Technical Writing and Literature in Dialogue in the Undergraduate English Classroom

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Why are technical writing and literature courses in the same department? Students often ask me this question during the first few meetings of my technical and professional communication (TPC) courses. Many students also share that TPC is new to them. They are more familiar with high school literature courses and first-year composition courses. And given these experiences, they are often unsure about why TPC is in an English department that studies Shakespeare or research essays. I address students' unfamiliarity with TPC as I guide them to define key concepts, examine sample documents, and discuss the types of writing they will do at internships and future jobs. Often, students' attitudes toward studying English and writing changes quickly. They show newfound excitement as they discover connections between English courses, business or STEM courses, and internships. Many share that they would have benefitted from taking this type of course earlier in their studies. This experience led me to consider an approach that emphasizes these connections earlier in students' academic careers with a first-year writing course (or equivalent early-career course) that studies TPC alongside literature.

This TPC-literature course provides students with the opportunity to study diverse texts that are from different genres and that are focused on different audiences. This approach (1) helps clear up inaccuracies about writing's limited scope, (2) emphasizes key "threshold concepts" integral to the writing field such as the understanding that writing is rhetorical,[1] (3)

introduces students to writing as a "subject of study,"[2] (4) and may spark students' interest in TPC and writing studies more generally.

In this course, students read and write about medical documents, legal contracts, business letters, maps, and public reports in addition to poems and short stories. Students work to understand how and why texts are produced with special attention to genre and audience. The course has four units: (1) an introduction unit that sets up key concepts related to studying literature and TPC, (2) a literature-focused unit, (3) a TPC-focused unit, and (4) a capstone reflection unit that encourages students to consider the transfer of knowledge to other contexts. The course is an introduction that explores ideas and opportunities in English departments.[3] It is an introductory course that does not replace a dedicated TPC course or literary analysis course. Instead, it highlights key concepts from different parts of English studies and, as a writing course, provides students with practice writing about these concepts.

Teaching Threshold Concepts

This approach provides a practical way to meet some recommendations from composition and writing studies scholars about diversifying the texts students read, analyze, and write about in first-year composition (FYC) courses. This approach can help students better understand writing's rhetorical nature and status as a subject of study while beginning to think about transfer, especially transfer to contexts outside of the writing classroom. As such it is informed by Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle's "threshold concepts" for writing studies outlined in *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies*.

Wardle and Adler-Kassner make a compelling case that writing should be a subject of study so that students can understand writing in new ways, or "change their conceptions of what writing is and their practices around writing that extend from those conceptions" (16). My TPC-literature approach challenges students to understand that writing takes place in many forms. Specifically, it introduces students to TPC, a key part of writing studies and many writing programs. It shows students that writing encompasses more than research reports or essays on literary pieces, which are some ideas that students may carry over from high school. Ultimately, my course moves students to challenge their assumptions about writing and writing practices so that they may recognize that writing has clear connections to contexts outside of the FYC classroom.

Doug Downs and Liane Robertson reinforce the need to challenge students to "examine prior knowledge" about writing (105). They make the case that FYC courses are ideal spaces to do so. They draw from research that shows that students entering the university may not fully understand the writing discipline: "as [Jan H. F.] Meyer and [Ray] Land (2006) suggest, early knowledge of writing is likely to be built on incomplete and inaccurate ideas about writing" (105). My experience supports such findings as well. Students' lack of awareness about TPC is particularly striking. Many students have not been exposed to this field, and, as a result, they may not clearly understand how writing can transfer to disciplinary courses or internships and future jobs. In response, the TPC-literature approach as a practical way to meet these concerns. It addresses misconceptions about writing, including that writing is mostly associated with literature. Darsie Bowden explains that students may have a "high school background" with a

"primary focuses on literature—and where even 'writing' courses are often conflated with literary study" (16). Bowden provides a useful distinction that students learn in my TPC-literature approach: "While literary studies focuses primarily on the interpretation of literary text, writing studies is inextricably grounded in the production of non-literary text, such as writing in professional, legal, non-profit, corporate, civic, academic, digital, religious and personal contexts" (14). My course provides substantial attention to texts related to professional contexts, contexts that often do not receive much attention in FYC classrooms.

This approach therefore meets the two main goals of FYC courses that Downs and Robertson identify: "(1) for students to examine and ideally reconsider prior knowledge about writing in light of new experiences and knowledge offered by their FYC course(s), and (2) for the course itself to serve as a general education course, teaching transferable knowledge of and about writing so that what is taught and learned can be adapted to new contexts of writing" (105). Downs and Robertson propose a "writing about writing" course to meet these outcomes because it highlights that writing is a subject of study while also helping students learn terms like "*audience*, *genre*, *rhetorical situation*, and *reflection*" that can be useful in contexts outside of the writing classroom (115). However, conventional "writing about writing" courses may not present a substantial amount of time on TPC texts and professional contexts even though there is a need to do so. I argue that instructors can also address these goals by introducing students to a more diverse range of texts, including texts that they will work with in professional situations. So, I present an approach that foregrounds professional genres and audiences.

Taking a large-scale view of writing curriculum from high school through the university, Joanne Addison and Sharon James McGee call for instructors to present a "balanced emphasis on literary analysis alongside rhetorical analysis" (170), a call that my TPC-literature approach meets. This balance promotes "transfer" and helps to "better prepare students" for diverse writing contexts, including writing in the professions (170). The TPC-literature approach specifically addresses a need to introduce students to workplace writing and to do so as early as possible in their university education. Such an approach is necessary given Addison and McGee's findings about the disconnect between writing in academia and writing at the workplace. They cite the National Commission on Writing's "Ticket to Work…or A Ticket Out," which emphasizes that writing is a key skill for many people in the American workforce even though writing courses do not often provide substantial attention to workplace genres: "college faculty provide little opportunity for exploratory writing or workplace-based genres" (163). In response, Addison and McGee argue that instructors need to consider how they "may or may not be preparing students for life beyond the academy" as early as possible (163). While Addison and McGee acknowledge debates about higher education's role in preparing students for the workplace, they maintain that writing courses can help prepare students while also helping them engage with "new ideas," "gai[n] rhetorical awareness," and "promot[e] engaged citizenry" (177). My approach provides one way address these goals by introducing students to TPC alongside familiar areas like literature and composition.

Like Addison and McGee, Kathryn Rentz argues that English departments need to provide more attention to professional writing. She observes that "professional writing

instruction is a significant component of many English departments across the country," but she believes that there are opportunities to increase students' exposure to the field (185). Rentz's department reworked the English major, which includes literature and writing studies courses, so that "the analysis of different kinds of professional discourse—managerial, technical, medical, legal, journalistic, and so on—could become a core component in our English majors' education" (185). Even more, she notes that "figuring out the relationship of professional writing to English…would help our students integrate their learning experiences in courses that now seem implicitly at odds in many ways" (188). My TPC-literature approach fits within this tradition in showing students, including non-majors, the ways that literature and TPC diverge, overlap, and intersect. Such a course could help connect FYC courses, many of which are focused on literature,[4] with the writing discipline more broadly.

This context described by Rentz and Addison and McGee further suggests that a TPC-literature approach may be useful for helping students think about transfer in a way that conventional "writing about writing" courses may not typically do. Students can more directly see connections to writing in the workplace and anticipate a transfer to these contexts more clearly.

Recent scholarship on connections between literature and TPC grounds my approach. Drawing from his experience as a technical writing instructor, Joseph Jeyaraj describes the benefits of making these connections. He describes an approach in which a literature course is "a pre-requisite for technical writing" for engineering students (199). Literary texts can be "pedagogical tools for engineering students" that allow them to "exercise their imagination," an

essential skill for solving problems in the sciences (201, 202). Jeyaraj makes a compelling case for drawing together TPC and literature. I propose a different approach with an introductory course that introduces first-year students to TPC in addition to more traditional composition readings and literary texts. This course would not replace a dedicated TPC course but would instead introduce students to TPC while also teaching the "threshold concepts" associated with FYC and writing studies more broadly.

Jeyaraj underscores the differences between literature and technical writing in advocating for his model. He argues that these differences are what make literary texts an effective "pedagogical device" as students learn that they cannot "respond to" literary texts in the same way they respond to professional or technical texts (and vice versa) (201). And instructors must keep in mind these differences when teaching literature and TPC side-by-side. In fact, teaching them side-by-side in my approach highlights texts' differences in striking, noticeable ways. This aspect can equip students to approach texts—including those they encounter inside and outside of the classroom—with critical and appropriate rhetorical strategies.

Learning about TPC: Inspiration for the Course

Technical communication scholar Elizabeth Tebeaux highlights the differences between TPC and literature in the context of "training technical communication teachers in graduate programs" ("Training" 181). She explains how important it is for graduate students who are most familiar with literary study to first understand "how literary writing and technical writing differ" ("Training" 186). Tebeaux addresses her experience training graduate students—especially

students with a strong background in literary analysis—in teaching technical writing, but her call continues to resonate with instructors who work with undergraduate students familiar with literary analysis. I use Tebeaux's foundational article to consider strategies to guide my undergraduate students to understand and write about how literary writing and technical writing differ.

Tebeaux explains that her course "begins with central questions": "What is technical writing? How does it differ from literary writing?" ("Training" 186) Since Tebeaux wrote this article in the 1980s, technical writing has developed an even richer pedagogical and theoretical tradition and has become a significant part of English departments and graduate programs.[5] Graduate students may be more trained in teaching TPC, but I argue that *undergraduate* students could still benefit from an introduction to TPC when they begin their studies in English departments during early-career writing courses. Tebeaux explains the importance of emphasizing "the use and analysis of basic rhetorical components—the rhetorical appeals, audience, purpose, tone, voice, organization, style, point of view—in technical writing" and "how these differ from their roles in literary discourse" ("Training" 182). This call fits in with recent attention to the threshold concept of writing as rhetorical as it is outlined in Adler-Kassner and Wardle's *Naming What We Know*. Consider how three writing professors at Rowan University, Sanford Tweedie, Jennifer Courtney, and William I. Wolff, discuss students' misconceptions about and unfamiliarity with writing's rhetorical nature: "many students enter the classroom with only a vague sense of genre; for example, they often confuse novels with any kind of book, fiction or nonfiction" (271). Many students may know that literary and non-literary

documents are different, but they could still benefit from understanding key concepts and articulating how and why they are different, objectives at the center of my TPC-literature course. I use Tebeaux's questions to begin my TPC-literature course because I believe that students need to understand differences between types of writing. They need to ask, "what is technical writing?" and "how does it differ from literary writing?" (186)

Literature and TPC: At Home in the English Department

Working from such a background, it is useful to look more closely at the intersections of TPC, literature, and composition. Such a connection arises naturally when considering how many departments house courses in these fields and how many diverse courses students may take throughout college.

While some universities have dedicated writing departments separate from traditional English departments, many of these independent programs continue to maintain strong ties to literature. Several of the programs showcased in Greg Giberson, Jim Nugent, and Lori Ostergaard's recent *Writing Majors: Eighteen Program Profiles* acknowledge writing's distinctiveness as a field while also continuing to emphasize connections between literature and writing studies. For example, Peggy O'Neill and Barbara Mallonee explain how faculty members in the Writing Department at Loyola University Marymount "recognize that [they] share values and interests with [their] colleagues in English" and explain that "the study of literature is important for all writers, and one of the most popular interdisciplinary writing majors has been the writing/English split" (58). Similarly, Jessie L. Moore, Tim Peeples, Rebecca Pope-Ruark,

and Paula Rosinski explain how some students in Elon University's Professional Writing and Rhetorical (PWR) concentration "bring in connections to literature or creative writing and articulate a broader identity with a well-formed PWR piece" (234). This discussion prompted me to think more about integrating these fields in an early-career course. This approach is student-centered in aiming to help them make sense of the diverse texts they will study during and after college, including texts from professional contexts with attention to TPC.

Rentz reminds us of the need for departments to better understand professional writing's distinctiveness as a field (186). I argue that introducing students to TPC much earlier than many programs currently do will provide students with the opportunity to recognize the field's distinctiveness, understand it, and appreciate its value. While teaching TPC alongside literature carries risks associated with "the timeworn conflicts between literature and composition, rhetoric, or creative writing" (O'Neill and Mallonee 58), I focus on making TPC more accessible to students who may be unaware of these tensions or unaware of the benefits of studying TPC. As an undergraduate student, I did not understand the value of taking courses in this field even though my undergraduate program offered TPC courses. Michelle Smith and Michelle Costello describe a similar example that is useful to consider. They describe Costello's journey as an undergraduate English major at Marist College. While Costello entered college as "English Literature major," she switched her major to communications because it provided a more professional focus. She then moved back to majoring in English when she learned that she could study writing, not just literature, as an English major (193). Perhaps if instructors could provide a course that introduces students who, like Costello, are interested in a field that is "professionally

oriented" (196) to TPC early in their coursework, they could see English and writing as viable, interesting, and useful courses of study.

Tweedie, Courtney, and Wolff describe a course that introduces students to the field of writing and addresses misconceptions about it by asking questions such as "'What exactly is this major?' and 'What can I do with it?'" (266). This introductory writing studies course is useful, but some programs cannot immediately provide an opportunity for this type of course. Instructors can respond to Tweedie, Courtney, and Wolff's call by integrating some of this work, especially as it pertains to TPC, into existing introductory or early-career writing courses. Of course, each program has constraints and differing goals since, as Tweedie, Courtney, and Wolff explain, writing programs and courses are shaped by "local situations and exigencies" (262).

Local situations shaped my TPC-literature approach, although the course or parts of it can be adapted to a range of FYC or equivalent early-career courses. I received graduate-level training in TPC, composition pedagogy, and literary analysis. My graduate department welcomes approaches that study the connection between TPC and literary studies with its graduate Writing History and Theory Project Emphasis, a program that allows graduate students to "investigate a variety of writing practices, historicizing them in sophisticated ways and relating them to dominant strands in literary, cultural, and rhetorical theory" ("Writing History and Theory"). The writing program where I tested some of these ideas encourages instructors to envision courses in ways that fit their and their students' interests. Administrators focus less on directing course content and more on ensuring attention to outcomes such as "academic inquiry" and "persuasive writing" ("Mission and Student Learning Outcomes").

An Intradepartmental Course: Context

My course considered TPC documents alongside literature in order to meet these objectives. I taught this approach in the second course of a required general education writing sequence at a research university where many students study in STEM fields. The early-career course was part of a writing-across-the-curriculum program, the Seminar Approach to General Education and Scholarship program (SAGES), affiliated with an English department with courses in literature, composition, and TPC (as well as courses in rhetoric, film, and journalism). My pilot course provided me with the opportunity to test lessons and activities where students study literature alongside contemporary and historical TPC documents.

University seminars are part of a writing program where students take writing-intensive courses throughout their university study and produce a reflective writing portfolio before they graduate. University seminars have similar aims as FYC courses. Although each section has a unique theme proposed by its instructor, all university seminars share the same learning outcomes. One common learning outcome is "Persuasive Writing":

> Upon completion of the SAGES program, students should be able to write a clear and persuasive argument in support of an answer to a question or a solution to a problem…Effective communicators are able to express their ideas with an awareness of purpose, as well as how to engage both discipline-specific and broader audiences. In addition, although there may be variations in disciplinary conventions for writing genres and formats, persuasive academic writing demands that the explanation or defense of a proposed answer or solution use a coherent thesis to govern the structured and clear

presentation of a persuasive argument based on reasons and evidence. ("Mission and Student Learning Outcomes")

University seminars are small discussion-based seminars limited to 17 students in order to provide attention to students' writing and allow for discussion. Students take this course in their first and second year, and most students in my section were first-year students from a variety of majors, including biochemistry, biology, engineering, sociology, and nursing. My students previously passed a required first-semester course where they learned about the university and the community around the university while also gaining an introduction to persuasive writing. Specifically, they worked on "improving personal writing techniques, including drafting, revising, and editing" during the first-semester course ("First Seminar").

As writing intensive courses, university seminars include formal and informal writing assignments. In my course, students completed short analysis essays that required literary or rhetorical analysis. They also completed a research-based longer essay. Informal writing assignments included frequent blog posts on readings, metacognitive reflections on writing practices, and low-stakes free writing to generate ideas.

I initially designed my course to study diverse literary, non-fiction, and TPC texts in part to interest students who may be studying in STEM fields. These literature-and-TPC pairings often produced fruitful discussions and research inquiries. They enriched conversations about writing's many different contexts and forms, and they helped to illuminate "threshold concepts" related to writing's rhetorical nature, a key part of the program's "persuasive writing" objective. These pairings introduced students to a wide range of texts that they may not have encountered

in previous writing courses in high school. Indeed, many students learned about TPC for the first time during this course.

As the course progressed, I found myself including additional TPC texts and inviting students to bring in similar texts because many students expressed special interest in TPC. Students' enthusiasm for studying TPC opened up exciting class discussions about the many types of writing they will read and produce during and beyond their university education. Indeed, several students met with me to explore additional writing, TPC, and literature courses they could take from the English department.

Since teaching and reflecting on this course, I developed a revised organization with a more coherent vision of integrating literary and TPC texts into a first-year writing course. The next part of this essay discusses this revised plan informed by my university seminar.

One novel that opens up conversation about a range of type of texts is Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall: A Domestic Tale of Present Time*, a popular mid-nineteenth-century novel. This novel traces the main character's rise as a professional writer. It includes references to professional documents and reproduces some documents, including business letters, within the story. I consider TPC documents—both those reproduced in the novel and supplementary to the novel— as objects of study. This approach therefore differs from more conventional approaches of using non-literary documents such as newspaper articles and personal letters to illuminate a novel's historical context. I teach TPC documents as objects of study to introduce TPC concepts and rhetorical concepts such as audience. I focus on audience because of the program's mission to help students gain dexterity "engag[ing] with both discipline-specific and broader audiences" in

order to make decisions about how to present an argument and select appropriate evidence ("Mission and Student Learning Outcomes"). This approach emphasizes how writing is rhetorical and dependent on specific situations.

Kevin Roozen opens his chapter on "Writing is a Social and Rhetorical Activity" in *Naming What We Know* by connecting to technical writing: "Writers are always doing the rhetorical work of addressing the needs and interests of a particular audience, even if unconsciously. The technical writers at a pharmaceutical company work to provide consumers of medications with information they need about dosages and potential side effects…Writing, then, is always an attempt to address the needs of an audience" (17). Roozen lists a number of other scenarios that students may be familiar with, but his attention to technical writing suggests that it is a useful way to teach students about audience and related rhetorical concepts. My approach challenges students to think about this example in a more in-depth way by studying some of these professional documents. The ultimate goal is to help students analyze and produce documents with an understanding of how they are shaped by rhetorical situations.

An Intradepartmental Course: A Plan

My TPC-literature course has four units that provide students the opportunity to read, analyze, and write about literary texts, short non-fiction essays, and TPC documents. The units include (1) an introduction unit that sets up key concepts related to studying literature and key concepts related to TPC, (2) a literature-focused unit, (3) a TPC-focused unit, and (4) a capstone reflection unit that encourages students to consider connections, similarities, and differences. See

Figure 1 for an outline of the schedule. Again, the course is an introduction where students explore and understand opportunities in English departments and writing students. It is not a comprehensive course that replaces a dedicated TPC course or literary analysis course. Instead, it highlights key concepts related to audience, purpose, and genre. Students learn to think about the situation in which a text is produced and employed.

One thread that ties diverse texts together is a theme. I piloted the course by focusing on texts about bodies. For this revised approach, a course on "writing about work" and "writing at work" could open up fruitful conversations and inquiries. This topic may interest students who are preparing for internships or planning coursework that prepares them for employment. The topic also connects with Addison and McGee's argument to call students' attention to writing in the workplace and professional genres in more direct ways. The topic also provides a natural connection to the workplace writing that TPC textbooks describe.

Writing about and at Work
Unit 1: Introduction—A Case Study 6 weeks Major writing assignment: Define and discuss literature and TPC
Unit 2: Literature 4 weeks Major writing assignment: Literary analysis
Unit 3: TPC 4 weeks Major writing assignment: Rhetorical analysis
Unit 4: Capstone Reflection 2 weeks Major writing assignment: Reflection—reflecting and looking ahead

Figure 1: Overview of units in proposed TPC-literature course

Unit 1: Introductory Unit

The key aspect of the course is an introductory unit that familiarizes students to different types of texts and shows them how to think about the ways that literary and TPC texts connect, overlap, and diverge. Figure 2 presents a brief outline of the unit.

Units 2 and 3 can work as abbreviated versions of introductory literature and TPC courses taught in English departments. In Unit 2, students read and interpret literary texts. In Unit 3, they perform rhetorical analyses of TPC texts. But the introductory Unit 1 provides an opportunity to show students the connections, differences, and similarities between texts by working with one text, *Ruth Hall*, a novel that also includes some TPC documents. This novel can help students confront misconceptions they may have about writing because it pushes an introduction to literature right up against an introduction to TPC. This approach, therefore,

challenges students to understand and articulate how writing is a subject of study different from literature. Students articulate these differences in argumentative essays familiar to many FYC courses.

Introductory Unit	
Week 1	*Understanding Literature and TPC?* *Literature and TPC: differences and similarities* Work briefly with a wide range of sample documents (poems, short stories, novel chapters, professional letter, executive summary, memo, report, proposal); reflect on previous knowledge
Week 2	*What is literature?* Reading: Mays, "Introduction"
Week 3	*What is TPC?* Reading: Tebeaux and Dragga, "Characteristics of Writing at Work"
Week 4	Ruth Hall *as Literature* Reading: Fern, *Ruth Hall*
Week 5	*TPC in* Ruth Hall Reading: *Ruth Hall*
Week 6	*TPC outside of* Ruth Hall Reading: Supplemental contemporary TPC documents

	Argumentative Essay:
	    Define TPC and literature as fields
	    Discuss how these fields intersect and deviate

Figure 2: Breakdown of "Unit 1: Introductory Unit" in proposed TPC-literature course

This course's introductory unit introduces students to "*what is literature?*" and "*what is TPC*?" by using essays provided in literary anthologies and TPC textbooks. Kelly J. Mays's 2013 edition of *Norton's Introduction to Literature* offers an introduction that begins "What is Literature?" and asks "What does Literature Do?" (1, 3) Mays defines literature as "'imaginative writing'" and offers a rationale for studying it (1). She discusses the history of the field in terms of canons and areas of study. She also guides students to think about what they value in studying literature, what skills they gain from reading a poem, and what genres they associate with literature. Students learn about what makes literature literary, and they work with a glossary of terms related to literary analysis.

Mays's essay also begins with a discussion about Charles Dickens's *Hard Times*, a novel that foregrounds questions of work important to the course theme. The second page discusses Herman Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener," a short story set in an office on Wall Street that could frame a course with a theme focusing on work and the workplace.

After discussing *Hard Times*, Mays underscores the differences between literature and other forms of writing by asking students, "what makes a story different from an essay, a newspaper article, or a technical manual?" (1) This question anticipates the conversations that occur in the later parts of the TPC-literature course. She then describes the differences between "pragmatic and literary reading," quoting Louise Rosenblatt: "scholar Louise Rosenblatt explains, 'it [literary reading] does not focus 'on what will remain…*after* the reading—the information to be acquired, the logical solution to a problem, the actions to be carried out,' but rather 'what happens *during*…reading" (2-3). This distinction is useful for students to consider,

reflect upon, write about, and discuss. As such, it frames my course, and I expand upon it by providing a range of texts—including TPC texts—that show the differences in how writers produce texts and how readers read texts. Indeed, I assign several short poems, stories, reports, letters, and proposals for students to discuss and write about during the first two weeks of the semester. This activity is an introductory exercise that highlights differences between genres, purposes, and audiences in striking ways. It also provides students with an opportunity to reflect upon their previous knowledge of and experiences with reading and writing. *What do they know about English and writing studies? What conceptions and misconceptions may they have? What texts interest them?*

Students also work with Elizabeth Tebeaux and Sam Dragga's *The Essentials of Technical Communication* in this unit. Tebeaux and Dragga define TPC in the introductory units "Characteristics of Writing at Work," "Writing for your Readers," and "Writing Ethically." They highlight the differences between TPC and other writing that students do, including "academic writing" associated with FYC courses (3). They list qualities of effective technical and professional writing, describe typical readers and contexts, and explain how writing happens in workplaces. Again, students use a glossary of vocabulary terms and work with a list of key concepts associated with TPC.

After students learn about literature, learn about TPC, and work with sample documents, they consider one text, *Ruth Hall*, that draws together these two fields. I identify two main reasons for working with this text: (1) it illuminates connections between literature and TPC, and (2) it opens up an opportunity to work with a range of texts since Fern includes business letters

(and even advertisements) within the novel. It tells the story of the main character's rise in the professional writing world and includes references to professional documents, including business letters, applications, and contracts. Ruth's experiences with contracts dominate the third part of the novel, with Fern including letters and agreements between Ruth and her editors. Parts of the text look different, so I want to work with students on understanding these differences and why Fern may have included these texts. We learn about literary analysis while also beginning to work with TPC documents.

First, students approach the novel as a piece of literature by using Mays's introduction and a glossary of literary terms. Students consider plot, setting, characterization, and theme. One theme to consider is Fern's representation of Ruth's struggles to enter the working class, especially as a woman. Students identify scenes throughout the novel that focus on this topic, and they work toward understanding how this theme emerges in scenes and passages throughout the novel. This discussion sets up a transition to focus on TPC and opens discussions about writing's rhetorical nature.

The novel provides a large-scale view of how Ruth achieves her goals. It allows students to track her successes and challenges, which renders concepts about audience, genre, and purpose more concrete. In other words, Ruth provides a compelling example of how writing is social and rhetorical that students can analyze and discuss in concrete ways by looking at outcomes related to her writing tasks. This unit focuses especially on audience because Ruth writes to a number of different audiences. More significantly, students can see the outcomes of her professional writing to note how she finds success because writes for specific audiences in

specific contexts. Students are challenged to track the rhetorical decisions that Ruth makes and consider why she makes these decisions.

This part of the course is especially helpful in teaching students the threshold concept that "writing can never be anything but a social and rhetorical act" (Roozen 18). Ruth's writing connects her to other characters and helps her achieve her goals. Roozen explains that students need to understand this concept: "If teachers can help students consider their potential audiences and purposes, they can better help them understand what makes a text effective or not, what it accomplishes, and what it falls short of accomplishing" (18). Ultimately, instructors should help students apply this concept to their own writing, but it is first necessary to help students understand this concept. I introduce it by having students read texts, analyze them, and determine their effectiveness. Studying how these dynamics play out in a text like *Ruth Hall* opens conversations about effective writing that students can apply in later writing activities.

I then encourage students to ask questions about why Fern would reproduce business letters in the text. *What do these letters show about Ruth's character*? *How does she succeed in navigating the publishing world when Fern sets up the difficulty for women to do so*? Students could argue that these documents reveal more about Ruth's character. These parts could provide evidence that Ruth is a hardworking and savvy businesswoman who prioritizes her independence. They could also show that Ruth is a savvy professional writer. Students can posit that Fern may be showing something about the power of writing. After all, Ruth makes effective, appropriate rhetorical choices that will best appeal to her target readers and fit with a larger

professional context. Students could argue that Ruth is a model professional communicator and that she benefits from it—a key theme throughout the novel.

Next, the course focuses on the letters reproduced in the text. Students have the opportunity to discuss how Ruth's letters look different from other parts of the novels. *What are the differences? Why are they important to consider? What do Ruth's documents do?* Finally, we move outside of the text and examine contemporary letters, emails, and memos. Discussion shifts to consider what effective TPC documents do in general. Students read Tebeaux and Dragga's introduction then work with business letters, emails, and memos. These correspondences are familiar to them. They read about them in the Tebeaux and Dragga's introduction, read sample letters in *Ruth Hall*, and know that they will soon have to produce when applying for internships. Students then examine sample documents in order to determine how a writer addresses a specific audience, frontloads important information, works with genre conventions, and organizes and formats information. They are starting to understand more about TPC. As we move into the standalone TPC unit later in the semester, we work with additional contemporary TPC documents so that students understand more about the field.

Units 2 and 3: Literature-Focused and TPC-Focused Units

The next two units offer a short standalone introduction to literature and a short standalone introduction to TPC. While these units do not replace semester-long courses, minors, or majors in literature and TPC, they provide a context for students to begin studying literary and TPC texts from different genres. Students learn how to perform literary analyses in Unit 2 and

rhetorical analyses in Unit 3. In both units, they work with key terms from glossaries to practice reading, writing, and thinking about texts centered around the theme of work and the workplace. These units could draw from more traditional approaches to introductory courses, although in an abbreviated form.

Unit 4: Reflection Capstone Unit

The reflection capstone unit requires students to revisit Mays's and Tebeaux and Dragga's introductions to ask *how do these introductions resonate after the past several units?* Students map similarities, differences, and connections between the course texts. They consider the vocabulary and key concepts that have shaped our class discussions. And they discuss the value in studying, analyzing, and producing a range of diverse texts.

Next, students look ahead to the types of writing and reading they will do in their major courses, internships, and jobs. They discuss and write about the value of making connections between texts, courses, and disciplines. They also discuss and write about strategies for making these connections. For example, in one assignment, students read and analyze the English department's website and course catalog to think about how the department describes these fields. *Why are they in the same department? Why do departments require students to study such diverse topics and texts?* Then students look outward at other departments' websites to think about the kinds of documents students will work with in other majors or jobs. These activities model ways to think and write about texts while also providing students with an opportunity to

discover new writing-related interests or a new awareness of the way English courses fit with other programs, situations, and contexts.

In reflection activities, students reconsider their understanding of writing and practice transferring ideas between courses, a call at the heart of our field. Indeed, Downs and Robertson highlight a crucial "mission" of FYC courses (and the writing field more generally) as "helping students reconceive writing and transfer their learning to new contexts" (113). My approach undertakes both of these aims by introducing students to a diverse range of texts in one course. It emphasizes the many types of writing, audiences, and rhetorical situations students may encounter. And it does so with striking juxtapositions of diverse texts. Downs and Robertson highlight a key learning outcome for an FYC course: "*Understanding the nature of writing and your own experiences with writing differently than when you began*" (114). My proposed course encourages students to meet this outcome because they are exposed to a (sometimes shockingly) diverse range of texts. As such, it helps them understand more that writing is a discipline, a "subject of study" in Wardle and Adler-Kassner's words (15), that does not just encompass writing for an English class or writing about a literary text.

A TPC-literature course can help students think more about the range of the texts they will work with in their English courses, other courses, and contexts outside of the writing classroom. The key is helping students put documents in conversation rather than teaching TPC as literature or vice versa. This clarification is important because it allows for students to help navigate the different genres and forms of writing, an essential skill as students transfer skills and knowledge to diverse contexts and professional situations. Facilitating a dialogue about a diverse

range of texts could help students more fully understand the many types of texts they will

encounter and how to approach them in appropriate ways. And students may develop an interest

in TPC, writing, and English more generally along the way.

Notes

[1] I borrow the term "threshold concepts" from Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle's 2015 Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies. The table of contents lists these concepts, which include "Writing is a Social and Rhetorical Activity" (v).

[2] Elizabeth Wardle and Linda Adler-Kassner identify writing as a "subject of study" as a "metaconcept" for writing studies (15).

[3] I use English in a broad sense that accords with the College English Association's description: "Our members represent a broad range of interests traditionally gathered under English studies, including literature, composition, popular culture, women's studies, minority studies, creative writing, film studies, technical communication, speech, and ESL" ("Home").

[4] Judith H. Anderson and Christine R. Farris show that many FYC courses focus on literature. They discuss how the "first-year English" courses described in their edited collection "[employ] literature in introducing college students to critical reading, thinking, and writing" (15). Critics have long discussed literature's place in composition courses such as in *College English*'s 1993 debate on the topic with Erikka Lindemann's "Freshman Composition: No Place for Literature" and Gary Tate's "A Place for Literature in Freshman Composition." For a more recent discussion, see the essays in Anderson and Farris's 2007 Integrating Literature and Writing Instruction, the essays in Linda S. Bergmann and Edith M. Baker's 2006 Composition And/Or Literature: The Ends of Education, and Mark Richardson's 2004 "Who Killed Annabel Lee? Writing about Literature in the Composition Classroom."

[5] Elizabeth Tebeaux provides an overview of the rise of technical writing programs in "Whatever Happened to Technical Writing."

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