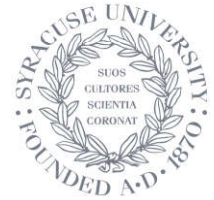


SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY
College of Arts and Sciences
Writing Studies, Rhetoric, and Composition



01 December 2017

██████████
H.B. Crouse Hall, Room #018
Syracuse University
Syracuse, NY 13204

Dear ██████████,

Thank you for allowing me to observe your class twice this semester, I always enjoy the opportunity of learning from a wide range of teachers as they work with their students.

When I observed your WRT 105 class on November 6th, I found that you have an energetic and enthusiastic teaching persona that carries forward throughout your lessons. You provide your students with several examples and mnemonic devices to remember key concepts – there is a lot of variety in your lesson content.

You began class by asking students if they would share their assignments. Emphasizing that no one is perfect and that the best way to learn is from each other, you asked two students to share examples of in-text citation from their essays as several students had failed to cite sources correctly in the last assignment. You clarified that students need to cite sources even when paraphrasing. You then went over writing conclusions, an area that you found the class needed more guidance with. Drawing from another student example, you explained how he effectively use rhetorical questions to conclude his essay, that his essay would leave the reader with future directions with which to consider the insights shared. It sometimes can be challenging for students to share their work, especially without advance notice, but overall, I thought this activity worked well.

Moving into the second phase of your lesson, you reminded students that for the rest of the semester they would have the chance to revise one of the previous class projects for re-submission. You offered students an acronym, a regular classroom practice that is meant to provide mnemonic devices, helpful writing tips, for project work outside of class. Writing on the blackboard, the first mnemonic you reviewed was HIT for introductions (Hook, Information, Thesis). You had students answer out loud for each letter of the acronym. You summarized the three working together as: the hook draws the reader in, outside information helps the reader understand what is being discussed, and the thesis is the larger argument you are trying to make. This portion of your lesson then emphasized thesis and how it can differ drastically from writer to writer; for the assignment, they were working on they were making an argument about ‘art’ and the ‘artist’ but also why art is valuable. You also explained that ‘hook strategies’ can be used in conclusions as well and you provided examples of larger questions they could use their conclusions. For example, if they were talking about dancers, in their conclusion they might explore how a dancer’s intense dedication to their craft is inspiring and that it might just inspire people to take up other art forms. This portion of your lesson offered a strong overview of what students learned before. My sense was that students might have benefited from your spending more time here taking stock and answering questions.

The third section of your lesson had students move into essay structure. You provided a helpful list to help students explore the topic: Introduction, Context and Evidence, Analysis and Implication, Concluding Claim. You then referred back to a previous reading about Japanese internment camps and how that specific essay works through the aforementioned steps, how each paragraph fulfills one of the identified roles from the list. You suggested that following these steps would help their papers add more nuance and then you asked students for examples of what “nuance” might mean. The students who answered had trouble articulating the nuances of their arguments so you re-framed the question as “What did you learn about your artist in writing this paper that you didn’t know before?” One of your students then elaborated on the importance of finding rebuttals to public critiques. In her paper, she looked into Lady Gaga. Focusing on other artists reactions to Lady Gaga led her to examine not only Madonna’s critiques of Lady Gaga as being ‘unoriginal’ but to take the next logical step and find Lady Gaga’s rebuttals to Madonna’s public criticisms of her. Your student explained that the nuance was in the fuller picture, not just the original reaction. Essentially, in conversations like the aforementioned you were creating a dialogue for students to understand nuance as the things you learn about a topic beyond the mainstream surface examination; finding nuance requires them to keep following some threads of inquiry and to put what they find in writing. You then connected this student’s ideas to another student who was writing about how director Steven Spielberg is seen as a major influence on later directors and yet no one accuses these younger directors of being “unoriginal.” I appreciated how you helped students see how their own work is a source for exploring topics about writing, that what they do in class is just as valuable for analysis as established artists. My sense is that you might slow down a bit and give student more time to process this material.

Overall, I think you provide students with a lot of helpful directions and memory techniques. You make it a priority to not only connect students’ learning to outside contexts that they find interesting but to also more directly connect this learning to their actual writing. Your dedication to your pedagogy is quite evident, and it has been a pleasure to observe your classes. I look forward to seeing what ideas you bring to your WRT 205 classroom in the spring.

Sincerely,

Noah P. Wilson
Assistant Director of TA Education
Doctoral Student, Composition and Cultural Rhetoric