ScolaroInstructorsNotes

Instructor’s Notes

Discipline Awareness Essay Assignment: Discourse Community Analysis

This assignment works well in all versions of 302: I have personally used it in versions S, B, H, and M over five terms (as of Summer 2018), and students have responded well to it. I mention this assignment on the first day of class, and officially introduce it in week two, after course enrollments are set. At first students are confused, unfamiliar with the term “discourse community”; they usually respond with varying degrees of anxiety over a writing assignment on a topic they’ve never heard of and have no idea what the term even means. Despite numerous assurances, students remain anxious until they get into the “hands on” aspect of the project: reading a 5-page excerpt from Linguist John Swales’ (1990) “Concept of Discourse Community”; watching a 2-minute YouTube video, “Facebook as a Discourse Community,” based on Swales (link below); writing Part 1: the personal essay; reading strong sample student essays from previous semesters, and working directly with a reference librarian who comes to class to help students find a professional organization or association in their fields before writing their first drafts. The entire process, from introduction, through librarian visit, first drafts, peer-editing, student conferences, to posting final drafts and a concluding writing reflection takes four weeks (weeks 2 through 6) of the semester.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

After completing this 2-part Discipline Awareness project in English 302, students will be able to:

Understand the concept of a discourse community

* Be able to identify and analyze a major professional association in the field

Understand the concept of genre and the concept of the rhetorical situation

* Be able to differentiate among genres in periodicals [from the examples they find through the organization websites they choose for the assignment; see assignment prompt: Students must explain the intended audience, purpose, writing style of each genre they include, explain the writing distinctions between genres, and explain how each genre furthers the organization’s common goals.]

Be able to identify an issue in their field that interests them

* From the discoveries they make when exploring the organization’s website and writings from different genres, students should discover issues / topics for future assignments.

Preparations Before the Assignment:

[You will need to obtain a copy of John Swales’ (1990) “The Concept of Discourse Community,” from his *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings*, Cambridge UP, 1990. Pp. 26-30. (I post this excerpt as a Word document on Bb.)

If you can’t find Swales, an acceptable substitute is the subsection titled “Discourse Community, Communicative Purpose, and Genre” (pp. 44-46) in Bawarshi and Reiff’s “Genre in Linguistic Traditions: English for Specific Purposes,” available through the WAC Clearinghouse <https://wac.colostate.edu/docs/books/bawarshi_reiff/chapter4.pdf>]

Schedule a reference librarian to come to your classes (see details below).  
  
Have students read Swales’ 5-page excerpt, “The Concept of Discourse Community” (pp. 26-30), or Barwashi and Reiff.  
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In-Class Activities – Part 1

Watch 2-minute YouTube video in class: “Facebook as a Discourse Community”   
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4NPPQajrqSA>.  
  
Introduce the DCA assignment prompt (ScolaroAssignment) and discuss the DCA Essay Structure page (ScolaroActivity), which I post separately on Bb, as a classroom activity. Students must strictly follow this structure in their essays to earn a passing grade on the assignment.

In groups, have students discuss their potential topics: how they will apply Swales’ six criteria to an interest group to which they already belong.

Student Writing on Part 1: Homework for next class:

Students write a 1-1/2 to 2-page short essay about their own discourse community (ungraded but required) and post this on Bb by the beginning of the next class. The purpose for this personal DCA essay is for students to become familiar and comfortable with Swales’ concept and points before moving onto the graded analysis of a professional organization in their fields, worth 20% of the final semester grade.

In-Class Activities—Part 2:

Plan for a Reference Librarian to come to class and demonstrate how students will find a professional organization or association in their fields for their essays:

* During a whole-class discussion, the librarian will ask students to name Swales’ six points and will post them on the board.
* The librarian will provide a sample prompt: “Using Google, search for (e.g.) ‘professional organizations in social work’ or ‘forensic accounting,’” etc.
* Students will find different websites and the class will settle on one.
* The librarian will then ask for examples of Swales’ points (shared goals, shared vocabulary, mechanisms of communication, genres, etc.) from the website.
* The librarian will then ask students to search Google for: “professional organizations in [my major],” and start the process of finding Swales’ points on the organization’s website for their first drafts (due next class). The librarian and instructor move through the classroom, assisting students as they work.

Student Work on Part 2: Writing, Conferences, Revisions, and Reflections

During an in-class peer editing “Writing Workshop” for first drafts of Part 2, students exchange first drafts and must leave with two peer critiques of their first drafts.

During the workshop, students sign up for individual conferences for the weeks ahead.

Schedule individual student conferences to discuss first drafts during the next three classroom instructional days plus office hours on each day (This works in a 2-day face-to-face class and hybrid classes). Students use the other days to revise their drafts and go to the Writing Center.

Final Required Steps:

* Students must send their revised / final drafts to another student for an online-peer review *before* posting the final draft to Bb’s Assignment link for grading, affording them one more opportunity for feedback and revision (Grade penalty without this step).
* Online peer review: Students send revised drafts to one peer as a Word attachment by email.
  + Student “Reviewer” uses MS-Word Track Changes feature to review the final draft and add comments to the paper, then returns the reviewed draft showing Track Changes to the author by email.
  + Students must attach both the online peer review they receive along with their final drafts for full credit on the assignment.
* Writing Reflection: Students must also write a reflective paragraph on their writing process from discovery through revision(s) and submission, reflecting on how their paper has changed in that process and what was most helpful in the revision stage. Finally, I ask them if they are now comfortable with the concept of discourse community, what they have learned, and how they feel about their final drafts. Students post the reflective paragraph in the comment box on the submission page so I can see it when I open their drafts in Blackboard, rather than a third attachment (Grade penalty without the reflection).
* Reading the students’ reflections on their essays *before* reading the paper itself affords the instructor a view of what students *think* they have accomplished before starting the actual grading. I find this very interesting and helpful in terms of fashioning my response comments explaining the final grade. The reflection also helps me see what students understood or may have misunderstood about the assignment itself. These reflections can provide insights for future in-class instructions to students before they begin writing.