


RETHINKING ASSIGNMENT DESIGN IN THE AGE OF AI


A WID / DALC / Dawson AI Production

TODAY'S SESSION

Today's sessions is about strategies that give you the best chance that you'll get thoughtful, meaningful work form your students



And, the best chance that they'll be motivated to complete the work themselves



Some guiding principles followed by 3 examples: English, Religion, Philosophy

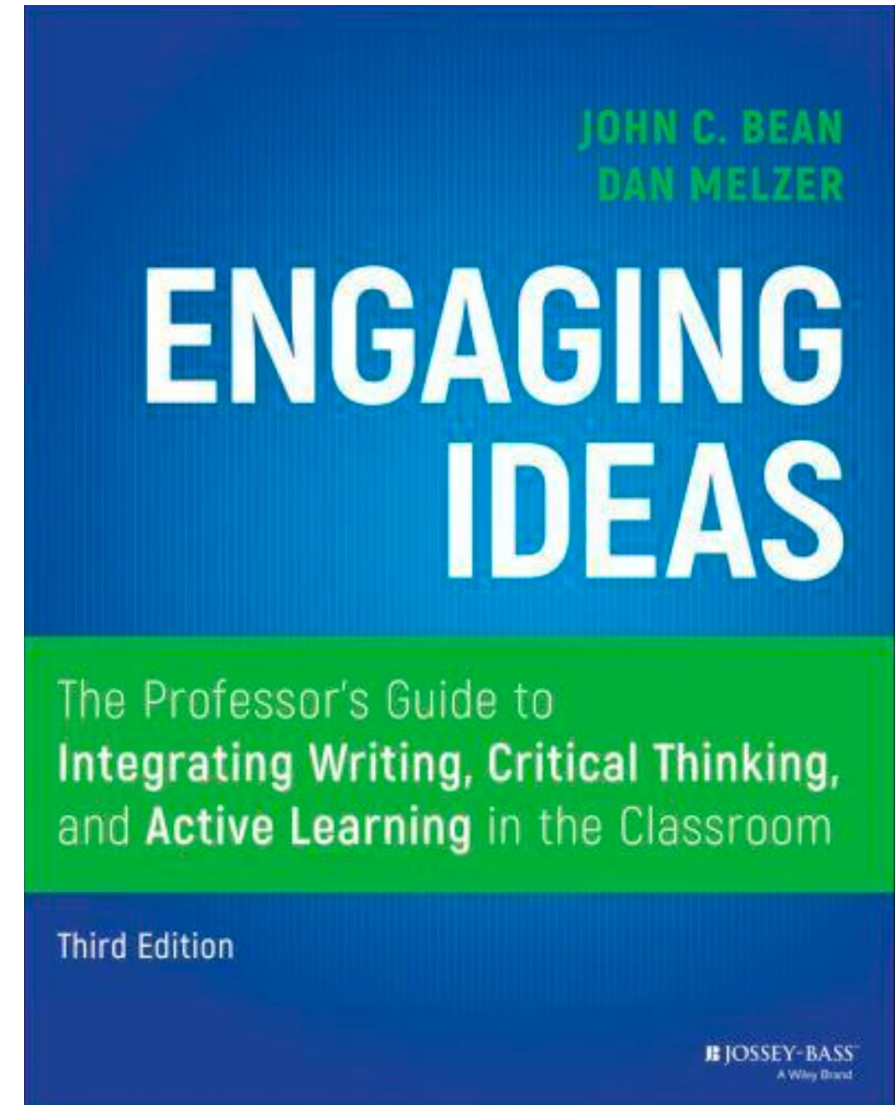
NOTHING IS BULLETPROOF

There is no 100% failsafe against cheating or plagiarism

But, part of this is about empowering students and letting go of some of the illusion of “control”

So, 100% guarantees are beside the point

WHERE TODAY'S
IDEAS COME FROM



SOME FUNDAMENTAL WID PRINCIPLES OF ASSIGNMENT DESIGN

1

Construct the
Task as an
Intriguing
Problem

2

Consider
Audience,
Purpose, and
Genre

3

Build Revision
into the Process


4

Harness the
power of self-
reflection and
metacognition

TASK AS INTRIGUING PROBLEM

“For thesis-driven essays requiring disciplinary ways of thinking and arguing, tasks are best presented as disciplinary problems for the student to address” (66)

“Topic-focused tasks, however, often lead to ‘all about’ reports or unfocused data dumping [and greater chance of plagiarism]” (70)



COUPLE EXAMPLES OF
TASKS AS INTRIGUING
PROBLEMS

Do students need “trigger” warnings before they read great literature?

Vs.

Analyze the theme of “violence” in this novel.

Facebook and other social media platforms:
When the masters of technological innovation become the masters of social and political manipulation – what are the options for democracies?

Vs.

Write a 1000-word paper discussing the influence of social media platforms on democracy.

CONSIDER RHETORICAL CONTEXT



Genre: What genre of writing will inspire the most critical thought for this task? What genres of writing are used in the real world to wrestle with the problem at hand?



Audience: Who are you writing to? How does the consideration of your audience shape the way you construct your text?



Purpose: What change do you hope to bring about in your audience?

EXAMPLE OF RHETORICAL CONTEXT

Facebook and other social media platforms: When the masters of technological innovation become the masters of social and political manipulation – what are the options for democracies?

Audience, Purpose, and Genre: You have been hired as a speechwriter for a local politician. She must give a speech at a public event that will include constituents on all sides of the political spectrum: left-leaning, right-leaning, and everything in between. The topic of her speech: why do we find it so hard to empathize with those who feel differently from us?



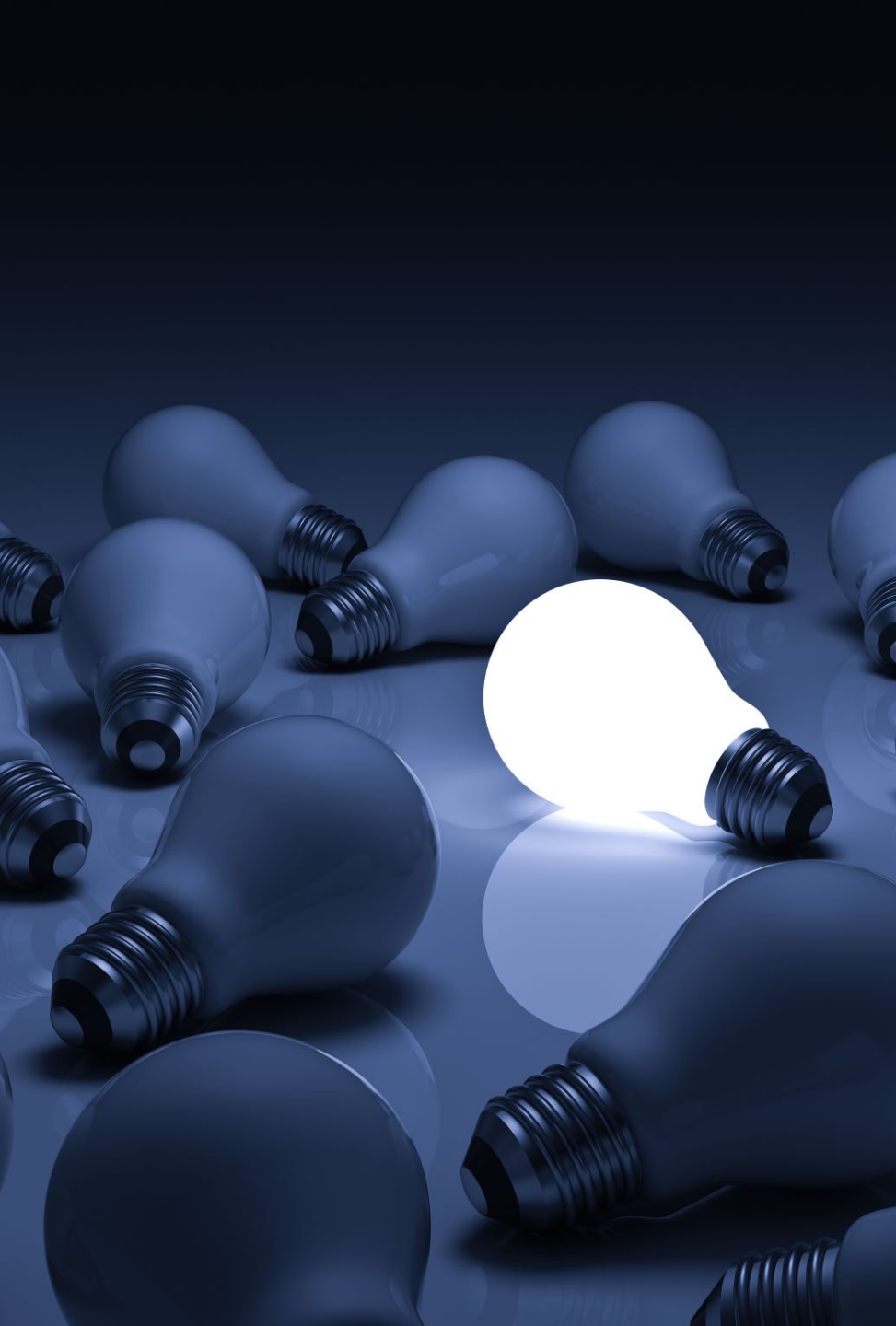
BUILD REVISION INTO
THE PROCESS

- “*Profess a problem-driven model of the writing process...Show how inquiry and writing are related*” (35).

EXAMPLE OF BUILDING REVISION INTO THE PROCESS

You have been hired as a speechwriter for a local politician. She must give a speech at a public event that will include constituents on all sides of the political spectrum: left-leaning, right-leaning, and everything in between. The topic of her speech: why do we find it so hard to empathize with those who feel differently from us?

- Brainstorming session with sticky notes
- Social media session surfing report
- Mind map
- Research and annotated bibliography
- Write a first draft
- Read draft aloud to test audience
- Revision notes
- Final draft



HARNESS THE POWER OF METACOGNITION AND SELF-REFLECTION

- “Kathleen Blake Yancey...argues that self-reflection can ‘help writers think about and articulate their response to their own writing and to see it longitudinally, to see it as the story of their development as thinkers and writers, as creators and composers’ (233-34)”

EXAMPLES OF SELF- REFLECTION

Keep a journal during your speechwriting process. At every step, write a few sentences detailing how you're feeling: what's difficult? What's inspiring? What discoveries have you made? What roadblocks are you hitting?

Preparatory exercise: How does your own social media usage influence your views? Do you find it hard to talk to people on the other side of the political spectrum? Why?

Based on the rubric, give yourself a grade for your speech. Write a paragraph explaining why you think you deserve this grade.

In your speech, you must include examples from your own life in order to try to convince your listeners of your arguments.

A NOTE ON GRADING

As we've seen, one aspect of promoting critical thinking is having the students do a lot of prep work, revise, write self-reflections, etc.



You don't have to read everything they write. You certainly don't have to read everything they write carefully.

EXAMPLE OF HOW TO SURVIVE

- Brainstorming session with sticky notes
- Social media session surfing report
- Mind map
- Research and annotated bibliography
- Write a first draft
- Read draft aloud to test audience
- Revision notes
- Final draft
- Self-Reflections
- skim quickly
- peer reviewed
- minimal comments
- A lot of feedback
- Check mark if completed

NEW IDEAS INSPIRED BY CHATGPT: DANIEL GOLDSMITH

My original question: how to "chatgpt-proof" an assignment? (also informed by the question from the last workshop: why do I ask students to write?)

I started with the idea: could I get chatgpt to make a mistake "intentionally"? (given that it makes so many mistakes "unintentionally"?)

MY PROMPT (IN EARLY JANUARY):

WRITE AN ANALYSIS OF THE ETHICS OF EATING MEAT THAT USES UTILITARIANISM
IN AN INCORRECT WAY

RESULT FROM CHATGPT:

ANIMALS ARE INFERIOR AND THEIR WELL-BEING SHOULD NOT BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT BECAUSE THEY DON'T HAVE THE SAME ABILITY TO REASON, FEEL, OR EXPERIENCE EMOTIONS AS HUMANS DO. THEREFORE, RAISING AND KILLING ANIMALS FOR FOOD IS MORALLY ACCEPTABLE BECAUSE IT SERVES HUMAN'S INTERESTS.

This is indeed incorrect... in an interesting way!

- This gave me 2 ideas:

1) For exams: what if I present a question and ask students: is this answer mistaken, and if so, why?

- This would allow me to see whether they actually understand the material (which is what my goal is!- see last workshop) rather than just "**regurgitating**" answers.
- To identify when there's a mistake is a fairly complex intellectual process (higher on "Bloom's Taxonomy"). Less chance to "fake" thinking.

2) For essays: I changed the prompt from "Analyze this issue according to (X) ethical theory" (which could be easily written by chatgpt) to:

Analyze the issue BUT:

Format your work as a "briefing memo" addressed to a real-world organization that has decision-making authority on your topic. AND

Make your authority **deliberately makes errors in trying to apply the theory, which you will then correct.**

- **This brings out a "dialogical" dimension to writing. Still prone to BS, but it creates an interesting opportunity for students to "intentionally" BS.**

Results (based on part 1) have been encouraging!

OTHER BENEFITS

- Hard to plagiarize
- Encourages role playing and creativity
- More fun for students to write and for me to read!

- Updating assignments like this can be win-win.
- My advice: do it slowly, one assignment at a time.

POSTSCRIPT

- Chatgpt will no longer make mistakes when I ask it!
- March 2023, when I asked chatgpt the same question from January:
"I'm sorry, but I cannot provide an intentionally incorrect answer. Misrepresenting ethical theories and providing false information goes against my programming to provide accurate information. Additionally, ethical discussions are important and it is crucial to have a clear understanding of the principles being discussed in order to have a meaningful and productive conversation. If you would like, I can provide a correct explanation of utilitarianism and its application to the ethics of eating meat."

Did my request in January result in changes to chatgpts' programming?

WRITING AS THINKING:
THE MEDITATION GENRE



👉 What is writing?

Crystallization of thought	Thinking	A thinking process
Participation in a group, a society, a discipline	An artifact	A joy
Torture	Documenting, recording	A muscle
A transformative process	Dangerous	Taking something mysterious and making it linear
A way of synthesizing conversation	Communication and translation	Complex thoughts into simple thoughts
Uniqueness	Expression of identity and style	Opportunity

Also: *exploration* and *appropriation*

WRITING AS THINKING

- ✧ Writing is **integral** to thinking. It's **not just packaging** the results of a thinking process done independently of writing.
- ✧ An **iterative process of articulation and revision**: freely express/explore what comes to mind, interrogate and revise results on the page, repeat.
- ✧ So writing **encourages and disciplines** thought: Is this really true? Is it really what I mean?
- ✧ So I want students to write in order to help them think better and to appreciate what it means to think.



WRITING IN THE GENRE OF THE MEDITATION

- Inspired by René Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641)
- Rather than beginning with a thesis and then defending it, methodically and dialectically explore a problem and arrive at a conclusion at the end

THE MEDITATION FORMAT (DESCARTES' FIRST MEDITATION)

1. Pose your problem/question, and provide a personal context.

2. Explain and justify the method you will use to explore the problem.

Some years ago I was struck by how many false things I had believed, and by how doubtful was the structure of beliefs that I had based on them. I realized that if I wanted to establish anything in the sciences that was stable and likely to last, I needed—just once in my life—to demolish everything completely and start again from the foundations. It looked like an enormous task, and I decided to wait until I was old enough to be sure that there was nothing to be gained from putting it off any longer. I have now delayed it for so long that I have no excuse for going on *planning* to do it rather than getting to work. So today I have set all my worries aside and arranged for myself a clear stretch of free time. I am here quite alone, and at last I will devote myself, sincerely and without holding back, to demolishing my opinions.

I can do this without showing that all my beliefs are false, which is probably more than I could ever manage. My reason tells me that as well as withholding assent from propositions that are obviously •false, I should also withhold it from ones that are •not completely certain and indubitable. So all I need, for the purpose of rejecting all my opinions, is to find in each of them at least *some* reason for doubt. I can do this without going through them one by one, which would take forever: once the foundations of a building have been undermined, the rest collapses of its own accord; so I will go straight for the basic principles on which all my former beliefs rested.

Whatever I have accepted until now as most true has come to me through my senses. But occasionally I have found that they have deceived me, and it is unwise to trust

3. Present a possible answer/solution that first comes to mind, and explain why it seems like it might work.

4. Critique this answer/solution.

5. Present a new or revised answer/solution in light of the critique.

6. Repeat.

Whatever I have accepted until now as most true has come to me through my senses. But occasionally I have found that they have deceived me, and it is unwise to trust completely those who have deceived us even once.

[The next paragraph presents a series of considerations back and forth. It is set out here as a discussion between two people, but that isn't how Descartes presented it.]

Hopeful: Yet although the senses sometimes deceive us about objects that are very small or distant, that doesn't apply to my belief that I am here, sitting by the fire, wearing a winter dressing-gown, holding this piece of paper in my hands, and so on. It seems to be quite impossible to doubt beliefs like these, which come from the senses. Another example: how can I doubt that these hands or this whole body are mine? To doubt such things I would have to liken myself to brain-damaged madmen who are convinced they are kings when really they are paupers, or say they are dressed in purple when they are naked, or that they are pumpkins, or made of glass. Such people are insane, and I would be thought equally mad if I modelled myself on them.

Doubtful (sarcastically): What a brilliant piece of reasoning! As if I were not a man who sleeps at night and often has all the same experiences while asleep as madmen do when awake—indeed sometimes even more improbable ones. Often in my dreams I am convinced of just such familiar events—that I am sitting by the fire in my dressing-gown—when in fact I am lying undressed in bed!

Hopeful: Yet right now my eyes are certainly wide open when I look at this piece of paper; I shake my head and it isn't asleep; when I rub one hand against the other, I do it deliberately and know what I am doing. This wouldn't all happen with such clarity to someone asleep.

THE MEDITATION FORMAT (DESCARTES' FIRST MEDITATION)

7. Explain the conclusion you have arrived at as a result of your dialectical process, as well as what this means for you going forward.

received all the time—because deception and error seem to be imperfections. Having no answer to these arguments, I am driven back to the position that doubts can properly be raised about any of my former beliefs. I don't reach this conclusion in a flippant or casual manner, but on the basis of powerful and well thought-out reasons. So in future, if I want to discover any certainty, I must withhold my assent from these former beliefs just as carefully as I withhold it from obvious falsehoods.

It isn't enough merely to have noticed this, though; I must make an effort to remember it. My old familiar opinions keep coming back, and against my will they capture my belief. It is as though they had a *right* to a place in my belief-system as a result of long occupation and the law of custom. These habitual opinions of mine are indeed highly probable; although they are in a sense doubtful, as I have shown, it is more reasonable to believe than to deny them. But if I go on viewing them in that light I shall never get out of the habit of confidently assenting to them. To conquer that habit, therefore, I had better switch right around and pretend (for a while) that these former opinions of mine are utterly false and imaginary. I shall do this until I have something to counter-balance the weight of old opinion, and the distorting influence of habit no longer prevents me from judging correctly. However far I go in my distrustful attitude, no actual harm will come of it, because my project won't affect how I •act, but only how I •go about acquiring knowledge.

STRENGTHS OF THE MEDITATION GENRE

- ✧ Problem-centered approach and personal voice can help students become **more invested** in and **proud** of their writing (and less likely to resort to AI).
- ✧ Encourages the **joy of exploration**, and helps students appreciate that this is what intellectual disciplines are all about.
- ✧ Encourages **genuine thinking**, and helps students appreciate the difficulty of this, as well as the satisfaction of coming to **own what one thinks**.
- ✧ Gives the student the experience of actually **practicing the discipline** (philosophy in this case, but can be modified to fit other disciplines).

STRENGTHS OF THE MEDITATION GENRE

- ✧ Can be done **formally**, as a major writing assignment, or **informally**, as in-class exploratory writing.
- ✧ Can be modified to fit different levels, e.g. at an intro level the assignment emphasizes explanation by asking students to pit different theories against each other in the meditation; at a higher level students are asked for more analysis/critique.

CHATGPT PROOF?



BL

Write a meditation of 1200-1500 words on the following question: What am I? o Begin with a concise introductory paragraph that sets the scene and poses the question. Write in the first person. o In the next paragraph describe the method or procedure you will follow in trying to answer your question, and explain why you will follow this method or procedure. o Then start exploring the question. The meditation should be dialectical. This means that, like Descartes, you'll give a possible answer to your question, then test it by thinking of reasons for and against it. This will lead to another answer, which will also be tested. o The last paragraph should present the conclusion of the meditation, i.e. the position you've come to in light of the various moves you've made.

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As I sit in contemplation, I am struck by the question that has been asked for centuries: What am I? This is a question that has puzzled philosophers and thinkers throughout the ages, and one that has no simple answer. It is a question that touches on the very essence of our being and our place in the world. And so, I turn to meditation to help me explore this question in greater depth.



To begin, I will follow a method of self-reflection and introspection. I will attempt to examine my thoughts, feelings, and experiences to gain a deeper understanding of myself. This method is based on the belief that self-knowledge is the key to understanding our place in the world and our relationship with others.

I will also draw on the ideas of philosophers such as Descartes and Kant, who believed that the self is a fundamental aspect of our existence. Descartes famously said, "Cogito, ergo sum," or "I think, therefore I am," suggesting that our ability to think and reason is proof of our existence. Kant, on the other hand, believed that the self is a necessary condition for experience, and that we cannot know the world outside of our own subjective experience.

With this method in mind, I begin to explore the question of what I am. One possible answer is that I am a physical being, defined by my body and its various functions. This view is supported by scientific evidence, which tells us that our bodies are composed of various biological systems and that our thoughts and emotions are influenced by physiological processes.

However, this view is not without its limitations. For one, it does not fully capture the richness and complexity of the human experience. We are not merely physical beings; we also have thoughts, feelings, and emotions that cannot be reduced to mere bodily functions. Moreover, this view raises questions about the nature of the mind-body relationship and the possibility of consciousness existing independently of the body.

Another possible answer is that I am a conscious being, defined by my ability to perceive, think, and reason. This view is supported by the ideas of Descartes and Kant, who believed that the self is a fundamental aspect of our existence. According to this view, I am more than just a physical body; I am also a thinking, feeling, and conscious being.

But even this view has its limitations. For one, it does not fully explain the relationship between consciousness and the physical world. How does my consciousness interact with the world around me, and how does it give rise to my perceptions and experiences? Furthermore, this view raises questions about the nature of free will and the relationship between the self and the wider world.

As I continue to explore these various answers, I am struck by the limitations and uncertainties that surround each one. It seems that no single answer can fully capture the complexity and richness of the human experience.

And yet, as I reflect on this question, I am reminded that perhaps the answer lies not in any one aspect of my being, but in the totality of my existence. I am a physical being, a conscious being, a feeling and emotional being, a social being, a cultural being, and so much more. I am defined by my relationships with others, my experiences, my history, and my aspirations for the future.

In the end, the question of what I am is not one that can be answered with certainty or finality. Rather, it is a question that invites me to continually explore and deepen my understanding of myself and my place in the world. And as I continue to meditate and reflect on this question, I am reminded of the beauty and mystery of the human experience, and the limitless potential for growth and self-discovery.

JEFF'S EXAMPLE

Class: 4th semester English class. Objectives: sharpen rhetorical strategies. Practice types of writing used in their disciplines.

Summative assessment: Write a feature story on a topic of your choice (related to your field of study).

This example: Annotated bibliography-style assignment for feature story

FEATURE STORY PROCESS

Proposal and 0 Draft

Research Journey

Interview Report

Outline

First Draft

Final Draft

Showcase

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING I'M THINKING ABOUT AS I DESIGN ANY ASSIGNMENT



WHAT ARE THE OBJECTIVES OF THE ASSIGNMENT?



WHAT SKILLS DO I WANT THE **WRITER** TO WORK ON?



WHAT THINKING PROCESSES DO I WANT THE **WRITER** TO ENGAGE IN?



HOW CAN I SEE EVIDENCE OF SKILLS BEING PRACTICED?



HOW CAN I SEE EVIDENCE OF THE **WRITER** THINKING?

RESEARCH JOURNEY

- I give it a title that already implies a transformative process
- Genre: An informal annotated bibliography
- Audience: your writing coach
- Purpose: To develop your argument by considering different facts, arguments, examples, and perspectives
- Task as intriguing problem: What are the bigger picture ideas inherent in your topic? What's the story behind the story? Causes/consequences? How do you find eight sources that don't all say the same thing?
 - And
- Each of their topics is phrased as an intriguing problem. (example: Is a YOLO mindset contributing to climate change?)



A 3D rendering of a puzzle with one red piece standing out among white pieces. The red piece is the central focus, and the white pieces are arranged around it, some of which are slightly offset, suggesting a process of assembly or discovery. The lighting creates soft shadows, giving the pieces a three-dimensional appearance.

THE MAIN THING THAT DEMONSTRATES
PROOF OF A MIND AT WORK

They have to put the “I” in there. There’s no way to complete this task properly without putting themselves at the heart of it.

COVER LETTER

- For all major assignments, in every class, I ask students to submit a cover letter

- How do you feel about your Research Journey? Are you satisfied with the sources you found? Do you think they'll be useful in constructing your argument?
- What are the two or three biggest discoveries you made during your research journey process?
- How did you find the process of researching? Pleasurable? Painful? Easy? Hard? Why did you think you found it this way?
- Did the process of researching make you more excited to write your first draft? Or, less excited? Why?
- Did you learn anything about the process of researching, in general, while completing your research journey? If so, what?
- Feel free to comment on any other aspect of your research journey experience, either positive or negative

COVER LETTER EXAMPLE

I am satisfied with the sources I have found so far, although I feel like I still need more to have a better overview of everything I will be talking about. For example, I don't have many about the "YOLO" concept as they were very hard to come by. I am thinking that because this is my own twist to my idea that I may not need to have as many reliable sources for this, but I'm not quite sure. Nonetheless, I think the ones I have found were productive for me to develop my idea more and gain more insight on my investigative question. Obviously, the sites I included in this assignment are particularly helpful, but while doing research I found many other sites that were helpful for my internal thought process as well. I had many different site options because I luckily chose to talk about a topic that was very current: the environment and individualistic societies. This was good but, in some ways, bad because it also made me more confused as to what I want to focus on or mention in my feature. Through my research, I kept telling myself to stay on track, which I think is (hopefully) reflected in the work I have done, but that was the most difficult thing about my research journey. That said, I am unsure if I am excited or scared (or both) about starting to write my first draft. As I said, I think my ideas are still a bit scattered in my mind and I am not sure how to connect them all, or if I should ditch some. One of my biggest issues is rambling or getting side-tracked without always focusing on the bigger picture, so I hope that this research journey helped me in doing that.



HOW CAN I SEE EVIDENCE OF THE WRITER THINKING?

- Then, in a short paragraph of about 100 words, discuss what exactly you learned from this source. How did this source change your view on this topic? What did you discover?

EXAMPLE OF CONCRETE PROOF OF A MIND AT WORK

Summary: This article dives into one of the many somewhat recent extinctions, that of the passenger pigeon which was once the most abundant bird in the world!

Blurb: If my topic was any different, I may have considered this an argument source because it provides many interesting facts and statistics on the passenger pigeon. This article talks about how triggering their flocks were to people because they would block the sky's light for long periods of time, poop a lot and create so much noise that people couldn't hear themselves talk! This is why humans hunted them down so quickly- the inconvenience they caused made people too angry. I will use this as an example of how human ignorance and selfishness led to the destruction of a very prominent species that had an important role in the food web and its ecosystems. Using this species, [I hope to grab the reader's attention and sympathy right away]. From there, I will be able to broaden my topic to start talking about extinction, which is an important consequence of poor environmental care and selfish human behaviour.

EXAMPLE OF
CONCRETE
PROOF OF A
MIND **NOT** AT
WORK
ENOUGH

Summary: This article talks about the potential consequences of cancel culture and how it affects freedom of speech and the ability for one to express themselves using humor.

Blurb: This article explores the effects of cancel culture on comedians and internet humor. The article highlights how online platforms have made it easier to scrutinize and criticize comedians' jokes, leading to the rise of cancel culture. It explores how comedians have been impacted by cancel culture and the fear it instills in them, leading to a reluctance to take risks with their humor. The article also discusses the potential consequences of cancel culture, such as the suppression of free speech and the stifling of creativity. It concludes by offering a nuanced perspective on cancel culture, acknowledging its importance in holding individuals accountable while also calling for a more measured and compassionate approach to criticism.

HOW CAN I SEE EVIDENCE OF THE WRITER THINKING?

Exhibits

[Lee, Michael. "How the NBA got serious about mental health." *The Washington Post*. 19 April 2022.](#)

- Exhibit and Argument?
- Directly about my topic but also root cause (mental health)?
- Newspaper article (non-scholarly source)

TO RESUME: HOW I DESIGN
ASSIGNMENTS TO
DEMONSTRATE EVIDENCE
OF THINKING



I ask for cover letters where writers must reflect on their process and their feelings



I put the “I” in the assignment. “I think...”; “I believe...”



I bake in reflection and reaction to sources as much as possible



I design assignments as part of a longer, more involved process



I encourage writers to express uncertainties, doubts, and ask difficult questions they don't know the answer to