge, but everyone knows about Stonehenge. Instead, I ended up doing an older site that wasn't very well known and it made it fun for me to write about...I learned something new and had a new understanding for it.

Here Kathryn articulates her understanding that research is about inquiring beyond the obvious—learning, and expanding perspectives on topics, which is significant for a first-year writer. She used the following rhetorical strategies: preplanning to decide on an interesting topic, databases and search engines for credible sources, and revising. Using the transfer definitions of Perkins and Salomon, these rhetorical strategies are a type of near transfer and reside within Flower and Hayes rhetorical situation, where the writer spends time with their writing process (generating ideas and rewriting), and the topic.

The use of writing process rhetorical knowledge was evident in Kathryn's engineering class as well. Kathryn admits to procrastinating, which forced a shortened process, but she utilized her writing and research processes with the research sources provided by the instructor. These processes (writing process, topic, audience, purpose) are important rhetorical strategies necessary for successful learning and writing in many courses beyond composition. This rhetorical recall and application, or near transfer, is similar to the tasks learned and engaged in for the rhetorical situations of our research-

writing class. From the interviews and analysis of the students writing sample, I see them using their writing processes and rhetorical strategies in these new, but similar rhetorical situations. Every time I observed the transfer of rhetorical knowledge, they were always strategies associated with the writing process and limited to the rhetorical situation where the recall was that “automatic triggering of well-practiced routines” that Perkins and Salomon define as near transfer.

Challenges for Transfer

The students demonstrated that some of their rhetorical recall transferred to similar rhetorical situations, but there were still difficulties encountered that limited transfer. For composition instructors, far transfer is one of the goals as students move from composition courses into other disciplines. Jen demonstrated the challenges of far transfer or thinking abstractly with a writing task in her journalism class—an assignment that was rhetorically similar to one she did in our research writing class. The students in the journalism class had interviewed one another for learning the craft of writing a personal interview. Jen interviewed a classmate and wrote her story as a newspaper article. Then, Jen had an opportunity to re-interview the student and then rewrite the story from a new perspective. Although the rhetorical situation (changing your perspective or stance) was similar to the situation for the argumentative essay from our English 102-research writing, and Jen stressed in our interview the importance of “changing your perspective on what you’re writing about,” she was unable to make a connection between the rhetorical situation from our research-writing course and this new context. When I asked about connections she might make with our research writing course, Jen responded, “it’s not like the writing we did...it’s very different from the

writing that we did that involved researching and rewriting from different perspectives.” As I encouraged Jen to discuss the journalism assignment further, she did recognize some rhetorical similarities: rewriting, revising, and writing a journalistic creative nonfiction piece. Yet again, Jen interpreted the revision as different: “I’m doing a lot of rewriting and revision, but it’s different from the rewriting and revision that we did with our research papers.” Jen is definitely grappling with trying to articulate the similarities and differences between the writing task from our research writing class and the writing task in the new context of her journalism class.

Jen did acknowledge both interviews she conducted as a source of research, but not the recursive process of research that was stressed in English 102, “there’s one time we got to interview them [student] further, but for the most part, she [instructor] has us change the way we write the story based on the same notes that we took. So we are rewriting and redoing things, but it’s at a stagnant point.” The implication of her response is that Jen considered the interview a limited source of research, or that the additional interview did not offer new insights for her research. Jen’s interview assignment in her journalism course was rhetorically similar to the argumentative essay written in English 102-research writing. Structuring the journalism essay, Jen reviewed and reconsidered her stance with the research. Yet, Jen stated repeatedly in her interview, “the writing [for journalism was] not like the writing we did in 102, it’s very different.” Based upon her perception and understanding of the writing assignment, Jen is making connections with rhetorical situation in the new context of journalism, but unable to identify the exact differences and similarities that might help her understand the rhetorical problem.

Like Jen, Billy was not able to articulate rhetorical similarities that could extend near transfer to far transfer. When Billy and I met to discuss an individual writing sample, he chose to discuss the essay exams for his history class and submitted a sample exam including the questions and guidelines from the instructor. For this take home exam, the instructor was very explicit regarding what to include in each essay (the instructor provided a specific word count, and he told students to use only the primary and secondary sources from class, and to discuss and answer the exam questions). Billy gave close attention to the directions for each exam. The following are excerpts of the conversation I had with Billy regarding his writing processes for these take home exams. In the excerpt below, and the one that follows, Billy was extremely focused on the assignment sheet, pointing to it repeatedly as we conversed. To begin the process, Billy says,

I just answer the questions that he assigns, for example [pointing to the assignment sheet], like these questions...answers these questions and use the sources or something to quote them to back up the answers... Basically, he [the instructor] knows exactly what we have to work with [for sources...the instructor provides all the readings] we don't need a works cited.

I next asked Billy what he does after reading the questions and answering them. Here, Billy provides a few more details into his writing processes and research processes for completing the exam. He also remembers the recursive process of research writing.

...if I read each part to the question... [reading off the sheet...showing me] I'll answer that and if I don't know the answer, I'll go read it or look for the answer, maybe somewhere in this page or something. When I find it, maybe I'll use a quote from that part to answer it and then talk about it a little bit or something. I go through every part of the question until I am done; I answer every part to it. [Then], I go back and see if it makes sense or not. Am I leaving something out?

While reflecting on Billy's writing and research processes for this assignment, I hear him articulate some connections with our research writing class. He uses: preplanning, rough drafting process, incorporating sources to support his answers to the questions, and connecting or clarifying his answers. Billy says he spends around five or six hours writing up this exam, returns to the research sources and rereads them several times, and then revises the essay 3-4 times over the weekend. The rhetorical strategies Billy learned in our research writing class are being used in a similar way in his history class.

The history essay exam itself was essentially two concise argumentative essays using both primary and secondary sources. As I evaluated the essays he wrote for the exam, Billy used some argumentative conventions, established claims as answers to the questions, used sources, and incorporated correct in-text citations. Yet, the broader rhetorical problem in this new context of history did not transfer. He wrote in a very simplistic manner utilizing some argumentative conventions from our research writing class, if only to support his answers to the questions. But, Billy lacked the integration of quotes as a conversation (introducing them and also reflecting upon their significance) and failed to "discuss" any aspects of the topics covered, even though he had the word count available to write more, and this technique was stressed in English 102-research writing—a technique he accomplished in his English 102 argumentative essay. Is this an example of limiting a student with a directive assignment or could the lack of connections for Billy simply be a natural regression that occurs when experiencing dissonance during the learning process and adjusting to a new learning environment?

In her study of underprepared student writers, Holly Hassel (2009) found that students moving from English 101 to English 102 had difficulties transferring rhetorical

strategies and lacked “rhetorical adaptability” when reading and writing in their English 102 course. Billy’s inability to recognize connections could be limited by focusing on the rhetorical situation, the assignment sheet, time spent with the subject matter of history, or natural regression as he adjusted to a new learning environment, or many other uncontrollable factors. The good news is that rhetorical strategies for writing are transferring—just within the rhetorical situation (writing process knowledge).

Utilizing rhetorical strategies were key for Kathryn in her engineering class. She had an informal writing assignment during a unit on engineering ethics and designing ethics contracts. The students in the class received several articles on corporate catastrophes or disasters and analyzed whether the accident happened through negligence of the protocol process of the ethics contract. Kathryn chose to write about the 1984, Union Carbide accident in Bhopal, India. For her writing process, Kathryn admitted to procrastinating and writing this paper two days before it was due. Although short on time, Kathryn applied many rhetorical strategies from our research writing class and refers to these strategies as she talks through her writing process.

Well, brainstorming...that was a huge thing I took from 102, because before I would write something...it would be the first thing I picked. If I started writing and didn’t like anything about it, I would still try to write it just to get it over with. I actually outlined a lot for this paper just in the sense that going through all the articles. There were only four articles that they gave us and I went through all four and looked at the different aspects, outcomes, what happened and the ethics that were violated.

Kathryn’s writing process demonstrates a fair amount of preplanning (brainstorming, outlining, and narrowing her topic choice). She also articulates the desire to find something interesting to write about rather than writing just to ‘get it over with.’ The completed essay had a few more connections for the new context, for example, the piece

exhibited argumentative creative nonfiction conventions that transferred beyond composition. Kathryn developed a thesis around the incident at Bhopal and draws from her creative nonfiction experience to create a more engaging introduction. She also relies heavily on pathos as she establishes the incident in Bhopal. The layout is an argumentative essay utilizing claims and supporting evidence and Kathryn is trying to communicate with her audience, relying heavily on pathos to draw the reader into the essay. In the process, she failed to develop the ethical implications and support/discuss these implications with sources leaving them undeveloped or overlooked. Yet, this type of rhetorical situation is one that Kathryn was fully capable of in her previous writing class. Once again, there are aspects of rhetorical knowledge that do transfer: preplanning, research, argumentative conventions, and use of source material, creative nonfiction flourishes, and in-text citation. Moreover, when connections do occur and near transfer occurs, this transfer always resides within the rhetorical situation.

Near Transfer: Bridging the Gap

If and when near transfer occurs, it appears to happen within the rhetorical situation. The students I worked with exhibited some markers of near transfer for generating ideas, writing as a recursive process, research writing, utilizing sources, and meta-awareness of their writing processes. These results correlate with the studies done by Wardle (2007) focusing on students writing in other disciplines. These rhetorical connections are encouraging and we should focus on what is transferring, because it means that students are learning important writing strategies that are applicable in other classes. Regardless of whether this transfer is viewed as “instruction in particular kinds of knowledge and skill not broad based writing,” it is still transfer (Smit 120). Focusing

on the writing process knowledge students are transferring is a starting point for instructors to model their abstract thinking processes for rhetorical problem solving. This “hugging” (starting with what the students know) and “bridging” (sharing abstract thinking to new contexts) is advocated by Perkins and Salomon (par. 28-29).

This bridging is similar to the findings of Julie Foertsch’s when exploring transfer and pedagogical practices. Foertsch creates parallels with how expert writers rely on previous problem solving experiences to tackle new problems in new contexts, and that student writers should have more general problem solving opportunities to instigate connections for transfer (371, 362). In order for students to “abstract” and connect their rhetorical knowledge across disciplines, they need opportunities to identify and solve the entire rhetorical problem—the type of problem expert writers solve. This problem solving approach to writing in different context could help alleviate the compartmentalization of rhetorical knowledge that Gerald Nelms and Ronda Dively (2008) found in their pilot study on transfer.

Let me demonstrate how I see this model working for us. Below is a visual model of the rhetorical situation that I used for teaching research writing—a model used by many instructors for teaching writing in composition. This diagram originates from the early research of Flower and Hayes.

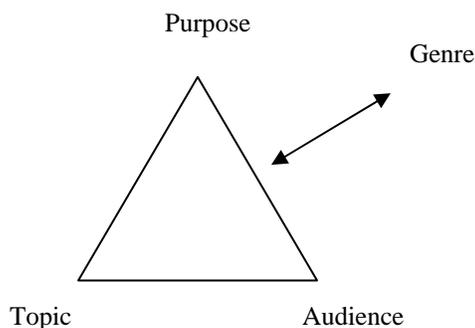


Figure. 8 Rhetorical Situation: Classroom Model

Instructors of composition routinely design unit projects that allow a student to work within and solve a variety of rhetorical situations. The instruction I offered my own research-based writing class focused on writing tasks that worked within rhetorical situations, but with a new rhetorical problem, we can teach without the constraints of the rhetorical situation. So how do we do this? How can problem solving help student writers think more abstractly, build on their stored representations, and become expert writers?

Re-envisioning Flower and Hayes' original rhetorical problem solving model can help students conceptualize writing tasks to increase abstract thinking and improve transfer. Many scholars, Wardle (2007), Beaufort (2007), Driscoll (2009) advocate composition instruction that emphasizes meta-awareness. David Perkins and Gavriel Salomon (1987) that meta-awareness is critical for promoting transfer. For my own pedagogy, re-envisioning their model provides a visual aid for teaching writing as problem solving that can move beyond the classroom. It creates a visual representation that demonstrates the complexity of a given writing task, but it also provides a strategy for thinking through and solving the writing task. In the diagram below, the research of

Beaufort (2007), Wardle (2007), and Flower and Hayes (1980) influenced the illustrated model for conceptualizing rhetorical problems in composition.

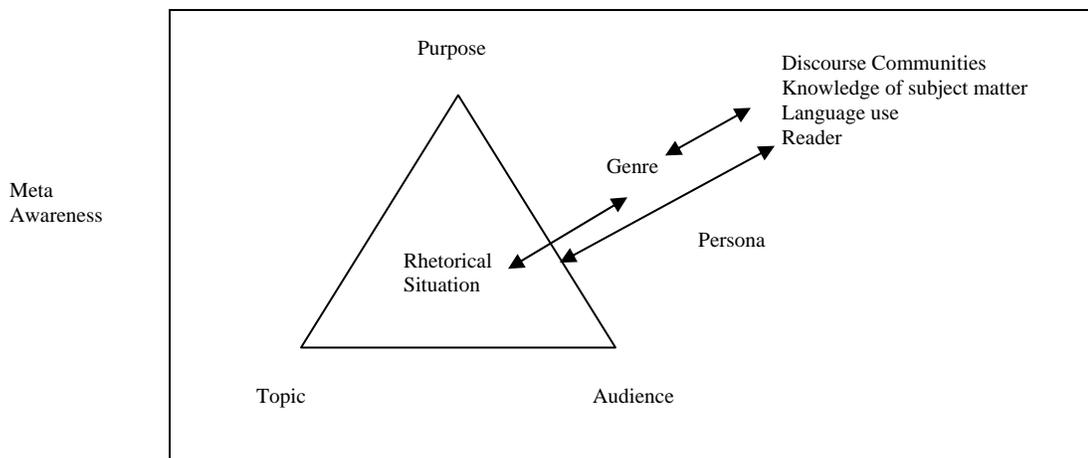


Figure 9. Remix of the Rhetorical Problem

This model has the potential for increasing meta-awareness because it allows students to visualize the entire writing task and the complex and dynamic interactions that occur within that writing task. The model gives students a way to create their “unique representation” of the task (writing for a magazine, journal, web community), and place the writing task into context. The model offers a visual representation that has classroom applications for allowing students to ask questions and analyze the similarities and differences of writing tasks in discourse communities. For example:

- What language do the members of this community use to converse in with one another?
- What do we mean by knowledge of the subject matter and how is this important for participating in this discourse community (context)?
- What are genre conventions? What are the similarities and differences of genres between discourse communities?
- Who is my immediate audience for this writing task? (the teacher, classmates, self) Who is the broader audience in the discourse community? (people in the discourse community that (possibly) have more expertise with the subject matter).
- What persona do I want to convey?

- What is my purpose for this writing task? (argue, persuade, inform, explore)
- What is my inquiry for writing? What is my topic?

By working through these questions with student writers, it allows students opportunities to improve their awareness of the writing task and helps their understanding of the complex challenges of working through that task. The model also allows students the opportunity to create their own rhetorical problem for a writing task in a variety of contexts, which encourages ownership and engagement that the students in Wardle's (2007) study sought. The rhetorical problem model allows students to think beyond just the rhetorical situation and build on their writing process awareness. The expert writers in Flower and Hayes' study immediately engaged in a rhetorical problem that they created, with an audience beyond themselves, and had some expertise knowledge of the subject matter. Experts explored genre conventions beyond MLA formatted texts, incorporated appropriate language for the discourse community—that broader audience and context for far transfer. Initially, writers must consciously attend to these interactions between the elements of a rhetorical problem, but with experience, these interactions become unconscious in the composing processes.

Learning and problem solving “is more than the acquisition to think; it is the acquisition of many specialized abilities for thinking about a variety of things” and juggling these elements simultaneously (Vygotsky 83). Revisiting the research studies of Flower and Hayes and studying transfer in composition could offer the potential to re-conceptualize the writing task and place that task into context. Rhetorical problem solving is what expert writers envision, navigate and solve when they analyze a writing

task. As we move forward, our aim for composition should advocate for the instruction of rhetorical problem solving to improve transfer.

One of the greatest benefits for using this rhetorical problem-solving model for writing instruction is that it can be used in any classroom—it is not discipline bound. With compositionists arguing for teaching writing solely in the disciplines (Smit 2004), and teaching composition as an introduction to writing studies (Wardle 2007), this model answers the call for both approaches. The rhetorical problem has practical uses that are immediate for writing in psychology, history, philosophy, composition, and any other context. This multi-disciplinary application is an important reminder that the walls of a classroom should not limit our learning, nor should they limit our fields of interest. As we continue researching the transfer of learning, we would do well to focus on the connection between the fields of psychology, composition, and educational research. Insights are discovered when research extends beyond the disciplines and illuminates a previously unidentified intersection.

Conclusions and Implications

Although it is impossible to generalize from these results, this study on transfer brings attention to teaching writing as a problem-solving task that could potentially improve and extend the transfer of rhetorical knowledge and rhetorical adaptability (Fallon 2009). For composition instruction, the model provides potential problem-solving strategies for students to engage in real world writing tasks that extend beyond the walls of the classroom, which requires the type of “mindful abstraction” that Perkins and Salomon (1987) advocate is necessary for transfer. To use the model in a composition course, an instructor could begin with familiar writing contexts and move to increasingly abstract

contexts over the semester. The familiar contexts would enable a student to understand the elements of the rhetorical problem-solving model and take ownership of the writing task. Initially, the instructor would control some of the elements (purpose, audience etc.) of the problem, but over time, the student would have more control and ownership to decide all aspects of the rhetorical problem. This approach would allow an instructor to meet the student at their “actual development” with writing tasks that are somewhat comfortable and then move into abstract contexts that create dissonance, but drive the student toward their “perspective development” (Vygotsky, 83).

As well as cognitive development, the shift away from assignments in the composition classroom to real world writing tasks lets students identify and articulate each element of the rhetorical problem for a given writing task and increases their meta-awareness of the social and dynamic interactions that occur within a given writing task. This meta-awareness also benefits a student’s approach to writing tasks in other contexts—the elements of the rhetorical problem help a student identify the “givens” of an assignment and understand which “variables” they need to complete the problem. I understand this method may sound very mathematical, but it offers a useful strategy for working through a variety of writing tasks regardless of the discipline. In order for this pedagogy to be effective, though, instructors would need to be more flexible with genre choices. Yet, this flexibility would reflect the aspects of real world writing tasks.

This study on rhetorical knowledge and transfer has significantly influenced my approach to thinking about a writing task and teaching writing tasks to student writers. As Wardle points out, there are far too few studies on transfer in composition, which means it’s necessary to look at transfer from as many research angles as possible. My

goal is to create a curriculum for teaching writing as problem-solving and design a longitudinal study for analyzing transfer with a larger student population, one that fully incorporates and reflects the dynamic and social interactions presented in real world writing.

Postscript

Writing about my thesis research on transfer as a journal article has been both challenging and interesting. It was challenging because the process of writing in a new context was intimidating and overwhelming. This was the first time my research writing as a graduate student required me to create a unique representation of a writing task and write to an audience beyond the walls of the classroom, which supports my argument for teaching writing using the rhetorical problem rather than the rhetorical situation. On an intellectual level, writing the article was interesting. The experience provided numerous learning opportunities. In order to write to a broader audience and discourse community of scholars, it was necessary to call upon my prior writing experience and my research on transfer and conjure up a persona for affecting my reader. Next, I had to project this persona through language and tone in my writing, and “abstract” my thinking into the context for writing the article (discourse community, scholars, subject matter, and the genre). Below, I will demonstrate my difficulties with each element of the rhetorical problem, and I will try to convey what I was thinking in regards to each element as I wrote the article.

Rhetorical Analysis

- **Purpose:** Arguing for the use of the rhetorical problem model for increasing opportunities for abstract thinking and extending transfer was difficult because I've never taken an argument course and I have a bit of an aversion to the conventions—the form limits my thinking. I prefer to write in a messy essayistic style, which does not work for this genre. I reminded myself that in order to communicate with my intended audience and discourse community, it was necessary to use the form of writing they use for communicating. As Heidi read my drafts, she was always suggesting and writing in “sign posts” to reiterate the conventions of the genre.
- **Audience/Discourse Community:** Writing to an audience of scholars was intimidating. As I created a persona of Jan as an academic contributor, I kept thinking of Wardle, Beaufort, Flower and Hayes and the other scholars in the community, which is the first time (as a student) I was required to write to an audience beyond the walls of the classroom. At times, it was easy to let their “presence” inhibit my thinking and question the research I was contributing. However, having said this, it was my belief in my research connections that helped push me to write to them.
- **Topic:** There are many perspectives and theories on transfer in composition and it will take me several years of study before I feel like an “expert” on transfer. Once again, I was intimidated to step into the academic arena and offer my voice. Yet, my inquiry and the insights and connections that I have discovered on transfer were the driving forces that kept me writing.
- **Genre/Structure:** I mentioned above in “purpose” that conventions of form inhibit my thinking. This experience to write an article forced me to try writing in a format that I need as an academic, which required me to open my mind to new ways of thinking and writing. What you have not been able to witness is how Heidi has been teaching me about this genre with her feedback. I have been learning in the act of writing the paper.
- **Subject matter knowledge:** As I described in audience/discourse community, I question my contribution to the scholarship on transfer. The subject of transfer is something I could study for years. To write, I had to convince myself to write about my research and trust my belief that my research contribution is worth hearing and researching further.
- **Language:** I am a very direct communicator and prefer informal conversations. An academic article requires a more formal tone with attention to vocabulary and style. My language use for this article was limited by my knowledge of the subject matter knowledge—I have only been reading and writing about transfer for one year. With a few more years of research writing, my confidence would

increase and I would use language appropriate for the genre/audience/subject matter.

- Meta-awareness: The dynamic and constant interactions between the elements of the rhetorical problem are complex. At various times in the writing process I would pause to consider the intimidating task of facing a scholarly audience and their deep understanding of the subject matter. There were many times that audience awareness inhibited my writing. Each time I would take a step back, breath, and conjure up the persona of Jan as a researcher who believes in her data.

My goal for demonstrating this rhetorical problem-solving model is to share the difficulties I encountered as a writer in the hope that you recognize the complexity of rhetorical problems and the dynamic interactions that occur with every new and unfamiliar writing task. Engaging and working through a writing task is incredibly difficult for writers of all levels. However, the challenge is particularly hard for students with limited writing experiences and those that lack “stored representations” or the ability to extend their rhetorical knowledge and make “abstract” connections to new and different contexts in and beyond the composition classroom. The implications for this study have direct and immediate applications for classroom instruction. In my final chapter, I will share the preliminary findings from using the rhetorical problem solving model with my English 101—“Introduction to College Writing” class.

CHAPTER 5: REFLECTING ON RESEARCH WRITING AND TRANSFER

I am grateful for the opportunity to follow my inquiry and engage in extended research on composition and transfer. This project has enabled me to experience the kind of insights I want for my students when they discover (usually through the exploratory essay) that research is not about proving, it is about learning. The knowledge that I have acquired on composition and transfer regarding the rhetorical problem-solving model has already found its way into my classroom. Although I have not had time to design a syllabus or lesson plans for teaching the concepts of the model, I have created a few opportunities to help my students conceptualize different writing tasks. The preliminary findings are exactly that—preliminary.

English 101: Introducing the Rhetorical Problem-Solving Model

This spring I taught one section of English 101, Boise State’s “Introduction to College Writing” course. In my course instruction, I challenged my students in a number of ways. First, I stressed the meta-awareness of thinking processes, critical reading strategies, and writing processes. Second, I emphasized that in order for each member of the class to learn effectively, we must all read, write, talk, and listen until each one of us recognized that there were twenty-five teachers in the room, not one. Third, I listened more than I talked as we studied genre, summarized arguments, wrote, and then analyzed and articulated the rhetorical choices we made in our writing. Since rhetorical awareness is an important component for both reading and writing, introducing the rhetorical problem solving model to the class was seamless.

On the second day of class, I introduced the model and explained each of the elements. We discussed it in a few different contexts, mainly focusing on the context of conversation in the student union building versus the conversation you might have with a bank teller. I introduced the ideas in a simple way because I wanted the students to be able to take the language of discourse community and be able to relate to it easily (handout appendix G). I should note that this writing task was a frontloading task for getting comfortable with the model. I used the model on the third day of class with the following assignment (abridged):

Frontloading Assignment: Critical Reading

A discourse community is in need of your assistance. They believe in osmosis for reading instead of learning critical readings strategies. Needless to day, the group “discussions” lack depth.

How can you help them?

You should think about answering the following questions to help this group improve as critical readers:

- Consider the discourse community and their subject matter knowledge
- What language is used to converse in this community?
- What genre would be appropriate for this audience?
- Your purpose is to inform, but please answer the following questions for your reader:
 - What is critical reading?
 - Why is critical reading important?
 - What are important techniques of critical reading?
 - When do you utilize critical reading strategies?
 - How does genre influence critical reading strategies?

The purpose and topic for this rhetorical problem are fixed, but the rest of the problem solving is up to you.

Results

This rhetorical problem was an essential starting point for the semester because it allowed the students to have an opportunity to hone their critical reading strategies before we jumped into reading essays and academic articles (anytime you teach someone else a

lesson, you learn it). The students had the weekend to do this project and came in on the following Monday morning for a “walk about” to check out their classmates’ approaches to problem solving.

The results for teaching this task were really creative and interesting. I could glance at the product and know the discourse community the student had chosen. Here are a few examples that demonstrate how the students were able to make this project their own.

- One male student provided critical reading strategies for students interested in reading the stock market. He created a slick power point and chose language and stylistic choices of an investor (colors, fonts, images). The student also focused the information on critical reading strategies with examples from the business section of the newspaper.
- Another student used her artistic gifts to draw a ski slope with a ski lift that demonstrated the recursive process of critical reading. The signs at the top of the ski runs represented different reading strategies depending on the steepness (difficulty) of the ski run (reading). It was cool. She totally embraced the assignment and let the genre reflect her thinking.
- A third student created a “Top Chef” for critical reading. Although the audience went well beyond the kitchen, she made her own recipe cards, complete with a red-checkered border. The language, tone, and subject matter fit her discourse community.
- An older student chose to focus on a discourse community of older students with families. This discourse community had unique needs for juggling school, work, and family. He paid close attention to time saving tips that would enable a reader to process as much from a first reading in order to save time. The genre was a simple MLA document that spoke to practicality.

I loved seeing my students fully engaged in their learning and recognize the relationship between ownership and engagement—students want control over their writing tasks.

However, it was not just engagement. Students chose a discourse community that appealed to them and a discourse community where they knew the subject matter.

Because they had such a comfort level, the emphasis for this project was on conveying their message to provide critical reading strategies, which enabled them to reinforce their

critical reading strategies while getting familiar with the use of the rhetorical problem-solving model. This particular writing task did not require a tremendous amount of abstract thinking to solve the rhetorical problem. Yet, it was necessary to let the students learn how to use the rhetorical problem-solving model with a writing task that did not challenge them to abstract to another context. In the following lesson, I asked the students to design a rhetorical problem for the first unit essay.

Designing a Rhetorical Problem: Who am I as a Writer?

For this unit project, the students were required to explore the people and experiences that have shaped their thoughts and attitudes on writing. The goal was to have students identify and write about their positive and negative experiences regarding writing and move (as a writer) into a more positive and open minded space for enjoying writing and recognize the learning potential that comes through writing.

The students used the problem-solving sheet (appendix G) and had to design their rhetorical problem to explore who influenced them as a writer. This essay/letter (or other genre) had to do the following:

- Create a visual text of the people, experiences and events through imagery, voice, dialogue, and scene of who you are as a writer.
- Offer specific, concrete examples for your reader
- Reflect and examine how these people, experiences and events created and shaped you as a writer. How are you still influenced (as a writer) by these people/experiences/events?
- Investigate the deeper meaning behind these people, experiences and events.
- Dig deep into the “self” to understand the, how? Why? What? of you as a writer

For this writing task, I met with each student for an individual conference to discuss possible discourse communities and help students generate venues for thinking beyond the classroom. Most of the students had ideas for writing in genres that reflected the subject matter. Here are some examples below:

- The first student generated material about a positive poetry writing experience, which he thought could be published in the *New Yorker*. For this rhetorical problem, he considered writing his “essay” as a journalistic piece modeling the format of the magazine and communicating with *New Yorker* readers.

- A second student loved writing poetry so she chose to weave strands of her poetry throughout the text and create a unique genre for the writing task.
- A third student who worked on a nuclear submarine in the navy writing nuclear code, decided to incorporate aspects of code to provide a framework for his writing experiences. We discussed using a journalistic creative nonfiction genre to reflect the subject matter and give him flexibility for the discourse community of other military men.
- Finally, there was a student who exchanged letters (over several years) with an uncle who was in prison for robbery. He felt this positive experience (of letter writing) could be shared with other young students who might be considered “at risk.” For the genre, the student wanted to experiment with writing the essay as a compilation of letters.

Preliminary Results

With every student (24 in this class), we had interesting conversations in our conferences regarding their subject matter, discourse communities, and genres that might enhance their final written piece. Yet, when the students turned in their unit projects, every one of them chose to stay within the confines of an MLA formatted text. Regardless of my encouragement, none of the students moved beyond the format of their comfort level to abstract to another context and experiment with genre. Having said this, the writing that they did within that MLA formatted essay is the most interesting I have ever read. The students were still testing genre and writing beyond the classroom by weaving poetry through their essays, or using nuclear code, and letter writing. They were also experimenting with scene, dialogue, and imagery. As a reader, I believe the genre is restricting their creativity. In the letters I wrote back to the students with revision suggestions, I encouraged each of them to “break out” of the MLA formatted text, use a journalist genre or other (depending upon their subject matter/discourse community), and allow the subject matter and reader to shape the genre to communicate with their

discourse community. Unfortunately, I will not have the complete results for this writing task until the students revise for their portfolios at the end of the semester.

Implications for Teaching at Boise State

I have several ideas for further research opportunities. The first idea is to explore and design a curriculum that fulfills the goals for English 101 and English 102 and use writing as rhetorical problem solving to frame the class. All the units I have taught in both English composition courses can easily be adapted to the problem-solving model. I see many direct and immediate applications that could be very productive for preparing students for thinking about writing in new ways, ways that extend their thinking beyond the walls of our classroom. The multi-genre research project that I teach in English 102 and the multi-genre digital websites I teach in English 101 could benefit the most. Using the rhetorical problem could really help my students understand these projects more fully because they have additional opportunities to engage in the dynamic interactions between genre and discourse community/reader.

My next area of interest would be to do a longitudinal study of student writers who enroll in a rhetorical problem-solving composition classroom and then move into other disciplines. This study would be even more interesting, because like Wardle who uses the language and theories of activity system in her instruction of composition, I would be listening for the language and use of rhetorical problem-solving. Would the problem-solving model really make a difference for student writers? Would the model help extend their thinking about writing tasks and make more connections for transfer? The only way to answer these questions and track transfer with this new model is to

design and curriculum for student writers and then follow those student writers with a qualitative study.

Finally, I want to research the theories of activity systems and the social-cultural interactions of writing environments. Elizabeth Wardle, Donna Kain, and Douglas Downs use the lens of activity systems for viewing writing instruction and transfer. If I want to study transfer in composition, it is paramount that I listen to as many perspectives on the topic to increase my subject matter knowledge.

Final Thoughts

The experience of writing this thesis project has been the most challenging rhetorical problem I have ever solved. If you look back through the narrative arch of this thesis, I had to navigate multiple rhetorical problems within the thesis itself. This was made more complicated because I was experimenting on myself as a writer as I wrote the thesis, and at the same time, researching, and teaching myself about rhetorical problem solving. There were many occasions when my mind felt like it was in a house of rhetorical problem solving mirrors. I support experimenting with writing. I believe it is important because experiments create dissonance and make me frustrated. This was certainly true for writing this thesis. However, dissonance and frustration are essential for traversing Vygotsky's zone of proximal development. Dissonance is essential for intellectual growth. If I want to learn, I must experience frustrations. Experiencing frustrations is also important for enhancing the writing instruction I offer my students. My writing frustrations help me understand student writers. I have empathy for a student when she is lost in her 7-page essay—I was lost on page 38, 49, and 72.

Where would I be without student writers? Student writers illuminate my path when I have moved too quickly through a lesson plan. Student writers talk with me about their confusions. Student writers are the real teachers in my classroom. It will come as no surprise that student writers have contributed the most to thesis project. Without the voices of Jen, Kathryn, and Billy, this thesis would not exist.

When I began this journey to explore transfer, I originally thought Mike Mattison's metaphor, "Find your star—create your own constellation," was about me, placing myself in the scholarship on transfer. Now that I have arrived, I wonder if that is exactly what he intended. Considering the complexity of star formations and constellations, I believe Mike was referring to all of us: compositionists, psychologists, educational researchers, student writers, professors, and me. Through research, reading, conversations and writing, we have created a connection on the transfer of rhetorical knowledge, which has created a new constellation—a new rhetorical problem-solving model for teaching writing task

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APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

1. Reflect back on your English 102 course. What strategies and techniques for writing do you remember? List them.
 - What strategies do you remember for doing research or general learning?
2. Chose a writing/learning strategy from English 102. How are you (or are you) using this strategy for writing this semester? Share details.
3. Describe the writing are you doing in other classes this semester?
 - Is the writing more formal, informal?
4. How are you approaching writing assignments in other classes? Choose an assignment and describe for me what your writing/learning process is.
5. What have you learned or discovered about writing in your other courses this semester?

APPENDIX B

Survey Questions

APPENDIX B

Survey Questions

1. List five (or more) writing strategies you learned in English 102.

2. Of these strategies listed, which strategies do you use for writing in other classes this semester?

3. These writing strategies listed above in #2 have been beneficial for me in my classes this semester.

Strongly agree_____Agree_____ Disagree_____ Strongly Disagree_____

4. Of the strategies you listed above in #1, which ones have not been utilized?

Can you explain why you are not using these writing strategies?

5. List any writing strategies (not mentioned above) that you are using for the writing you are doing in your classes this semester.

APPENDIX C

Individual Interviews on Writing Samples

APPENDIX C

Individual Interviews On Writing Samples

1. What was the goal for this writing assignment?
2. Do you see any connections with other writing you did in English 102?
3. Do you recognize any techniques or strategies focused on in English 102 that you were able to apply to this assignment?

APPENDIX D

Consent to Be a Project Participant

Boise State University

APPENDIX D

**Consent To Be A Project Participant
Boise State University****A. Purpose and Background**

Jan Roser in the Department of English at Boise State University is conducting a research project entitled, "Boise State FYW Study: Exploring the Transfer of Writing Strategies." The purpose of this project is to evaluate the transfer of writing knowledge and writing strategies. You are being asked to participate in this project because you have taken English 102 and are currently enrolled in courses at BSU.

B. Procedures

If you agree to be in the study, the following will occur:

You will be asked to participate in a group interview with other classmates. This interview will be recorded.

You will be asked to submit 1-2 writing assignments and participate in an individual interview. Again the interview will be recorded.

You will be asked to fill out an online survey.

The interviews will be conducted in my office, LA 209 B. The survey will be sent to you in an email.

C. Risks/Discomforts

This project will involve very little risk or discomforts. The conversations will be open, relaxed and honest. If you feel uncomfortable, you can stop the recording.

D. Benefits

Participating in this study will offer you an opportunity to contribute to improving my instruction for English 102, bring attention to writing activities for other courses, and contribute to our awareness to writing strategies that transfer to other classes.

E. Costs

There will be no costs to you as a result of taking part in this study.

F. Payment

Your time for this project will be scheduled and your convenience. No payment will be provided, but snacks will be made available for our interviews.

G. Questions

If you have any questions or concerns about participation in this study, you should talk with Jan Roser 426-7025 or Heidi Estrem 426-7073. If for some reason you do not wish to approach me, you may contact the Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. You may reach the board office between 8:00AM and 5:00PM, M-F, by calling (208) 426-5401 or by writing: Institutional Review Board, Office of Research Compliance, Boise State University, 1910 University Dr., Boise, ID 83725-1138.

H. Consent

You will be given a copy of this consent for to keep.

Participation in the project is voluntary. You are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point. Your decision as to whether or not to participate will have no immediate or long term impact on your status at BSU.

I give my consent to participate in this project:

Signature of Project Participant _____ Date _____

I give my consent to be audio taped in this project:

Signature of Project Participant _____ Date _____

I give my consent to be directly quoted in this project and future publications based upon this project:

Signature of Project Participant _____ Date _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent _____ Date _____

**THE BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD HAS
REVIEWED THIS PROJECT FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN
PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH.**

APPENDIX E

Email Letter Soliciting for Participants

APPENDIX E

Email Letter Soliciting for Participants.

Greetings Student (name),

I hope this finds you well and enjoying your classes this semester.

I am contacting you today to ask for your assistance with a research project I'm conducting this year as part of my thesis for English Composition. My research project entitled, "Boise State FYW Study: Exploring the Transfer of Writing Strategies," involves following students from our English 102 classes last spring and evaluating the writing they're engaged in for courses this fall. The purpose of this project is to evaluate the transfer of writing knowledge and writing strategies.

You are being asked to participate in this project because you have taken English 102 and are currently enrolled in courses at BSU.

If you agree to be in the study, the following will occur:

You will be asked to participate in a group interview with other classmates. This interview will be recorded.

You will be asked to submit 1-2 writing assignments and participate in an individual interview to discuss the writing process of the assignment. Again the interview will be recorded.

You will be asked to fill out an online survey.

There would be very little to no risk for you and the total time involved would be approximately three hours. However, I do know your time is valuable and we could arrange meetings to fit your schedule anytime during the month of October.

Participating in this study will offer you an opportunity to contribute to improving my instruction for English 102, bring attention to writing activities for other courses, and contribute to our awareness to writing strategies that transfer to other classes.

I would welcome your participation, but you are under no obligation to commit to the study. If you are interested in participating or you have additional questions, please contact me at janroser@boisestate.edu or call 426-7073.

Kind regards,
Jan Roser
Graduate Student

APPENDIX F

Research Study

APPENDIX F

Research Study

The Study: Boise State First-year Writers and Transfer

In the spring of 2009, I taught two sections of English 102-research writing—Boise State’s second semester composition course. This research writing class introduced students to the inquiry model of research, and the recursive process of in-depth research while focusing on teaching thorough research practices, critical reading and writing strategies, the conventions of exploratory writing, argumentative writing, writing in digital mediums, and a variety of rhetorical situations. Halfway through the semester, I began contemplating what rhetorical knowledge and strategies my students would recall and utilize in other courses beyond our classroom.

Although I am new to composition instruction, I value the rhetorical knowledge, learning strategies, and academic lenses I shared and discussed with my students. In addition, because I have had a variety of experiences writing in my undergraduate program as a chemistry major, professional life in research, and as an adult graduate student, it was easy for me to recognize the relevance of the rhetorical strategies we engaged in and the applications in other courses. Yet, I continued to wonder if my students would make these connections.

In order to answer this question, I designed a qualitative study generating questions from my own teaching instruction and the composition transfer studies of Elizabeth Wardle (2007), Anne Beaufort (2007), and Lucille McCarthy (1987). In their research, they demonstrate how generative interviews (both group and individual interviews) are for studies on transfer. Beaufort also stresses the importance of collecting a writing sample with the instructor’s assignment guidelines to evaluate a student’s interpretation of a writing task. Consequently, I conducted the study using qualitative data collected through interviews, writing samples, and assignment guidelines for the writing sample in an attempt to answer several questions.

- What rhetorical knowledge do students remember from English 102-research writing?
- What rhetorical knowledge do students recall and utilize in their courses?
- What kind of writing are students doing in their courses?
- What transfers from English 102-research writing and to writing tasks in other courses?

Participants and Methods

Three students (2-female and 1-male) from my two English 102-research writing classes (spring 2009) agreed to participate in this study on transfer. These three students were typical freshmen attending college directly from high school and enrolled in core-curriculum classes such as anthropology, history, journalism, and communication. The study design collected data from cluster interviews (which involved two students

together), individual interviews, and a writing sample. I followed these students into their fall (2009) semester classes to explore what rhetorical strategies learned in English 102 and utilized in other classes. To gather data, I met and interviewed each of the students halfway through the semester and just before finals in November. With the data collected, I provide sufficient triangulation with the interviews, writing samples, and assignment sheet (or instructions from the professor). This qualitative approach for studying transfer is similar to that used by Wardle (2007), Beaufort (2007), and Holly Hassel (2009).

For the research study, I focused on the conversations with Jen (journalism major), Kathryn (engineering major), and Billy (pre-dental major). I evaluated each student as an independent case study and reviewed their transcripts from the cluster interview to look at each student's recall of rhetorical knowledge, their application of this knowledge for writing in their courses, and the connections/disconnections to the writing we did in English 102 research writing. Next, I reviewed the student's individual interview discussing a specific writing sample (chosen by the student). I then evaluate the writing sample for rhetorical connections, and triangulate these data points back with the cluster interview (students invariably discussed the individual assignment in both interviews) and again, made connections/disconnections to English 102-research writing course.

APPENDIX G

Solving a Rhetorical Problem

APPENDIX G

Solving a rhetorical problem

Definitions:

Rhetoric—the art of effective persuasion (verbal (oral), visual, or written).

Rhetorical situation—involves the purpose, audience, and topic/subject matter.

Genre—genre is the form of presentation (letter, book, pamphlet, radio ad, essay etc...)

Discourse community—this is the way people communicate within a given community (could be the discipline of mathematics, cafeteria talk, conversations in business classes etc... the point is we need to know what “language” and text is utilized within that community).

Knowledge of subject matter or topic—this is important because we need to consider how much of what we’re discussing or conveying is known within that community. For example, if I’m trying to articulate critical reading strategies to a group of homeless men, I would approach it differently than if I was offering these strategies to a group of freshman in the dorm.

Meta awareness—this means we can step back and observe the dynamic interactions and have a complete awareness of how to approach this writing problem.

