

Comp Quickreads

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January 18, 2010

Teaching Invention

Some Key Invention Terms

Assessing the Rhetorical Situation—audience, purpose, genre and conventions

Brainstorming—thinking out loud in a group

Classical—ethos, logos, pathos (types of appeals), *topoi* (topics of invention), stasis (determining the issue), *dissoi logoi* (arguing both sides)

Clustering—a visual form of listing

Cubing—describe it, compare it, associate it, analyze it, apply it, argue for or against it

Double-entry notebook—summary/response journal

Dramatism (Burke's Pentad)—heuristics to determine motive: Act (What is happening?), Agent (Who is doing it?), Agency (What method?), Purpose (What is the intent?), Scene (Where?)

Freewriting—an attempt to tap unconscious knowledge

Journalist's Questions—who, what, when, where, why, how

Journal Writing—record of daily observations, responses to reading/ideas

Listing—free association of ideas in point form

Outlining—informal or formal listing of ideas

Scratch Outlines—like "listing" but with some attention paid to sequence and subordination

Tagmemics—examine the surface ('particle'), dynamic ('wave'), and comparative ('field') aspects of a topic

Journal writing, *topoi*, stasis theory, Burkean pentads, clustering, brainstorming, listing, tagmemics, double-entry notebooks, cubing, freewriting, hermeneutics. Beginning in the mid-1960s, renewed interest in the rhetorical concept of invention (or prewriting as most teachers of writing refer to it) led to an explosion of invention strategies for the classroom. The first Composition Conversation of the Winter term focused on "Teaching Invention," and began with a simple question: What strategies are taught in the classroom? The answers revealed a key distinction. Developmental students benefited from basic "unconscious" prewriting strategies such as journals, freewriting, and listing while first-year composition students benefited most from "conscious" activities that helped them understand and respond to texts.

Since invention helps writers figure out what to say, it is closely tied to the writing task. First-year writing classes (i.e. ENGL 101 and 102) emphasize careful reading of often complex arguments in disciplinary texts and writing that must directly respond to these arguments. Participants agreed on the importance of discussing reading assignments in depth, noting that students needed to know "what they were responding to" to begin formulating effective responses.

One instructor illustrated this process by describing a recent classroom activity. Students watched a documentary critical of gender representations in Disney films. To begin, the class was asked to sum up the criticisms articulated in the film. They were then asked to "switch sides" and offer counter-arguments to these criticisms. Then they were asked to offer counter-arguments to the counter-arguments and the process continued. Most teachers of writing

employ similar strategies to help students examine arguments critically and develop their own resources for analyzing and inventing arguments.

Developmental students (i.e. ENGL 095 or 096), of course, also benefit from attention to reading and argument, but they often need to examine their own writing process. Perhaps because developmental writers are more likely to have had negative experiences with writing (or more specifically with writing instruction), they are more likely to suffer from writer's block or writing anxiety. For these writers, successful prewriting strategies disable the "conscious" filter and allow them to tap "unconscious" knowledge.

Such strategies postpone the imposition of rules and conventions as one participant paraphrased Mike Rose. Keeping a journal, freewriting, and other "editor-disabling" invention strategies, help students write their way to their ideas. To be successful these strategies need to emphasize speed and be "low-stakes." For example, one participant described a freewriting exercise where students were told that their writing was entirely for themselves. Later students were asked to freewrite again and told that other students would read their freewrite. The results were predictable: students performed the first low-stakes freewrite easily and struggled with the second.

Ultimately, teaching invention is inseparable from helping students recognize their own writing processes, and how those processes can be made more effective and efficient. Invention helps writers tap knowledge they already have and understand knowledge available from others. It helps a writer figure out what to say, which is another way of saying it enables a writer to know what he or she knows. Is there any greater knowledge?