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Moving Beyond Grades:
A Shift in Assessing First-Year Composition

A Thesis by
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Orange, CA

Wilkinson College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in English
August 2020

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June 2020

Moving Beyond Grades:
A Shift in Assessing First-Year Composition

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ABSTRACT

Moving Beyond Grades: A Shift in Assessing First-Year Composition

by Matthew G. Goldman

In Spring 2020, I conducted an I.R.B. approved study with the students in my English 103: Writing About Writing course. I wanted to determine how students felt about the two grading models—a qualitative-grading system vs a modified form of contract grading that I called a participation-based system—at two separate points in the semester. Early on I gave students a survey gathering data about their past experiences with both models. Prior to enrollment in my course, none had experienced a participation-based classroom, but everyone was familiar and comfortable with grading rubrics. The survey had 21 questions and gauged concepts from the effects of qualitative grading on creativity to the way assessments helped them understand assignments. Then, after experiencing a participation-based model, I gave a follow up survey with similar questions to see how their views and opinions of the two systems changed with experience. In addition, I used student reflection to gain written data regarding the assessments.

This research was inspired by studies done by Peter Elbow, Linda Nilson, Asao Inoue, and many other scholars who have been exploring new composition assessment models. My study shows that grading and grading rubrics may end up doing more harm than good.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

In Spring 2019 I began work on a syllabus for a first-year composition course inspired by Wardle and Downs's *Writing About Writing*. Wardle and Downs reject "teaching a universal academic discourse...as a goal for first-year composition" seeking "instead to improve students' understanding of writing, rhetoric, language, and literacy in a course that is topically oriented to reading and writing as scholarly inquiry" (552).

Wardle and Downs sought to reconcile the tension between process and post-process pedagogy. Process pedagogy is "designed to help students *engage* in their writing to develop self-efficacy, confidence, and strategies for meeting the challenges of multiple writing situations" (Anson 226). Post-process, while not necessarily a paradigm shift from process, was a way to push back against the lack of attention process pedagogy paid to "cultural, social, ideological, public, situated, and interactive dimensions of writing" (Anson 225). In essence, process pedagogy runs the risk of becoming far too expressivist and individualistic. *Writing About Writing* focuses not only on method (process), but by having students engage in "an interrogation of writing and literacy that helps to bring to the surface tacitly held beliefs and unexamined practices" (Anson 225).

At this early stage in their writing lives, I thought it might be more beneficial to teach my students about the process of writing by encouraging them to engage in assignments without the

fear of academic failure influencing their work. While students have been trained to write outlines and rough drafts, the focus is typically on the finished product. The question of how to assess my students' work while placing an emphasis on both process and post-process loomed over me. This is why I designed a course without qualitative grading, which I define as grading based on the quality of a student's work (See Appendix A for syllabus, which details grading methodology).

When we grade students, it is an attempt to provide objectivity to the assessment process. However, depending on who is assessing the composition, the results can vary. It seems that qualitative grades are difficult if not impossible to objectively determine. This is problematic because qualitative grading is predicated on an instructor trying to establish an objective standard for student work. Objectivity is necessary in a world where grades have ramifications. If a student who excels at writing is held to a higher standard than a peer who struggles more with the same work, the student who excels can potentially end up with a lower grade than their classmate, negatively impacting their opportunities during and beyond college.

It is my belief that the job of a first-year composition instructor is to make students believe that they *are* writers; that they have important things to say and a written voice to communicate with. With this end in mind, qualitative grading can prevent a student from taking the types of risks required of writers in the development of a finished composition. If a student is writing an assignment strictly with a grade in mind, they are less focused on original thought and more focused on saying what they feel their instructor wants them to say.

It was through examining the WPA Learning Outcomes of a first-year composition course that I began to wonder about alternate forms of assessment. As Susanmarie Harrington, Rita

Malencyzk, Irv Peckham, Keith Rhodes and Kathleen Blake Yancey point out in their essay on WPA Outcomes, the WPA “document’s relationship to outcomes, to assessments” is “glaringly absent” (Harrington, 323). Each bullet point on the WPA Outcome Statement, particularly the ones focused on process, seem difficult to assess in any sort of objective way. For example, students are expected to “develop a writing project through multiple drafts” and to “experience the collaborative and social aspect of the writing process” (WPA). These goals are better accomplished through trial and error than through qualitative assessment.

I wanted my course to be based around drafting, peer revision, and experimentation. According to Anne Lamott, a first draft should be written as if “no one is going to see it and...you can shape it later” (854). As a writer, I know how important the so-called “word vomit” part of the process can be to developing an idea. Is it fair to assess the quality of a “final” draft for first-year writing students when even professional writers can spend long periods of time reworking and revising a piece? As Doug Downs says in his essay of the same name, “revision is central to developing writing” (66).

1.2 Assessing Assessments

Qualitative assessment standards can push students to write what the student thinks their instructor wants to read, which I will discuss more in Section 2.2. I wanted my students to have the freedom to explore and develop writing as a practice. I wanted to see if I could teach them to view writing as a tool for self-expression, first, before worrying about rules and expectations. As Kevin Roozen says, writing “is not so much about using a particular set of skills as it is about becoming a particular kind of person” (51). He goes on to state that “the difficulties people have with writing are not necessarily due to a lack of intelligence or a diminished level of literacy but

rather to whether they can see themselves as participants in a particular community” (51). My goal as a first-year composition teacher is to develop self-efficacy in my students so that they have the confidence to see themselves as participants in the broad community of writers.

At the start of my first semester teaching, I asked my students to talk to me about writing. The five-paragraph essay was the dominant form they knew to work with. They complained that teachers would mark them down for each grammatical error. There was a common fear of the red pen, feeling as if instructors were looking for errors rather than areas where the student succeeded. They were taught never to insert themselves into their writing or to use contractions or slang. Structure and rules were considered non-bending. They were judged, sometimes harshly and often through a very subjective lens, on their finished product with little to no emphasis placed on writing as a *process*. The majority of my class had low confidence in their ability as writers. What this discussion taught me was that the dominant model of assessment, one of qualitative grading, had already caused my students to determine their level of success as composers. What they failed to realize is how many professional writers would end up with just as many red marks on the page if a high school teacher were to assess their early drafts.

For this IRB approved study, I focused on student reactions to a non-qualitative grading system within my first-year composition classroom. I wasn’t curious about their improvement as writers but rather their *attitudes* toward writing in relation to assessment method. My course is totally participation-based. What this means is that students receive full credit for an assignment just for completing it; quality is not a factor in their grade. This encourages students to engage with all the learning outcomes for first-year composition students in ways that make sense to them. I wanted to see if students felt more comfortable engaging in academic writing without fear of

academic failure affecting the way they write. The results make a strong case for removing qualitative grading assessments from first-year composition classrooms.

2 Literature Review

This study draws from a long history of research into grading methodology. I was most interested in the impact of failure on first-year composition students as well as the ways in which grading impacts student confidence. I sought out prior research into self-efficacy, failure, and grading methods that shift away from a qualitative approach to assessment.

2.1 “Failure” as a Label

In a 2014 article, Asao Inoue explores the role of failure in the classroom. He believes that failure should serve “purposeful and pedagogical consequences” (332). When a teacher grades a student’s work based on quality, success or failure become dependent on the way that teacher judges the work. The problem is that studies have shown that “teachers and other readers are not reliable in scoring or grading” (333), and that “writing assessments that produce failure, or that have possible failure present in the system (but not necessarily experienced by a student), have psychological consequences for all students in the system that negatively affect their learning” (336).

Ruth Slotnik, Christopher Cratsley, Annamary Consalvo, and Carol Lerch determined that “the process of explicating what goes into selecting a score was central to the process of judging student artifacts” (52). This presents the problem with grading: that it is hard to come to an objective understanding of how a student’s work should be assessed. Oftentimes instructors wielding rubrics end up “overly influenced by mechanical or surface errors” (Slotnik et al. 55),

as if the process of grading encourages them to find little pieces of the work that might cause it to be marked down rather than considering its sum or the process that went into the work.

Joseph Williams provides further support for this idea. He demonstrated that when a teacher is grading a student's work, because they are focused on finding errors, they are more likely to find them. It would seem, according to Williams, that it is very difficult for a teacher to read a student's text and judge the content of the material if they are focused on finding errors. "When we read for typos, letters constitute the field of attention; content becomes virtually inaccessible. When we read for content, semantic structures constitute the field of attention; letters—for the most part—recede from our consciousness" (Williams 807). An argument can be made that we can shift from focusing on grammatical errors and read with a content focus, but that becomes an extremely subjective task that is prone to some of the same issues that a focus on grammar creates. According to Williams, no two people will find exactly the same set of errors within a text. This is just as true for typo-errors as it is for content-errors. Error-based assessments don't serve the purposeful pedagogical function that Inoue was looking for.

I found it interesting when Inoue pointed to the racial bias involved in IQ tests and the consequence of this bias. People believe that IQ scores are a real measure of intelligence, but they forget that "the IQ score is produced by the test and does not actually exist before the test" (Inoue 334). Similarly, quality-based assessments can create failure where it wouldn't otherwise exist, typically benefiting students who are able "to write in dominant ways" (Inoue 334).

Students of color, multilingual students, and working-class students are put at a disadvantage when we try to enforce a qualitative-grading method. This creates a category of students viewed as basic or remedial writers, a classification that carries harmful effects on the people who wear the label.

Arturo Tejada Jr, Esther Gutierrez, Brisa Galindo, DeShonna Wallace, and Sonia Castaneda address the harmful effects of mislabeling a person in “Challenging Our Labels.” Tejada et al are a group of students who were labeled as remedial for their first-year English course. Labels can “isolate and limit students,” according to the authors (Tejada et al. 132). If a student is told they are less intelligent or less talented, they will view themselves as such. Grades create labels, and labels can be difficult to break. Wallace points out that the ages of 13-20 are critical in a person’s development of identity. She states that it is “not the time to critically undermine student self-efficacy with spurious labels” (Tejada et al. 143). This supports the idea that quality-failure doesn’t serve the best pedagogical purpose, acting as a gatekeeping device to students who, with the right level of self-efficacy and motivation to practice, might prove to be talented writers. As Inoue points out, motivation is the factor “most influential to academic success” (331). I believe it is a pedagogical error to do anything that might steal motivation from a student.

Collin Brooke and Allison Carr’s research focuses on the virtues of failure in the leaning process: “In the writing classroom, when assessment is tied too completely to final products, students are more likely to avoid risking failure for fear of damaging their grades, and this fear works against the learning process” (Brooke & Carr 63). All writers make mistakes on their way to writing a final draft. This is an important lesson for first-year composition students, and one that is harder to learn when they are punished for their mistakes in the form of a lower grade.

2.2 Self-efficacy

Extending from my research into failure was the idea of student self-efficacy, which is the way a person judges what they are able to accomplish. Bandura’s (1986, 1997) social cognitive theory suggests that self-efficacy has a strong effect on behavior. Daly and Miller (1975) showed

writing apprehension as a psychological effect that causes a person to avoid writing due to negative perceptions of themselves as writers, the writing situation, the specific task, or worry over negative evaluations. This influences can influence behavior in terms of actions people take, challenges and goals they take on, commitment to those goals, the amount of effort they put into tasks, their expectations for outcomes, their endurance when it comes to obstacles, resilience, the way they that stress affects their emotional life, and the choices they make.

Research in social cognitive theory has found that “self-efficacy beliefs are strong determinants and predictors of the level of accomplishment that individuals finally attain” (Pajares 545).

Self-efficacy mediates personal agency. This means that experience affects confidence, which then affects future behavior (Bandura 1986). Self-efficacy is developed by gathering results from the observation and reflection of how you perform, how other people perform, and the evaluation in the difference of the two. It also holistically weighs this with performance feedback and the physiological effects the performance produces, such as dread, stress, and enthusiasm.

2.3 Writing as a Process

To successfully teach first-year composition students, we need to avoid situations in which “writing becomes an exercise in target practice” (Turley 89). When students write with qualitative grading in mind, they avoid taking risks in selecting topics or expressing views that they fear might hurt their grades. One flaw of conventional assessment is that it can lead to “dull, uninspired, academic writing” (Anson 217). Removing qualitative grading creates an environment where, free from the worry of trying to assume what the teacher thinks is right or wrong, students are free to focus more on the act of writing than the outcome.

Writing is very much a process-based activity. Qualitative grading is too focused on outcomes. There are few, if any, professional writers who can write a polished text without drafting and revision. Focusing on process teaches “creativity, imagination, and the development of an authentic voice” (Anson 217). Assessments, according to Anson, should be given throughout the process of writing and should not focus on the finished product. Because process is all about trial and error, tying grades to process-assessment creates a barrier preventing students from fully exploring the creativity that is essential to developing and executing an idea.

2.4 Contract Grading

For my course, I was determined to see students learn about process and write without fear of academic failure. How does one objectively judge a student’s written voice in the earliest stages of development? What might a grade say about process? Inoue and Tony Scott give insight into the way assessments shape a student’s writing: “Assessments are a social activity” (Inoue & Scott 30). Qualitative grading removes the flexibility of that social exchange and shifts the power dynamic too strongly to the subjective impressions of the instructor. More importantly, Inoue and Scott contend that “assessment constructs boundaries for learning and student agency in learning environments and frames how students understand writing and their own abilities” which means it can “therefore affect...students’ senses of legitimacy and chances of success” (Scott 30). In this early stage of their writing lives, I think it is important that we help our students feel they can be successful writers by removing the limitations qualitative grading puts on them.

Inoue breaks down failure into two types: quality-failure and labor-failure. Quality-failure would be based in a system that uses what I have referred to as qualitative grading. This means that

students are judged on the quality of their work and can pass or fail depending on the teacher's subjective assessment. The problem with quality-failure is demonstrated through a series of studies conducted at Fresno State between 2005 and 2012. This type of grading “produced more frequent failure in particular racial populations” (Inoue 338). The other type of failure, labor-failure, comes through a system where students are graded based on the effort they put in, the quantity of work they do, or the amount of time they spend working on material. Failure showed much less of a bias when based on labor rather than quality. This form of grading—called contract grading due to the “contract” students enter with their professors, promising to complete a specified amount of work—is much more likely to be regarded as fair by students. There are no subjective judgments; students either complete the required work or they don't. This form of grading is mainly seen as unfair when “students perceive the requirements as too much work” (Inoue 339).

One criticism of contract-grading is that it privileges students who have more free time to devote to classwork. Students who are financially struggling or come from a lower socio-economic class are more likely to have to work long hours alongside school, making it harder for them to commit to completing the requirements of a contract-grade. Is it fair to judge them based on work output if the quality of the work they have time for is of a higher standard than their peers who are able to spend more time on classwork? This is an extension of the criticism that Inoue addresses, that contract-grading can be seen as unfair when students feel the professor gives them too much work. I don't believe that this is a valid concern if the professor sets up the class properly. The goal is to see the students engaged in the process of writing. Giving regular but short tasks to students will keep them engaged in process without feeling overburdened by work. Furthermore, flexibility on the part of an instructor is important in creating this contract. A

contract implies an agreement. Students should be allowed negotiating power within that contract. This can mean flexibility with deadlines or readjusting a student's expected output based on their circumstances and what can reasonably be expected of them.

The bigger criticism of contract grading centers on the assumption that students will produce lower quality work if professors are not enforcing quality standards. Inoue has two responses to this criticism. First, he argues that contract grading doesn't mean professors should lower their standards. Feedback is, perhaps, even more important to the learning process in this system. "Students find reasons to learn and grow as writers when their labor is truly honored, and they listen more carefully to feedback when grades are out of the way" (Inoue 343). It is possible to coach students toward higher quality writing through feedback and conversation rather than the consequence of failure. Next, Inoue points to the fact that writing is "an epistemological process" where labor "produces often unexpected, meaningful consequences" (343). Students learn through the process of writing. The consequence of putting in the labor is an increase in knowledge, particularly when combined with instructor feedback. There's an analogy here to learning to play the guitar. By putting in a set amount of practice time, a person's skills with the instrument will improve. If a student is focused on the quality of their music during practice, they will focus on playing the type of music that will most impress their teacher. Innovation comes when a student is free to play with the instrument, combining chords and rhythms to make new melodies. Sure, a lot of it might sound terrible along the way, but that student will learn through trial, error, and audience feedback.

In a 2009 study, Jane Danielewicz and Peter Elbow proposed an interesting form of contract grading that attempts to find a compromise between contract and qualitative grading. Students

would all earn a B simply for completing every assignment that was given. To earn an A, their work had to be exemplary. The intention behind this system was to allow students and teachers to focus more on writing and less on grades. This may be a workable system, but it still carries the same flaws as any system that involve quality-failure. Grade B becomes synonymous with quality-failure in this system, and getting an A is based on the subjective assessment of an instructor. Competitive students will still worry about their grade and less about the epistemological process involved with learning writing.

2.5 Synthesis

From this research, I decided that quality-failure serves little pedagogical purpose for first-year composition students. Psychologically it beats students down and epistemologically it does little to teach. I was also convinced that assessment is as much of a process as writing itself. Rather than focus on failure, I was determined to find success in my students and coach them toward being more successful. It became my intention to design a course where students felt entirely free to take risks, hoping to see students become enthusiastic about expressing themselves through writing. We live in a world dominated by social media; a world where people would prefer to send a text message or an e-mail than talk on the phone. Students are composers without even realizing it, and I wanted to bridge the gap between seeing writing as busy work and writing as a vital component of the human experience. I developed a modified contract grading system and decided to study its effectiveness on the two first-year composition courses I taught in spring of 2020.

3 Methodology

3.1 Getting Started

Like Peter Elbow argues in his essay “A Method for Teaching Writing,” I wanted to train my students to produce “the desired effect in the reader” (115). It is important to “build from strength and only gradually to proceed to areas of weakness” (Elbow 116). This means that style, grammar, and any other number of criteria take a backseat role to learning how to get the reader to understand what the writer is attempting to communicate. I built my Writing About Writing course around workshops and extensive peer and instructor feedback. Following Peggy O’Neill, I viewed assessment as “open, fluid, and tentative,” asking “critical questions” and having a “conversation” where the writer can “explain why they made a particular choice” (68). Students receive a perfect score on any assignment they attempt, so long as they respond to the given prompt and meet the length requirement. For example, for the Open Letter assignment, if a student ignored all conventions of open letters and chose to write a piece of flash fiction instead, they would not receive credit. Or, if the assignment asks for a minimum of three full pages and a student turns in work that barely reaches the end of the first page, they will only receive partial credit for falling short of the requirements. The reason for the length requirement is to set a standard for the implied contract of completing a certain amount of work by the end of the semester. While the page limit is mandatory for rough drafts, students are free to turn in a paper of any length for their final draft, allowing them to cut filler and craft a tighter composition.

After gaining IRB approval, informed students of the purpose, methodology, and possible risks associated with my study. I asked students to voluntarily sign a consent form, ensuring them that

there was no penalty if they chose not to participate. All 34 of my students agreed to take part in the study, though due to the disruption caused by COVID-19, only 22 students filled out the second survey. The surveys were confidential. I had students include their names only to track individual progress from one survey to the next. None of their actual writing was initially considered as data for this research, though I did pull comments from assigned feedback journals to supplement the data. I examined one student as a case study and make mention of her work, but only to demonstrate her engagement with the assessment system.

For the sake of the study, I compared student perceptions of a qualitative-grading system to a participation-based grading system. I did this by comparing their attitudes to the two systems by using surveys given once at the beginning of the semester and once closer to the end of the semester. To be clear, this was much more about gaining information than gathering empirical data. I also had students write entries in a reflection journal after each essay, giving me deeper insight into their thoughts on the evaluation and learning process. I defined a qualitative-grading system as being one where a student's grade is based upon a professor's assessment of the quality of their work. A participation-based grading system was defined as one in which a student is given full credit for completing an assignment. I gave four separate writing assignments (See Appendix B for prompts) throughout the semester and organized them so that the first essay would come with very few rules with each proceeding essay having a more defined prompt. The first essay, for example, asked students to write a narrative that touched on some element of their identity. They could accomplish this through fiction or creative nonfiction. They were allowed to touch directly on their identity or get there in a roundabout way. Beyond that there was no direction. I told students that the goal of this essay was to help them get used to the idea of breaking free from the five-paragraph essay form. I also stressed that this essay was

meant as a way for them to experience writing as something fun and expressive rather than rigid and academic. This was to avoid the issue Anson addressed of dull, uninspired writing. Surveys were aimed at measuring student attitude toward and comfort with a participation-based grading system and seeing if attitudes changed after experiencing what, for most, was a brand-new grading system.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The third day of class, students signed their informed consent forms and filled out the first survey. The survey was meant to gauge their experience and comfort level with qualitative-grading vs without. It also asked questions about how accurate an assessment qualitative-grading provides, the effects of qualitative-grading on their stress levels regarding composition assignments, how qualitative-grading impacts their creativity, whether qualitative-grading impacts their confidence in taking risks in their compositions, if qualitative-grading helped them to better understand an assignment, and several other questions. The survey (see Appendix C) included 20 questions with room for comments on 18 (two of the questions only required Yes / No responses) followed by a section where they could leave any additional comments on issues the survey may not have addressed.

I collected the surveys and recorded the data in a word doc on my computer with student names attached. After storing the data in my computer, I destroyed the physical copies of the surveys to protect student information. I waited until they finished their second writing assignment, an Open Letter, to hand out the second survey. By this point in the semester, students had experienced two assessments under a participation-based system and were better able to judge this system against a qualitative-grading system. Surveys were once again confidential, data was

transferred to a word doc for storage, and physical surveys were destroyed after the word doc was created. The second survey was focused strictly on participation-based systems. It asked equivalent questions to the first survey, using a numerical scale to measure perceptions like stress levels, creativity, and accuracy of assessment. The goal was to see if these numbers improved after students had experience with an alternate assessment method.

For each question on the survey, I added the number total then divided by the number of students who took the survey to find a composite rating for that question. For the first survey, I was particularly interested in comparing students who had prior experience with a participation-based grading system with those who had only been assessed using qualitative-grading. The second survey compared the composite numbers to the results for the equivalent questions on the first survey to see if the number had changed.

At the end of the semester, I went through all the student feedback journals and took note of any comments that reflected student attitudes toward writing in general, or how they felt about the assessments they'd received. Then I examined one student more closely who had been both critical and deeply engaged with this assessment system. Her comments and feedback became part of a case study that supplemented the rest of the data. While things didn't go exactly according to plan due to an unexpected global pandemic, the data builds a compelling argument to take a closer look at the relationship between grading methodology and self-efficacy.

4 Data

4.1 Survey 1

The first survey (See: Appendix C.1) was composed of 21 questions. The first half of Survey 1's questions mirrored the questions on the second half. Questions 2-10 ask about qualitative grading systems and 12-20 focus on what I call a participation-based system. For each question, students could rate their response from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Questions 1 and 11 were both Y / N answers, and 21 was left as a space for additional comments. Each comparative question from the survey is listed below:

2. Qualitative grading (an instructor's assessment of the quality of your work) provides an accurate assessment of my work / 12. a participation-based grade provides an accurate assessment of my work.
3. Concerns over grades stifle my creativity when it comes to writing / 13. without a set of grading criteria to follow, I feel my creativity was stifled.
4. Concerns over grades add a level of stress to my composition process / 14. writing without a set of grading criteria added stress to my composition process.
5. Qualitative grading helps me to better understand the writing assignment / 15. it was easy to understand the writing assignment without a set of grading criteria to follow.
6. I write better when there are rules to follow / 16. I write better when there are no rules to follow.
7. I enjoy writing more when there are rules to follow / 17. I enjoy writing more when there are no rules to follow.

8. I see writing as work when there are rules to follow / 18. I see writing as work when there are no rules to follow.
9. I feel I learn more effectively when I receive a qualitative grade on an assignment / 19. I feel I learn more effectively without having to follow grading criteria.
10. I am unafraid to take risks in my writing (style, subject matter, etc.) when I know I will be graded based on the quality of my writing / 20. I am unafraid to take risks in my writing (style, subject matter, etc.) when there are no grading criteria to follow.

Questions 2-10 act as a control group (Fig 1.0), showing me the students' pre-existing relationship to writing under a standard grading system. Questions 12-20 measure the students' pre-existing assumptions about writing under a participation-based system. Only 2 out of 22 students who filled out both surveys (34 students filled out Survey 1, but I discarded 12 surveys of students who chose not to fill out the follow up survey) had previous experience with a participation-based grading systems. Still, the students noted that it was only for select smaller assignments. For all intents and purposes, this was a new system for everyone.

Survey 1, Questions 2-10. Measure of student attitudes toward qualitative grading taken at the start of the semester.

Survey 1. Comparison of student attitudes toward qualitative grading (Survey 1, Questions 2-10) and participation-based grading (Survey 1, Questions 12-20) as measured at the start of the semester.

In Figure 1.1, the results from the second half of the survey were added for comparative purposes. Of note: one student chose not to answer several of the questions on the second half of Survey 1. The student assumed that they were not supposed to answer the questions if they had no experience working within the system. Still, the data gives a base starting point for gauging student attitudes toward the two grading systems.

4.2 Survey 2

The second survey (See Appendix C.2) was nearly identical to the first but only asked 10 questions rather than 21. Questions were follow-ups to the second half of Survey 1. Only the first question was new.

1. I feel comfortable taking on a writing project without a rubric to follow.
2. A participation-based grade provides me with an accurate assessment of my work.

3. Without grading criteria to follow, I feel my creativity was stifled.
4. Writing without grading criteria added stress to my composition process.
5. It was easy to understand the writing assignment without grading criteria to follow.
6. I write better when there are no rules to follow.
7. I enjoy writing more when there are no rules to follow.
8. I see writing as work even when there are no rules to follow.
9. I feel I learn more effectively without having to follow grading criteria.
10. I am unafraid to take risks in my writing (style, subject matter, etc.) when there are no grading criteria to follow.
11. Please provide any additional comments you might have on your feelings of a structured grading system against a participation-based system in terms of its impact on your ability to learn and engage with composition.

**Comparison between Survey 1, questions 12-20 and Survey 2, questions 1-10:
participation-based grading expectations vs. participation-based grading
experienced.**

Of key significance in Figure 2.0, looking at the results for question 1, students felt very comfortable taking on a writing project without a grading rubric to follow. There was a significant jump when it came to understanding writing assignments without rules to follow (question 5). Prior to experiencing this system, students were much less confident that assignments could be clear without set rules and expectations. While most of the other categories remained the same, nearly each category saw a slight shift toward favoring a participation-based grading system after experiencing this new method of assessment.

4.3 Student Comments

In general, students provided much better insight through commentary than through ranking perceptions on the surveys. While all student comments can be found in Appendix D, I will give a few examples in this section. An analysis of student comments can be found in Section 5.3.

Sample student comments:

- I believe students have better writing when they can speak their mind without worrying about guidelines. However, students also need incentives to write well.
- Qualitative grading is much “scarier” but participation based could be ineffectual if no feedback is given to the writer. The overall idea is very ideal.
- Knowing that I was not graded made me not write to best of my ability. I felt less pressure which was nice
- I feel like a little bit of each would balance out. On one hand, I agree that qualitative grading limits my ability to learn and write, same as participation system. However, on the other hand, I would not be a 100% object the benefit both bring. I think these grading

systems are here to guide us focusing learning better. Hence, having a balance between each would help a lot.

- A participation-based grading system doesn't actually grade you based on how well you wrote your essay unlike a qualitative grading system does so I would be able to learn more about writing as it was graded on a qualitative grading system.
- Qualitative grading stifles my motivation to write and my creativity. Over the years, teachers have taught me to write a certain limited way that leaves little room for my own unique writing style.
- Participation based system gives me more confidence in what I am writing since I'm not worried about the grade, I can focus on what I like and what I want to write about. This gives me a chance to not only show my strengths in writing but my weaknesses since I only play with my strengths, I can strengthen my weak ability's and become a better writer. I also have learned to love writing because I understand how to use my voice and now it just feels like I'm having a conversation and not just writing a bunch of words on a paper. Participation based system got rid of my anxiety about writing and with that out of the way I was able to learn more effectively.

5 Analysis

5.1 Survey 1

Figure 1.0 demonstrates students were typically in agreement that qualitative grading provides an accurate assessment of their work. It also reveals the pressures that qualitative grading puts on students. When asked if grades add stress to the composition process, the class median was 3.59, which is as close to “strongly agreeing” as they came on any question. Students also indicated that they feel as if their creativity is stifled and that they are more afraid to take risks in a qualitative grading system. They record that writing is more likely to be viewed as work when they are graded based on quality, and that they do not find writing to be an enjoyable practice when there are strict rules associated with evaluation. When it comes to learning, understanding, or performance, student responses reflect neutrality about the impact of qualitative grading.

The first half of Survey 1 was meant to act as a control group, and the results of the survey weren’t especially surprising. Student response indicates that qualitative grading is familiar and trusted and that while they weren’t exactly thrilled with that grading method, they felt it was accurate. The second half of the survey was meant to gauge how well they reacted to the *idea* of a participation-based grading system. Since no students had any real experience with contract grading, I expected that they might not feel as confident in the system, even if they might be optimistic about it. Based on the results, I was correct.

Looking at Figure 1.1, students indicate that they felt less confident in the ability for a participation-based grade to assess their work. To students, it seemed as if a void might inhabit

the space red pens used to fill. It seemed as if they couldn't imagine critical feedback without it being represented by a grade. This comment sums up the fear:

I feel like grading writing based on participation isn't a good system to grade because it doesn't critique your work like a qualitative grading system would and make you a better writer.

Still, their journals reflected that they could see the positive side to contract grading. Without any experience with a participation-based system, students were more confident that this methodology wouldn't interfere with creativity or add stress to their composition process. They report feeling more confident taking risks and less inclined to view writing as work. Furthermore, they reported enjoying writing more when there aren't rules to follow. The idea that writing can be more enjoyable without rules is important in bridging the gap between viewing writing as a strictly academic pursuit and realizing how similar the writing they do in a classroom can be to writing they do beyond the classroom, particularly in their daily lives. Being that my goal for a first-year composition course is to help students believe in their ability to compose texts, the results from this half of the survey show that students feel more optimistic about writing if a qualitative grade is removed from consideration.

5.2 Survey 2

The results of Survey 2 demonstrate what I would consider the students' first impressions of a participation-based grading system. The effects of a contract grading system decentralized concerns over grades, however students seemed slow to accept the new system.

Of key significance in Figure 2.0, students felt very comfortable taking on a writing project without a grading rubric to follow (Question 1). The median score here was 3.59, which is tied for the highest ranking of any question. In the first survey, students seemed less sure of a participation-based system's ability to communicate expectations or to provide an accurate assessment. Both of those items saw a rise in Survey 2. While most of the other items remained the same, nearly each question improved in favorability after experiencing a participation-based grading system. I predict that students would prefer this system even more if they received a follow-up survey after semester's end. As we will see in section 5.4, a case study of one of my students provides evidence that time and experience bring a student closer to favoring this grading system.

5.3 Student Comments

From looking at student comments, I gleaned that some felt as if there was no motivation to write well if they weren't being graded based on the quality of their work. Other students felt as if crucial components of the evaluation process were lost in this system, particularly students who are more concerned with fixing grammar errors or other technical mistakes. It seemed like, overall, students who value creativity thrive in this system and students who would rather follow specific instructions took longer to adapt. Still, there was an appeal to some sort of hybrid system, even from those most critical.

Across the board, students commented on how refreshing it felt to remove stress and pressure from the composition process. One student mentioned how he learned to actually love writing. Without worrying about a grade, he was able to find his voice, treating writing the same as he treats any conversation. I'd like to note that this specific student took far more risks than

anyone else throughout the semester, playing with structure and form and creating unique compositions. While it wasn't my intention to consider the content students created in my course as part of this research, this student shined so brightly within this system that it was worth noting. Another common remark from students is that they were able to better focus on process and not worry so much about outcome, which is exactly what I was hoping for.

5.4 Case Study: Brianna

Particularly noteworthy is a student, Brianna (pseudonym), who I will be examining as a case study. Brianna turned in two copies of the second survey. This was because I attempted to collect Survey 2 soon after we were required to switch to a remote classroom. Only 3 students turned in surveys when I requested them, so I tried again later in the semester after time had passed and we had fallen into our new routine. When Brianna turned in her first copy of Survey 2, the results were much more critical of a participation-based system than they ended up after turning in her final survey.

Figure 3.0 is a side by side comparison of Brianna's survey scores. Brianna expressed a particularly strong preference for the accuracy of qualitative assessment. Prior to the start of the semester, Brianna left this comment on Survey 1, Question 21:

Qualitative grading is much "scarier" but participation based could be ineffectual if no feedback is given to the writer. The overall idea is very ideal. It would allow writers the opportunity to be more open and personally expressive with their writing.

Case study: Breanna. Comparison between pre-semester attitude toward qualitative grading (Survey 1, questions 2-10), pre-semester attitude toward participation-based grading (Survey 1, questions 2-20), and results from each of the two times Brianna took Survey 2 (participation-based grading experienced).

Brianna, more than any other student in the class, would ask questions about the assignments and requesting feedback from me as she worked through the prompts. Unfortunately, most of this came after she had filled out both surveys. There is evidence that, were she to fill out the survey now, after the class has ended, her results may have changed. Still, we can see in Figure 3.0 that in the short time between taking the 2 surveys, Brianna decided that writing felt less like work, that it became a more enjoyable task, that assignments became easier to understand, that writing became less stressful, and she significantly felt as if she was able to be more creative.

Furthermore, there was a comment added on Survey 2, Question 11 that disappeared from her second copy of the survey:

I think that I have learned that I do like having qualitative grading. As much as I wish I liked a participation-based system for grading, I think having a qualitative grading system allows me to understand the assignment as well as receive feedback on my writing skills.

Alongside the other changes in her perception of a participation-based system, the removal of this comment implies that Brianna had warmed up to a new and unfamiliar system.

Also of note, after both surveys had been filled out, I worked closely with Brianna on her third essay, the Satirical Research Paper. This was the point in the semester where I began to see Brianna step outside of her comfort zone as she embraced my less-rigid system. Brianna came up with an experimental form for her satire and met with me after class one day to discuss the best way to accomplish her plan. After completing her rough draft, Brianna still wasn't certain if she had accomplished her goal as well as she would have liked to, so we met again after class and brainstormed ideas. Evaluating Brianna's work became a dialog, which is what Inoue was getting at when describing assessment as a social activity. If I had strictly read Brianna's paper, I may not have understood her goals the same way as if we had talked things through. While my feedback may have helped her write a better paper, it wouldn't have helped her write the paper she wanted to write. I would have brought her closer to my ideas rather than her own. In her feedback journal for the satire essay, Brianna had several relevant comments:

I feel like my struggle in writing the satirical paper didn't come from understanding what to do, but just not knowing how to execute my ideas. This is why I was so grateful for your feedback on how to better my paper.

I certainly appreciate all the feedback you have given me on this paper as well as the other three assignments.

These comments show that Brianna had come around to appreciating the evaluation process more at the end of the semester than she had at the point when she filled out the surveys. I will develop the reasons for this in Section 6.

5.5 Summary

From the data, it is rather clear that a non-qualitative grading system provides a more enjoyable way for students to engage with a first-year composition course. From a pedagogical standpoint, whether this system is one worth investing in depends on an instructor's goals for a first-year composition classroom.

I believe that it is incredibly important for students to learn about process. More importantly, I believe that in this early stage of their writing lives, it is vital that students develop self-efficacy and learn to *believe* in their ability to communicate using the written word. From my research, contract grading is an effective tool for accomplishing these goals.

6 Weaknesses, Criticisms, and Opportunities

Switching to a remote classroom half-way through the semester presented several challenges to my research. It also helped me realize missed opportunities and future areas of exploration. Here are some of the mistakes I made and what I learned from them.

6.1 The Pedagogical Purpose of Competition

While I was reading past scholarship on grading methodology, I became interested in the pedagogical purpose of failure. While considering this, I never stopped to consider *why* people would look for a pedagogical purpose of failure in the first place. One of the benefits to the assessment system that I worked with was its cooperative, conversational approach to the assessment process. I began to view my role as more of a coach, or, to remove the authoritative system of power involved, as a cheerleader. In a system that assigns a letter grade to a student based on the quality of work that student turns in, we place a particularly large emphasis on competition. Students *compete* to be top of their class. Students *compete* for the best grades. Even when it's not a course that grades on a curve, there's still an inherent push to be *the best*; to stand out among our peers and create opportunities that might not exist for students who don't shine as brightly. Inherent in capitalist power structures, competition is seen as a motivator.

I didn't focus on competition vs cooperation in my study, but to really challenge the structure of assessment, we need to look at some of the fundamental pieces of qualitative grading systems. Do qualitative grades reinforce capitalist ideas of competition? Do they allow for fair

competition, or does the bias toward dominant norms that Inoue addressed rig the competition from the start? Does competition even benefit a first-year composition student? There is an opportunity to explore the pedagogical purpose of competition as it connects to qualitative assessments that I failed to explore.

6.2 Over-Promising & Timely Evaluations

For the first essay, the narrative, I promised my students that I would give them each extremely detailed, “professional-editor-of-a-journal” feedback on their stories. I foolishly committed to roughly 30 hours’ worth of extra work. While I was okay with that decision, I was not prepared to do that kind of work after the pandemic began and my routine was shaken. This caused me to get way behind on evaluations.

Because of my over-promise, I ended up letting my students down. As a result, at the time of the second survey, their opinions of the evaluation system were not as favorable as they were by the end of the semester when they had received all of my feedback. Through Brianna’s surveys and feedback journals, I was able to recognize this flaw much more directly.

6.3 Follow-Up

I conducted this research for my master’s thesis. Because of this, I was limited in the time and scope of my study. I couldn’t give out surveys after the semester had ended because of deadlines for this project. However, for this study to more accurately represent student attitudes, it is important that a follow-up survey be given after student’s receive their final grade / evaluations for the course. Without that information, all of the data feels incomplete.

Furthermore, I believe there is value in following up with these students again as they progress through college. One of my goals was to make students enjoy writing. I wanted to invite them to believe that they can write, that they have something to say, and that they are part of a much greater discourse community of writers. I would like to see if those seeds are able to take root within my students in a lasting way. Do students who take a first-year composition course without qualitative grading have a better relationship to writing by the time they graduate than students who have only been assessed based on quality? That's a question I would like to see answered.

7 Conclusions

Something I discovered through my research is that there is no one-size-fits-all assessment method. Some students seem to prefer the perceived objectivity associated with qualitative grading while others enjoy the freedom of a more conversational assessment approach. Contract grading has the potential to meet any type of student's needs.

The primary benefit of a contract grading system is that it creates an environment with more flexibility in the assessment process. I believe that my approach only scratched at the potential of contract grading. I didn't embrace the full flexibility of this system. There is no reason why, for example, I couldn't have merged the two systems for students who would prefer to know what sort of letter grade their paper may have earned. It's possible to give qualitative assessments on each assignment while still basing a student's final course grade on participation. The benefits of not having to worry about the outcome of each composition frees students to focus on the process, which, for the novice writer, is substantially more important.

An anecdote may show the utility in what I learned through this study. I recently had a conversation with a more experienced teacher than myself who has been working with first-year composition students for many years. She was baffled by the things her students believed in (particularly fringe conspiracy theories) and why they chose to trust non-credible sources without any skepticism. I experienced something similar with my class which led to an interesting classroom conversation over what was persuasive about the source's rhetoric and why students believed what they believed. When I gave my students the freedom to freely express their views

on the information without fear of making the wrong argument or saying something that could affect their grade, I was able to learn the way they think about and interact with the world. This helped me develop tools to more adequately explore rhetorical situations with them and help them see the world through a more critical lens. If they were scared to speak their minds honestly for fear of it affecting their grades, I would have lost out on the conversation that led to a new understanding. It's the same with their writing. Fear of failure prevents students from making the types of mistakes that could lead to new knowledge for both the student and teacher. By seeing the way students write when they feel free to take risks, it can foster the types of open, fluid conversational assessments that Peggy O'Neill promotes. My fellow instructor, when we talked about our similar situations, remarked that she has been spending too much time correcting grammar and teaching her students textbook rules of argumentation. While the "rules" of rhetoric and composition are important, they can be discussed deeper into a writer's life. What's important for a first-year composition course is that we make students feel worthy of being part of the compositionist discourse community. Grades can act as a barrier to that sense of belonging.

I don't believe that grading is useless. Rubrics in particular are wonderful tools for assessing very specific goals and outcomes for a student's writing. But when you are trying to teach students about nebulous concepts like process and voice, it is best to give students the freedom to explore what works for them without fear of academic failure. Some people might argue that combining qualitative grades with the chance to revise can mitigate the fear of failure, but as Doug Downs argues, that creates a situation where students "see revision as a punishment for poor performance" rather than as "central to developing writing" (67). Also, they will still ultimately be writing to try and please the teacher rather than to explore their voice. It is

important to divorce grading from student assessments at this critical point in their development as writers.

My study was far from perfect. In the process of conducting my research, I saw several more efficient and effective ways to measure the efficacy of a grade-free assessment method. Even still, the research supports the potential for eliminating grades from first-year composition assessments. Students take more risks, find more enjoyment in writing, and feel more confident in their ability to understand and learn from an assignment when they don't fear academic failure. Moving beyond grades might be the best method for improving the way we assess first-year composition students.

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Appendix A: Class Syllabus

English 103: Writing About Writing Chapman University, Spring 2020

Instructor: Matthew Goldman

Meeting Time: M/W/F 8:00 AM

Meeting Place: Hashinger Science Center 220A

Instructor's Email: matgoldman@chapman.edu

Catalog Description

Writing seminar devoted to rhetorical understanding and competence in a variety of specific academic contexts. Students may choose their area of concentration from a range of writing genres, each with its own sets of expectations, forms and purposes. Attention will focus on student writing in differing discourse communities, but all sections of English 103 address rhetorical effectiveness in composition. (Offered every semester.) 3 credits.

Course Description

Through critical reading and engaging in multiple writing projects, including writing through drafting and peer workshops, students will explore and develop their own writing and rhetorical practices and consider how those practices can be applied beyond this course.

Course Learning Outcomes: By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Learn and use key rhetorical concepts through analyzing and composing a variety of texts
- Gain experience reading and composing in several genres to understand how genre conventions shape and are shaped by readers' and writers' practices and purposes
- Develop facility in responding to a variety of situations and contexts calling for purposeful shifts in voice, tone, level of formality, design, medium, and/or structure
- Use composing and reading for inquiry, learning, critical thinking, and communicating in various rhetorical contexts
- Read a diverse range of texts, attending especially to relationships between assertion and evidence, to patterns of organization, to the interplay between verbal and nonverbal elements, and to how these features function for different audiences and situations
- Locate and evaluate (for credibility, sufficiency, accuracy, timeliness, bias and so on) primary and secondary research materials, including journal articles and essays, books,

scholarly and professionally established and maintained databases or archives, and informal electronic networks and internet sources

- Develop a writing project through multiple drafts
- Develop flexible strategies for reading, drafting, reviewing, collaborating, revising, rewriting, rereading, and editing
- Experience the collaborative and social aspects of writing processes
- Learn to give and to act on productive feedback to works in progress
- Reflect on the development of composing practices and how those practices influence their work
- Develop knowledge of linguistic structures, including grammar, punctuation, and spelling, through practice in composing and revising
- Understand why genre conventions for structure, paragraphing, tone, and mechanics vary
- Gain experience negotiating variations in genre conventions
- Practice applying citation conventions systematically in their own work

In addition, students completing this Written Inquiry GE will compose texts that:

- Establish active, genuine, and responsible authorial engagement
- Communicate a purpose—an argument or other intentional point/goal
- Invoke a specific audience
- Develop the argument/content with an internal logic/organization
- Integrate references, citations, and source material logically and dialogically, indicating how forms of evidence relate to each other and the author's position
- Compose with rhetorically effective use of language, form and genre, voice and tone, and style

Course Format

After the introduction to the course, each period of class will begin with a five-minute free writing exercise followed by five minutes where several students will read their work out loud to the class. Each day of the week will have its own emphasis:

Mondays will be dedicated to workshoping. Students upload copies of their work to blackboard before class and will be expected to bring in copies of their writing assignments for their small group of peers to read and workshop in class. The workshops will give students the opportunity to read their peers' work and to learn how to give constructive feedback.

Wednesdays the class will break up into small groups that change each week to discuss the readings for that day. This will give students the opportunity to discuss the readings with classmates and work out the opinions about the readings. For the last 15 minutes of the period, the class will reconvene and discuss their findings.

Fridays will be dedicated to full-class discussions. The class will discuss the theoretical readings about writing and work on participation as a community. Beginning the fourth week of class, pairs of students will be assigned to lead full-class discussions.

Required Text

- Downs, Doug and Wardle, Elizabeth. *Writing About Writing* Bedford/ St. Martin's, Third Edition, Boston and New York, 2011.
- ***Available in the bookstore or online using ISBN # 978-1319032760 ***
- Your choice from the following books, or talk to me about other options:
 - American Prison by Shane Bauer
 - Paradise Built in Hell by Rebecca Solnit
 - What You Have Heard is True by Carolyn Forché
 - Bullshit Jobs by David Graeber
 - Just Mercy by Bryan Stevenson

Technology Requirements

- Regular access to a computer and the internet
- Chapman Email Account – communications and updates with the class will be conducted via the official Chapman accounts
- Access to Blackboard – this will be where the syllabus, class schedules, writing assignments, and additional texts will be posted. It will also be where students will submit finished projects.

Assignments and Grades

There will be a total of 100 points over the course of the semester.

- All grades in this class are participation-based. What this means is that if you complete the assignment and follow all directions, you will get 100% regardless of the quality of the finished product. If what you turn in doesn't meet the requirements of that assignment (eg: off topic, short of the page requirement), partial credit may be given at the instructor's discretion.
- Class attendance is expected. Being a participation-based course, class discussion and workshops are vital to each student's success. **Missing more than six classes will result in a deduction of the final grade.**
- Students are responsible for all administrative procedures: adds, drops, withdrawals, etc.

Point Breakdown		
Area of Evaluation	Total Possible	Percentages
Discussion Board Posts	10	10%
Book Journals	5	5%
Writing Prompts	5	5%
Writing Center	5	5%
Discussion Leader	5	5%
Narrative Essay	5	5%
Open Letter	10	10%
Satirical Research Paper	10	10%
Rhetorical Analysis Essay	15	15%

Multimodal Presentation	5	5%
Reflection Letters	5	5%
Portfolio	20	20%
Total	100	100%

A	=	100-93	4.0 (excellent)
A-	=	92-90	3.7
B+	=	89-87	3.3
B	=	86-83	3.0 (very good)
B-	=	82-80	2.7
C+	=	79-77	2.3
C	=	76-73	2.0 (satisfactory)
C-	=	72-70	1.7
D+	=	69-67	1.3 (unsatisfactory)
D	=	66-63	1.0
D-	=	62-60	0.7 (minimum passing)
F	=	59-0	0.0 (failing)

Area of Evaluation

Grades will be determined by each of the following:

- **Discussion Board Posts: 10 points, 10%**
- Students are expected to engage with the class material through the Blackboard Discussion Board. This is not to replace in class discussions, but rather to help prepare us to have livelier in-class discussions. The discussion board posts will focus on reading assignments. Each discussion board post will be worth **0.5 points**. There will be extra credit opportunities through the discussion board as well. To get credit, the post must be submitted **before** class on the day we discuss that reading assignment and should be a **minimum of 100 words**. To put that in perspective, this paragraph is exactly 100 words.
- **Book Journals: 5 points, 5%**
- Students are expected to make **5 journal entries** throughout the semester to document important or interesting content from whichever book they choose to read. These journal entries serve 2 purposes. First, they prove to me that you are doing your reading. Second, they will help you when it comes time to write the fourth essay. I have given you most of the semester to finish reading whichever book you choose. The first journal entry is due by **Friday – 2/17**. The final entry is due by **Friday – 4/13**.
-
- Journal entries can always be turned in earlier than their due date. If you are a quick reader and want to get the reading out of the way early, feel free to do so. Each book is roughly 300 pages, so each journal entry should cover roughly 60 pages. This isn't an exact science. If you end up only reading 20 pages by one of the due dates, that's fine. You will just need to make up more reading down the line.
-
- When making a journal entry, try and cite specific quotes and examples from the book, making sure to note the page number. Look for examples of arguments the author is making and

how they utilize ethos, pathos, and logos. Keep the Book Essay in mind as you write your journal entries. Book Essay instructions can be found later in the syllabus. Journal entries should be roughly **1 page** and are worth **1 point each**.

-

- **Writing Prompts: 5 points, 5%**

- Students are expected to post **5** writing prompts in the Blackboard discussion section throughout the semester. Alongside each prompt, the student should write a brief 1-2 sentence explanation of the rhetorical reason for selecting of that prompt. Consider the following questions when choosing and explaining your prompts. What skill might this prompt help build? What thoughts might it inspire? What important things will it cause people to say? The first will be due by the start of the **third** week of class, **Mon – 2/17**. For the next **4 weeks**, an additional prompt will be **due each Monday**. These prompts will fuel the free writing exercises for the remainder of the semester. Each prompt is worth **1 point**.

-

- **Writing Center: 5 points, 5%**

- Students are expected to visit the writing center **2 times** throughout the course of the semester. Each visit is worth **2.5 points**. Students are required to turn in notes from their visit to get credit for the visit. Writing Center visits can happen during **any draft** of the essay, and students are encouraged to visit when they are feeling particularly challenged by an assignment. Attending a literary event can replace **1** Writing Center Visit. These will be promoted throughout the semester.

-

- The Writing Center can be found at 130 DeMille Hall. More information can be found on Blackboard. While online tutoring is allowed to earn these points, I recommend seeing them in person at least once.

-

- **Discussion Leader: 5 points, 5%**

- Students will be partnered up and assigned a week to lead class discussions. This will begin the **fourth Friday** of class. The team should come in prepared to discuss the assigned reading, being able to both present a summary of the key information and to ask engaging questions to dig for a deeper understanding of rhetorical concepts. Students are free to lead the classroom using any method they desire.

-

- After presenting, students will be responsible for sending in a brief reflection on their presentation. What was effective about your rhetorical strategy? What might you do differently in the future? How did the presentation affect your engagement with the reading assignment? This should be roughly half a page.

-

- The presentation will be worth **2.5 points** and the reflection will be worth **2.5 points**. The reflection letter will be due no later than **1 week** after you present.

-

- **Narrative Essay: 5 points, 5%**

- The first essay will be a narrative essay that touches on some element of the student's identity. This can be done through either fiction or creative nonfiction. Students will follow the conventions of narrative storytelling to effectively communicate an important part of their

identity to the reader, focusing on voice, audience, and purpose. Each essay in this class will be split into 3 separate assignments: An Outline, a Rough Draft, and a Final Draft. The finished essay should be **3-5 pages**.

- - **Outline—1 point—Due – 2/14**
 - **Rough Draft—2 points—Due – 2/21**
 - **Final Draft—2 points—Due – 2/28**

- **Open Letter: 10 points, 10%**

- The second essay will be an Open Letter. Students will pick a topic / issue that they care about and will write an open letter to a public figure relevant to that issue. The objective of this letter will be to argue for change. Students should consider voice, audience, purpose, and argument when writing their letter. Letters should be addressed to their recipient and follow all the genre conventions of an open letter. This includes locating the mailing address for that recipient and including it in the letter. The finished letter should be **3-5 pages**.

- - **Outline—2 points—Due – 3/13**
 - **Rough Draft—4 points—Due – 3/20**
 - **Final Draft—4 points—Due – 3/27**

- **Satirical Research Paper: 10 points, 10%**

- The third essay will be a Satirical Research Paper. For this essay, students will manipulate data to bring the reader to an absurd conclusion. Students will blend the conventions of a research paper with satire when writing this essay. Essay requires at least **5 sources** and should follow proper citation rules. While English papers typically follow MLA format, if your major follows a different format and you would rather cite your work that way (eg: APA, Chicago), you are welcome to do so. Voice, audience, purpose, argument, and tone should all be considered when writing this essay. The finished paper should be **3-5 pages**. A work's cited page should also be included but does not count toward the page total.

- - **Outline—2 points—Due – 4/3**
 - **Rough Draft—4 points—Due – 4/10**
 - **Final Draft—4 points—Due – 4/17**

- **Rhetorical Analysis Essay: 15 points, 15%**

- The fourth and final essay will be a rhetorical analysis of whichever book you chose to read at the beginning of the semester. Students will analyze the rhetorical decisions the author chose to make in that book. Who is the target audience? How did the author establish voice and what impact did it have in the way you read the book? What is the purpose of the book? What is the author's argument and is it convincing? How did the author utilize ethos, pathos, and logos in the text?

- Finally, you are to choose one rhetorical statement the author is trying to make and use it to challenge a contemporary rhetorical statement. For example, if you chose to read What You Have Heard is True, you might use the rhetoric in the book to challenge the idea that immigrant families put their children in danger by bringing them across the border illegally. Does the book

make a convincing argument? Do you agree with the author? Have you been persuaded to think differently about this issue? This essay should be a **minimum of 5 pages**.

- - **Outline—3 points—Due – 4/3**
 - **Rough Draft—6 points—Due – 4/10**
 - **Final Draft—6 points—Due – 4/17**
- - **Multimodal Presentation: 5 points, 5%**
 - Students will present one of their essays in a multimodal format. This can be through a blog post, creation of a website, a poster, a video, turning it into a song, doing an interpretive dance, creating a piece of visual art, or using any other sort of multimodal techniques to re-compose their essay and communicate the key information to the class. The presentation should be no longer than **5 minutes**.
- - **Reflection Letters: 5 points, 5%**
 - After each essay and the multimodal presentation, students are expected to write a **1 page** reflection letter giving the instructor feedback on what they learned from that project, things that they enjoyed in class, and things that they did not enjoy. Reflection letters will be filled out through the journal function on Blackboard. Further prompts for each letter will be found there. Letters are due no later than **1 week** after each final draft is turned in (and 1 week after the final multimodal presentation is finished). Student won't be graded down or judged in any way for their honesty, even if the response is negative. Instructor has thick skin. He can take criticism. Each reflection letter is worth **1 point**.
- - **Portfolio: 20 points, 20%**
 - At the end of the semester, students will turn in a portfolio that includes a revised version of each essay they wrote throughout the semester. Students are required to make substantial edits to each essay. This goes beyond cleaning up grammatical errors and touches on the rhetorical choices made within the paper. Alongside each paper should be an explanation of the changes that were made. Students should reflect on why they made those changes and what effects they had on the paper. The explanations should serve as an introduction to each paper (separate from the paper itself) and should be roughly **1 page**.
 - No matter how perfect you think your paper is, you are still required to make edits. This is because writing is a process and it is important to experiment along the way to composing a truly finished final draft. Perfection is never the goal in this class; experimenting with technique is much more important.
 - Each essay is worth **5 points**. You will not receive **any credit** for an essay if no edits have been made or if it does not include a letter explaining the edits.

Late Assignment Policy

All assignments are expected to be submitted on time. Unless student has cleared a late assignment with the professor, late work will not be accepted.

Course Policies

The class policies that each student is expected to abide are as follows:

Attendance

As this course is based on discussion and workshop, attendance is pivotal to the success of the course. An absence not only negatively affects the student's own learning process, but also each of their peers. Therefore, each student is expected to come to class and to do so on time (within the first 5 minutes of the start of class). **6 unexcused absences will lower a student's grade by 10%, and each additional absence will lower student's grade by an additional 5%.** Showing up late to class 3 times, after the 5-minute mark, will also count as an absence.

Furthermore, absent students are responsible for all readings and assignments for any missed class. A student should email me about their absence within 24 hours of the end of the class to receive any updates missed during that session.

Preparation

Showing up to class is only one part to the success of the course. It is also important that each student comes to class prepared, reading all assigned texts before the start of the class, bringing all relevant materials to every session (this includes paper or laptop, writing utensils, and copies of drafts for workshops), and stays awake and alert the entire class period. Neglecting to do so will negatively affect your participation grade.

Class Etiquette

The classroom is a community where everyone should feel welcome and able to share their opinions without any negative stigma. Every student's perspective, within reason, is encouraged to be shared with the rest of the class. In order to create a safe and welcoming environment, every student is expected to respect each and every one of their peers.

This means each student should be allowed to speak their mind without unnecessary interruption. However, participation also means being concise and thoughtful, and not dominating the discussion. Contributions that veer off topic or become disrespectful will be cut short. Students should listen silently and wait their turn to respond in a respectful manner. There will be no personal disparagement, immature or rude behavior, or vulgar language in the class. No one student should dominate the conversation, allowing others to speak in order to hear other perspectives. To keep a safe and comfortable environment, no guests will be allowed to come to the class.

Any student who is unable to treat their fellow students in a respectful way will be asked to leave that class period. This will result in an absence to the class and, depending on the severity, may result in a referral to the department and the Dean of Students.

Any student who feels threatened or uncomfortable in this class should contact me immediately.

Additionally, electronic devices (phones, mp3 players, videogames) should be put away by the beginning of class. Texting is strictly prohibited during class. **Computers, laptops, and tablets can be used for educational purposes only.** Any abuse of these devices will result in the loss of privileges.

Tardy Instructor

If, for some unforeseen reason, no instructor arrives to the class during the start time, students are to wait for fifteen minutes for an instructor to arrive. After the allotted time, if no notification is sent to students about the absence, students may leave and will receive no penalty for their absence.

University Policies and Procedures

Chapman University Academic Integrity Policy:

“Chapman University is a community of scholars that emphasizes the mutual responsibility of all members to seek knowledge honestly and in good faith. Students are responsible for doing their own work and academic dishonesty of any kind will be subject to sanction by the instructor/administrator and referral to the university Academic Integrity Committee, which may impose additional sanctions including expulsion. Please see the full description of Chapman University's policy on Academic Integrity at <http://www.chapman.edu/academics/academic-integrity/>.”

Chapman University's Emergency Response Message:

“Take note of the safety features in and around the classroom. Also, please study the posted evacuation routes. The most direct route of egress may not be the safest. Running out of the building during earthquakes may be dangerous. During strong earthquakes, it is recommended to duck, cover, and hold until the quaking stops. Follow the guidance of your instructor. Your cooperation during emergencies can minimize the possibility of injury to yourself and others.”

Chapman University's Students with Disabilities Policy:

“In compliance with ADA guidelines, students who have any condition, either permanent or temporary, that might affect their ability to perform in this class are encouraged to contact the Disability Services Office. If you will need to utilize your approved accommodations in this class, please follow the proper notification procedure for informing your professor(s). This notification process must occur more than a week before any accommodation can be utilized. Please contact Disability Services at (714) 516-4520 or visit www.chapman.edu/students/student-health-services/disability-services if you have questions regarding this procedure or for information or to make an appointment to discuss and/or request potential accommodations based on documentation of your disability. Once formal approval of your need for an accommodation has been granted, you are encouraged to talk with your professor(s) about your accommodation options. The granting of any accommodation will not be retroactive and cannot jeopardize the academic standards or integrity of the course.

Chapman University's Equity and Diversity Policy:

“Chapman University is committed to ensuring equality and valuing diversity. Students and professors are reminded to show respect at all times as outlined in Chapman's Harassment and Discrimination Policy. Please see the full description of this policy at <http://www.chapman.edu/faculty-staff/human-resources/eoo.aspx>. Any violations of this policy should be discussed with the professor, the dean of students and/or otherwise reported in accordance with this policy.”

Changes to the Syllabus Note:

Events may arise through the course of this semester that may deem it necessary to modify specifics in the syllabus or course calendar.

Course Calendar:

Week	Dates	Lessons	Reading Due	Assignment Due
1	M 2-3	Introduction		
	W 2-5	Syllabus	Syllabus	
	F 2-7	Discuss: WAW Chapter 1	WAW 1-29	
2	M 2-10	Discuss: Rhetoric	Downs, "Rhetoric: Making Sense of Human Interaction and Meaning-Making" WAW 457-483	
	W 2-12	Discuss: First Drafts / Error	Lamott, "Shitty First Drafts" WAW 852-857 & Williams, "The Phenomenology of Error" WAW 803-823	
	F 2-14	Intro to Workshops	Straub, "Responding—Really Responding—to Other Students' Writing" WAW 44-55	Essay 1: Outline
3	M 2-17	Workshop / Talk About Elements of a Narrative		Writing Prompt 1 / Book Journal 1
	W 2-19	Elements of a Narrative Continued	Murray, "All Writing is Autobiography" WAW 223-235	
	F 2-21	Discuss: Labels / Identity Politics	Tejada et al, "Challenging Our Labels" WAW 130-147	Essay 1: Rough Draft
4	M 2-24	Workshop		Writing Prompt 2
	W 2-26	Discuss: Literacy and Multiliteracy	Pasqualin, "Don't Panic" WAW 236-244 & Malcolm X, "Learning to Read" WAW 106-115	
	F 2-28	Discuss: Code Switching	Young, "Nah, We Straight" WAW 148-171	Essay 1: Final Draft
5	M 3-2	Workshop / Intro to Open Letters		Writing Prompt 3 / Book Journal 2

	W 3-4	Open Letters Continued	MLK Jr. "Letter From a Birmingham Jail" & Flying Spaghetti Monster (Blackboard)	
	F 3-6	No Class		Essay 2: Outline / Reflection Letter 1
6	M 3-9	Workshop		Writing Prompt 4
	W 3-11	Discuss: Language in Communities	Mirabelli, "Learning to Serve" WAW 298-318	
	F 3-13	Discuss: Argument	Corder, "Argument as Emergence, Rhetoric as Love" WAW 600-618	Essay 2: Rough Draft
7	M 3-16	Workshop		Writing Prompt 5 / Book Journal 3
	W 3-18	Discuss: Writing for an Audience	Wardle, "Identity, Authority, and Learning to Write in New Workplaces" WAW 407-425	
	F 3-20	Discuss: Diversity in Discourse Communities	Johns, "Discourse Communities and Communities of Practice" WAW 319-341	Essay 2: Final Draft
8	M 3-23	Spring Break		
	W 3-25	Spring Break		
	F 3-27	Spring Break		
9	M 3-30	Workshop / Intro to Satirical Research Paper		Book Journal 4
	W 4-1	Discuss: Satire	"A Modest Proposal" & McSweeney's Article	
	F 4-3	Discuss: Using Textual Sources	Kantz, "Helping Students Use Textual Sources Persuasively" WAW 579-599	Essay 3: Outline / Reflection Letter 2
10	M 4-6	Workshop		
	W 4-8	Discuss: Argument	Greene, "Argument as Conversation" WAW 31-43	
	F 4-10	Discuss: Transferable Skills	Robertson et al, "Notes Toward a Theory of Prior Knowledge" WAW 184-211	Essay 3: Rough Draft
11	M 4-13	Workshop		Book Journal 5

	W 4-15	TBD	TBD	
	F 4-17	Discuss: Intertextuality	Porter, "Intertextuality and the Discourse Community" WAW 542-558	Essay 3: Final Draft
12	M 4-20	Workshop / Intro to Rhetorical Analysis Essay		
	W 4-22	Rhetorical Analysis Continued	Blackboard Handout on Rhetorical Analysis	
	F 4-24	Discuss: Rhetorical Reading Strategies	Haas and Flower, "Rhetorical Reading Strategies and the Construction of Meaning" WAW 559-578	Essay 4: Outline / Reflection Letter 3
13	M 4-27	Workshop		
	W 4-29	Discuss: Rhetorical Analysis Essay	Rhetorical Analysis of Letter From a Birmingham Jail (Blackboard)	Essay 4: Rough Draft
	F 5-1	Discuss: Rhetorical Velocity and Delivery	Ridolfo & Devoss, "Composing for Recomposition" WAW 512-541	
14	M 5-4	Workshop		
	W 5-6	Discuss: Alternative Theories of Rhetoric	TBD	
	F 5-8	Discuss: Revision Strategies	Sommers, "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers" WAW 858-872	Essay 4: Final Draft
15	M 5-11	Presentations		Multimodal Presentation
	W 5-13	Presentations		Multimodal Presentation
	F 5-15	Presentations		Multimodal Presentation / Reflection Letter 4
16	M 5-18	No Class		
	W 5-20	No Class		
	F 5-22	No Class		Portfolio / Reflection Letter 5

Appendix B: Assignment Prompts

B.1 Narrative Essay

For the first assignment, you are to tell a story that touches on some element of your identity. This can be done through either fiction or creative nonfiction. For example, if you have a pet that is important to you, you are free to tell a fictionalized story of your pet's life with your pet as the narrator. You could also tell a story from your life about overcoming adversity and how it defined some element of your character. Or, if you have a dream that you hope to accomplish, write a fictional story about that dream. You are to utilize elements of narrative storytelling to effectively communicate an important part of your identity to the reader, focusing on voice, audience, and purpose. The finished narrative should be 3-5 pages.

Elements of narrative storytelling:

Plot, setting, character, point of view, theme, symbolism, conflict.

When workshopping, try to recognize these elements in each other's narratives. Does the plot include background, conflict, climax, and resolution? How does setting add to the story? Is the setting shown rather than told? Are characters three dimensional or flat? Are they believable? Is point of view consistent? Did they choose the right point of view for this story? Can you define the theme? Did you locate any symbolism within the story? Was the conflict engaging?

Also, remember to locate ways in which the writer established voice, who the audience to their piece might be, and what their purpose in writing this story might have been.

B.2 Open Letter

For this assignment you are to pick a topic / issue that you care about and write an open letter to a public figure who can affect that issue. The objective of this letter is to argue for change. You should consider the impact of voice, audience, purpose, and argument when writing your letter. Letters should be addressed to their recipient and follow all the genre conventions of an open letter. The finished letter should be 3-5 pages.

When critiquing Open Letters, follow this rubric:

Voice:

-What type of voice does the author use for the piece and what tone does their voice set?
Academic? Humorous? Sarcastic? Angry? Casual?

-Is voice consistent throughout?

-How does the tone impact the message?

Audience:

-Is the letter clearly addressed to a specific person or group?

-Does it appeal to a wider audience?

-Does the author ever lose sight of their audience while writing their letter?

-In what ways was the author effective in engaging their audience? How might they better reach their audience?

Purpose:

-What is the author trying to accomplish?

-Does the author ever go on tangents that lose sight of their purpose?

-Does this being an Open Letter hurt or help their purpose? For example, think about Dean Sparks's letter and how making it an Open Letter actually hurt her cause.

-In what ways was the author successful in making their purpose clear? Are there opportunities for improvement?

Argument:

-Does the author establish ethos (authority / credibility)? Is it necessary for them to?

- How does the author use pathos (emotion) and logos (logic) in their letter?
- Does the author's use of pathos / logos help or hurt their argument?
- Does the author ever introduce talking points that are irrelevant to their argument?
- Is the author convincing?
- Is the letter structured in a way that works with the argument? In other words, is there a logical flow to the letter, or does it feel scattered?
- What did the author do well when establishing their argument? Do you see opportunities for improvements?

B.3 Satirical Research Paper

For this paper, you will manipulate data to bring the reader to an absurd conclusion. You are to blend the conventions of a research paper with satire when writing this essay. Essay requires at least 5 sources and should follow proper citation rules. While English papers typically follow MLA format, if your major follows a different format and you would rather cite your work that way (eg: APA, Chicago), you are welcome to do so, but please make it clear to me that you are shifting from MLA. Voice, audience, purpose, argument, and tone should all be considered when writing this essay. The finished paper should be 3-5 pages. A work's cited page should also be included but does not count toward the page total.

Remember that satire is about embracing the absurd. You are not necessarily trying to say something or offer advice on how to fix a thing. The goal is to draw out an idea to its most absurd end, making your point through having the reader recognize the absurd.

Also remember that in this case, you are trying to manipulate the reader into seeing a false absurdity. Past examples include painting Ellen DeGeneres as selfish and evil, “proving” that LeBron James is part of the Illuminati and has plans for world domination, demonstrating that vegans are more cruel to animals than people who eat meat, and showing how birds are actually drones used by the government to spy on people. Embrace your inner conspiracy theorist for this essay.

When workshopping, here is a rubric to consider:

Voice:

-Who is this author speaking as? Is this consistent? What sort of language would or could this author use to speak more effectively through their narrator?

Audience:

-Does the essay maintain an awareness of its intended audience? Does it use the most effective language to connect with the people it is speaking to? For example, if it is meant for a very wide audience, does it use offensive language? If it uses offensive language, does the author seem aware of the audience they are losing? If the author chooses to sacrifice certain parts of a wider audience, do they seem aware of that decision?

Purpose:

-Why is this paper being written? You should be able to answer this question without much difficulty (or, if you want to get tricky and make it difficult to see the purpose, once the purpose is revealed the audience should feel satisfied rather than tricked). Readers should challenge the author to more clearly define their purpose if they have a difficult time seeing it. Also, good satire should have a surface level purpose and something deeper it is trying to poke at.

Example: On its surface, *Birds* aren't really warning the world that birds are actually surveillance drones. Really, it acts as a spoof of conspiracy theories like the flat earth society.

Argument:

-How does the author plead their case? Is there an effective use of ethos, pathos, and logos? Do they use their sources in clever, surprising, or effective ways? Are there glaring or obvious holes in their argument that don't seem like intentional aspects of the satire? (for example, in *Modest Proposal* one could say a glaring hole in the proposal to eat babies is that it is horribly immoral, but the very point of the satire is that it is immoral, as is income inequality, as is poverty, as is starvation) Do you see any missed opportunities to push their satire even further?

Tone:

-Is this satire trying to keep a straight face? Is it meant to be humorous? Angry? Paranoid? Intellectual? This should be married closely with the voice the piece uses, but tone is especially important for a satire. There isn't a right tone, but there is a right tone for what you are writing.

Does the author make effective use of tone? Where does their tone work well and where is there room for improvement?

B.4 Rhetorical Analysis Essay

This essay contains two parts. While I encourage you to connect the two halves of the essay into an organic whole, it is not required.

For the first part, you are to analyze the rhetorical decisions the author chose to make in whichever book you chose to read this semester. Who is the target audience? How did the author establish voice and what impact did it have in the way you read the book? What is the purpose of the book? What is the author's argument and is it convincing? How did the author utilize ethos, pathos, and logos in the text?

Next, choose one rhetorical statement the author is trying to make and put it into conversation with a contemporary issue. For example, if you chose to read What You Have Heard is True, you might use the rhetoric in the book to challenge the idea that immigrant families put their children in danger by bringing them across the border illegally. Does the book make a convincing argument? Do you agree with the author? Have you been persuaded to think differently about this issue? This essay should be a minimum of 5 pages.

Remember that everything exists in a rhetorical ecology. Logos and pathos will often blend in an argument. Feel free to use any of the terms / devices we have discussed throughout the semester: discourse communities, intertextuality, code switching, code meshing, anything relating to audience, author, and purpose, etc. Try to recognize the connections between all of these concepts as they exist within the piece you read, and then apply them to analyzing an argument.

Appendix C: Surveys

C.1 Survey 1

Survey 1

1=strongly disagree, 2=mildly disagree, 3=mildly agree, 4=strongly agree

1. Have you ever been graded on the quality of your writing?

Y N

2. Qualitative grading (an instructor's assessment of the quality of your work) provides an accurate assessment of my work.

1 2 3 4

Comments:

3. Concerns over grades stifle my creativity when it comes to writing.

1 2 3 4

Comments:

4. Concerns over grades add a level of stress to my composition process.

1 2 3 4

Comments:

5. Qualitative grading helps me to better understand the writing assignment.

1 2 3 4

Comments:

6. I write better when there are rules to follow.

1 2 3 4

Comments:

7. I enjoy writing more when there are rules to follow.

1 2 3 4

Comments:

8. I see writing as work when there are rules to follow.

1 2 3 4

Comments:

9. I feel I learn more effectively when I receive a qualitative grade on an assignment.

1 2 3 4

Comments:

10. I am unafraid to take risks in my writing (style, subject matter, etc.) when I know I will be graded based on the quality of my writing.

1 2 3 4

Comments:

11. Prior to this course, have you ever had your writing graded on a participation-based grading system?

(NOTE: This is not referring to a participation grade; for the purpose of this survey participation-based grade means receiving full credit for an assignment just for completing it)

Y N

12. A participation-based grade provides me with an accurate assessment of my work.

1 2 3 4

Comments:

13. Without a set of grading criteria to follow, I feel my creativity was stifled.

1 2 3 4

Comments:

14. Writing without a set of grading criteria to follow added stress to my composition process.

1 2 3 4

Comments:

15. It was easy to understand the writing assignment without a set of grading criteria to follow.

1 2 3 4

Comments:

16. I write better when there are no rules to follow.

1 2 3 4

Comments:

17. I enjoy writing more when there are no rules to follow.

1 2 3 4

Comments:

18. I see writing as work even when there are no rules to follow.

1 2 3 4

Comments:

19. I feel I learn more effectively without having to follow grading criteria.

1 2 3 4

Comments:

20. I am unafraid to take risks in my writing (style, subject matter, etc.) when there are no grading criteria to follow.

1 2 3 4

Comments:

21. Please provide any additional comments you might have on your feelings of a qualitative grading system against a participation-based system in terms of its impact on your ability to learn and engage with composition:

C.2 Survey 2

Survey 2

1=strongly disagree, 2=mildly disagree, 3=mildly agree, 4=strongly agree

1. I feel comfortable taking on a writing project without a rubric to follow.

1 2 3 4

2. A participation-based grade provides me with an accurate assessment of my work.

1 2 3 4

Comments:

3. Without grading criteria to follow, I feel my creativity was stifled.

1 2 3 4

Comments:

4. Writing without grading criteria added stress to my composition process.

1 2 3 4

Comments:

5. It was easy to understand the writing assignment without grading criteria to follow.

1 2 3 4

Comments:

6. I write better when there are no rules to follow.

1 2 3 4

Comments:

7. I enjoy writing more when there are no rules to follow.

1 2 3 4

Comments:

8. I see writing as work even when there are no rules to follow.

1 2 3 4

Comments:

9. I feel I learn more effectively without having to follow grading criteria.

1 2 3 4

Comments:

10. I am unafraid to take risks in my writing (style, subject matter, etc.) when there are no grading criteria to follow.

1 2 3 4

Comments:

11. Please provide any additional comments you might have on your feelings of a structured grading system against a participation-based system in terms of its impact on your ability to learn and engage with composition:

Appendix D: Survey Results

D.1

Below are all the results with commentary from the student surveys. Names have been removed for the sake of confidentiality.

D.1.1

Student 1:

Survey 1

1.Y

2.2

3.3

4.4

5.2

6.3

7.2

8.3

9.2

10.3

11.N

12.3

13.2

14.2

15.3

16.3

17.2

18.3

19.3

20.4

21.NA

Survey 2

1.4

2.2

3.2

4.1

5.4

6.3

7.4

8.4

9.3

10.3

11. I believe students have better writing when they can speak their mind without worrying about guidelines. However, students also need incentives to write well.

Student 2:

Survey 1

1.Y

2.3

3.3

4.4

5.2

6.2

7.3

8.4

9.2

10.3

11.N

12.3

13.2

14.1

15.2

16.4

17.4

18.3

19.2

20.4

21.

Survey 2

1.3

2.4

3.3

4.4

5.2

6.4

7.4

8.3

9.3

10.4

11.NA

Student 3:

Survey 1

1.Y

2.3—For the most part. Many teachers have their own ideas as to what the paper should look like. That doesn't always match your style of writing.

3.2.5—Never written any creative pieces. Only research papers.

4.1

5.2—Helps me understand the expectations from the teacher and how to model my paper to their needs.

6.3—Better in terms of grades.

7.2

8.2

9.2

10.1—If a paper is well written and follows the prompt, students shouldn't be penalized because the teacher may not agree.

11.N

12.2—Maybe? Unless assessment is provided.

13.2

14.1—Less rules less stress

15.3

16.2.5

17.3—Not a big writer to begin with.

18.4

19.3

20. 4—Refer to my other comments. Risks should not be penalized if done / executed correctly.

21.Never done it before so it will be interesting to see the difference and if / how my feelings toward writing change.

Survey 2

1.4

2.3

3.2

4.2

5.3

6.3

7.3

8.3

9.3

10.4

11.NA

Student 4:

Survey 1

1.Y

2.3

3.3

4.4

5.3

6.3—Rules can usually guide me throughout my essay

7.2

8.3

9.NA

10.4—I don't like to take risk trying a new format / when my essay is graded accordingly

11.N

12.3

13.3

14.2—I feel like I would have more freedom with my writing.

15.3

16.2—Having rules usually help me stay on track in my writing.

17.2

18.2

19.3

20.1

21.I believe having a participation based system will improve my learning and would actually enjoy writing.

Survey 2

1.4

2.3

3.1

4.1

5.3

6.3—Rules do help me guide my essay, however, without rules I am able to write more freely

7.3

8.2

9.4

10.1

11. Qualitative grading system has always stressed me out, and it always made me limit my creativity since I might be marked wrong for it.

Student 5:

Survey 1

1.Y

2.3—Based on past experiences, this is true. However it only made sense if the teacher provided feedback about it to explain why it was graded a certain way.

3.3—Some teachers that I had in the past were a bit more biased and only graded higher for certain ideas that they agreed with. Also, I recall choosing topics that were safer for the assignment (based on what my cousin with the same teacher said) (in AP Lit that wasn't the case)

4.4—Definitely! Probably added to why I would procrastinate on essays.

5.3

6.3—With more of a guideline I feel more confident in writing.

7.3—Sometimes... w/ rules I may feel better about writing but depending on the kind of writing sometimes not.

8.4

9.3—Sometimes

10.1

11.Y—For some smaller assignments, yes

12.3

13.3

14.2—I'm stressed either way

15.2

16.2—Depends

17.3—Depends on type of writing

18.4

19.3

20.1

21.Participation-based seems less stressful.

Survey 2

1.3

2.3— I think I enjoy it more because there is less pressure than having to see actual scores other than participation. But also, it's something still new to me so I'm not sure if I would completely say it's accurate. Definitely shows all the work and effort though.

3.2— There's more freedom with no grading standards but I also find myself limiting myself a bit because I'm used to following a certain structure. It could also just be part of my personality as I just tend to follow certain rules anyways.

4.2— I feel that it's quite the opposite, but still a bit stressful at the same time because there aren't any guidelines I should follow (when I'm used to doing so).

5.3— Sorta. As I am used to following qualitative grading standards, it's still a bit new to me to have more freedom to write without them. Sometimes it almost seems too vague of what to write because there are no standards.

6.3— Definitely feel that there is a bit of weight lifted off my shoulders.

7.3— There's less pressure with no rules, but doing something new (writing with no rules) is still not entirely enjoyable as it is just work. I do find it a bit more enjoyable though (the narrative was fun, so far the others are things I'm not used to/it's new so unsure how to feel about it).

8.3— If it's for a grade, it seems to be like work even with no rules.

9.3— Still not completely sure how to answer this as I am still very used to learning with qualitative grading standards and not used to not having them. There is definitely less pressure without the grading standards though!

10.2— Either way I feel afraid to take risks in my writing.

11. I think so far, it's pretty nice to not have to worry about getting a certain score since it's participation-based. As long as you do the work, it's fine. To have this mentality, it's somewhat nice to have for once. I still feel a bit of the pressure because sometimes I find writing scary and tedious, but it's still interesting to experience something new. I am used to a qualitative grading system throughout K-12 (except small classwork or homework assignments perhaps, but scores overall are qualitative) but think it's a bit more enjoyable to learn composition participation-based. With less pressure, it's better for our mental health sake to not have to worry about grades for once. Definitely enjoying the class more than I expected coming in to the class that's for sure!

Student 6:

Survey 1

1.Y

2.3

3.4

4.4

5.3

6.2

7.2

8.3

9.2

10.1

11.N

12.3

13.2

14.2

15.3

16.3

17.3

18.2

19.3

20.4

21.NA

Survey 2

1.4

2.4

3.2

4.2

5.4

6.4

7.4

8.2

9.4

10.4

11.NA

Student 7:

Survey 1

1.Y

2.2

3.3

4.4

5.2

6.3

7.3

8.3

9.2

10.2

11.N

12.3

13.3

14.4

15.2

16.2

17.2

18.3

19.2

20.2

21.I feel like this is hard because I like knowing exactly what I need to do and what to write about, but it is important to be able not to have rules for creativity.

Survey 2

1.3

2.4

3.2

4.2

5.2

6.1

7.2

8.3

9.2

10.3

11. I think this is hard because I like having like a sort of direction and need for someone to edit my paper harshly, but I also like the freedom that a participation grade gives the person. It puts less stress on them to be perfect.

Student 8:

Survey 1

1.Y

2.3—Depending on the task at hand that could change

3.4—Very much so

4.4—Yes indeed

5.2

6.2

7.2

8.3

9.2

10.1—Very afraid to take risks

11.N

12.3

13.2—Without a set of rules I could explore more.

14.1

15.2

16.4—Allows me to explore more ideas without fear

17.4

18.2

19.3

20.4

21.Qualitative = makes me just want to get a good grade and write as bland as possible.

Participation = allows me to go deeper into my writing as I am not afraid of a grade

Survey 2

1.4

2.4—The professor provide great feedback, and because it's participation based I try harder to write a better piece.

3.1—My creativity has greatly increased

4.1—Makes writing a lot less stressful and more of an art form

5.4—Less stress and anxiety

6.4—My creativity is expressed

7.4—Absolutely

8.1—I see it as an art form now

9.4—I put more of myself into my writing

10.4—True

11. Qualitative = Tike a boa constrictor, it squeezes the life out of me.

Participation = Like freeing the chains of hell and allowing me to explore my mind and write for enjoyment and finally see the art in writing.

Student 9:

Survey 1

1.Y

2.3

3.4

4.4

5.3

6.3

7.2—I think that guidelines are helpful, maybe not “rules”

8.3—Depending on how restrictive they are.

9.3—I learn what to improve, however qualitative is heavy on marking down mistakes.

10.4—I’d rather follow closely the rules than take an artistic risk, knowing the “cookie cutter” option will likely give the higher grade.

11.N

12.4—With commentary, yes.

13.2

14.2

15.3

16.3

17.4

18.2

19.4

20.4

21.NA

Survey 2

1.3

2.4

3.4

4.4

5.3

6.3

7.3

8.2

9.3

10.3

11.NA

Student 10:

Survey 1

1.Y

2.3—Doesn't take into account other factors always such as creativity.

3.3

4.3

5.3

6.3—Personally I enjoy having a structure to follow when told to write because I am used to it.

7.3

8.3—I don't write much in my free time so typically I think of it as work.

9.2

10.3—Depends on teacher / how they grade but typically yes.

11.N

12.2—This is hard to answer because I have never had to before.

13.2

14.2

15.3

16.2

17.3—Unsure

18.1

19.3—Makes it more enjoyable.

20.2

21.NA

Survey 2

1.4

2.2

3.1

4.1

5.4

6.2

7.3

8.3

9.2

10.3

11. Knowing that I was not graded made me not write to best of my ability. I felt less pressure which was nice

Student 11:

Survey 1

1.Y

2.3

3.4—I get so focused on following the criteria that I don't wanna take a chance that might risk my grade.

4.4

5.2—All I think about is filling the minimum page requirement and getting a good grade.

6.2

7.2

8.3

9.2

10.1

11.Y

12.3

13.1

14.1

15.3

16.4

17.4

18.2

19.4

20.4

21.Qualitative grading makes it hard to connect with the material and actually enjoy writing.

Survey 2

1.4

2.3—Only if I get good feedback

3.1

4.1

5.3

6.3

7.4

8.2

9.4

10.4

11. Participation based system gives me more confidence in what I am writing since I'm not worried about the grade, I can focus on what I like and what I want to write about. This gives me a chance to not only show my strengths in writing but my weaknesses since I only play with my strengths, I can strengthen my weak ability's and become a better writer. I also have learned to love writing because I understand how to use my voice and now it just feels like I'm having a conversation and not just writing a bunch of words on a paper. Participation based system got rid of my anxiety about writing and with that out of the way I was able to learn more effectively.

Student 12:

Survey 1

1.Y

2.3

3.3

4.4

5.3

6.3—A simple set of rules or at least outline what is expected and not just completely thrown into it.

7.3—Some freedom is enjoyable especially if it's a topic I am interested in.

8.4—If it is for a class and graded then yes.

9.3—I should know what I missed or could have explained better but I'm not sure if it is super effective.

10.2—I did a lot of timed writing essays in class so I was more pressured to write what I was expected to

11.N

12.2—I was left to do what I felt was correct for an assignment, not knowing if I understood the material correctly.

13.2—I have the freedom and not stress about everything I needed to add. More I had options and I got to choose what I wanted.

14.3—I was unaware of what was expected.

15.2

16.2

17.2

18.3

19.2

20.2

21.NA

Survey 2

1.3

2.3

3.2

4.2

5.3

6.2—I think having at least an outline or agenda that needs to be met will at least guide me to what I need to write.

7.3—I think this allows for creativity, yet it can still be difficult if you have too much freedom.

8.3

9.2

10.2

11. I think with participation based system, you are allowed to be more open with your opinions and what your thoughts are on a certain topic. When it comes to qualitative, it seems more objective and there is a correct answer that is being expected. Yet I think it is important to at least set a standard or some form of expectation from students in certain writing assignments or styles of writing that needs to be learned.

Student 13:

Survey 1

1.Y

2.3

3.3

4.2

5.3

6.4

7.3

8.1

9.2

10.2

11.N

12.3—As long as you are trying and completing the assignment, I think it is an accurate assessment

13.2

14.4

15.1

16.2

17.3

18.3

19.1

20.3

21.I feel like it is really subjective to grade someone's writing and I feel participation grading is more fair.

Survey 2

1.4

2.2

3.2

4.4

5.4

6.3

7.4

8.3

9.2

10.4

11. There is a lot less stress but I feel like having some genral guidline like what we have had so far is good.

Student 14:

Survey 1

1.Y

2.3

3.4

4.4

5.3

6.3

7.3

8.3

9.2

10.1

11.Y

12.2

13.2

14.4

15.2

16.2

17.3

18.4

19.3

20.3

21.NA

Survey 2

1.3

2.2

3.2

4.3

5.3

6.3

7.4

8.2

9.4

10.3

11.NA

Student 15:

Survey 1

1.Y

2.4—As I progressed through high school, I feel like the quality of my work was graded harder and harder.

3.3

4.4

5.4

6.2

7.1

8.3

9.4

10.2

11.N

12.1

13.2

14.3

15.2

16.2

17.3

18.3

19.1

20.4

21.I feel like grading writing based on participation isn't a good system to grade because it doesn't critique your work like a qualitative grading system would and make you a better writer.

Survey 2

1.4

2.1

3.2

4.2

5.4

6.2

7.2

8.3

9.2

10.4

11. My answer is the same as the first survey we did. A participation-based grading system doesn't actually grade you based on how well you wrote your essay unlike a qualitative grading system does so I would be able to learn more about writing if it was graded on a qualitative grading system.

Student 16:

Survey 1

1.Y

2.3

3.4

4.4

5.3

6.3

7.2

8.3

9.3

10.1

11.N

12.3—I feel like it would but I have not experienced this before.

13.I've never not received grading criteria

14.""

15.""

16.I'm not sure but I do like being able to follow rules, but when it comes to writing I'm not sure.

17.""

18.3—Writing isn't my favorite thing to do. I'd rather read.

19.2—In general

20.Not sure—Will find out this semester!

21.I have never had a participation-based grading system so it will be very interesting to see this semester

Survey 2

1.3

2.3

3.2—I could worry less about the grade and more about what I wanted to say.

4.2

5.2—I did struggle sometimes but it was more that I did not have an example to follow

6.2—I feel like it is hard because certain rules are so ingrained into our heads.

7.3—I definitely worry less about the outcome and focus more on the process

8.3—Writing is not really my favorite thing, though I do miss free writes at the beginning of class.

9.3

10.3

11.

Student 17:

Survey 1

1.Y

2.3

3.2—Sometimes it doesn't concern my creativity in writing.

4.3

5.3

6.1—The less rules mean more space for creative writing.

7.1

8.3—Some academic papers that have a proper set of rules act as a guidance for me to write better.

9.3

10.3

11.N

12.1

13.1

14.3

15.2

16.4

17.4

18.3

19.3

20.2

21. Qualitative grading should always be constructive, an encouragement to the student's writing weakness or strength, not criticism or judgment.

Survey 2

1.4

2.3—I believe participation grade does provide me a vision of my standing in the class. However, I'm not 100% agree on it because there are other factors of grade that could give me a better assessment.

3.2—I think without qualitative grading, I'm not strapped in rules. I write better when there are less standards, especially in this class.

4.2—Same as above, a standard guide would limit my thinking and creative.

5.4

6.4

7.4

8.3

9.3

10.4

11. I feel like a little bit of each would balance out. On one hand, I agree that qualitative grading limits my ability to learn and write, same as participation system. However, on the other hand, I would not be a 100% object the benefit both bring. I think these grading systems are here to guide us focusing learning better. Hence, having a balance between each would help a lot.

Student 18:

Survey 1

1.Y

2.2

3.4

4.3

5.3

6.2—Rules allow me to write formally but not creatively

7.1

8.4

9.2

10.4

11.N

12.4—Full credit with an explanation on how I can do better.

13.1

14.2

15.2

16.3

17.4

18.1

19.4

20.1

21. Qualitative grading stifles my motivation to write and my creativity. Over the years, teachers have taught me to write a certain limited way that leaves little room for my own unique writing style.

Survey 2

1.4

2.4—It allows me to take feedback without a negative correlation associated with it like “a bad grade.”

3.1

4.1—It took away a lot of stress and allowed me to be more creative.

5.4—Everything was explained well and it is a lot easier to think and be creative when there aren't restrictions.

6.4—Absolutely, since I am no longer scared to take risks in my writing.

7.4—I've never enjoyed writing more than in this English class without the qualitative grading.

8.1—When there are no rules it's fun and I can express my thoughts clearly and precisely how I want to portray them.

9.4

10.1—This has allowed me to take risks I never would have.

11.NA

Student 19:

Survey 1

1.Y

2.3

3.3

4.4

5.3

6.1

7.1

8.3

9.3

10.3

11.N

12.3

13.3

14.2

15.2

16.3

17.4

18.2

19.3

20.4

21.NA

Survey 2

1.3

2.3

3.2

4.1

5.4

6.4

7.4

8.1

9.2

10.4

11.NA

Student 20:

Survey 1

1.Y

2.3

3.3

4.4

5.2

6.2

7.1

8.2

9.2

10.1

11.N

12.3—I think if there are still critiques on the paper it does.

13.1

14.1

15.1

16.4

17.4

18.2

19.4

20.3

21.NA

Survey 2

1.4

2.2

3.2

4.2

5.3

6.3

7.4

8.4

9.4

10.4

11. I think that it is working very well for me and this class, especially since we are a very high participatory class

Student 21:

Survey 1

1.Y

2.4

3.2

4.4

5.2

6.3—It depends on how motivated and confident I am in my writing skills.

7.2

8.4

9.3—Not necessarily

10.2

11.Y

12.2—It depends on the feedback I receive

13.3

14.3—I still want it to be “good”

15.3—There were clear guidelines. It was given a grade for completion but no edits or feedback was given.

16.3—I’m not sure I’ve never done it before

17.3—Same as above

18.2—Less stressful or pressure for good grades

19.2

20. 3—I wouldn’t know what risks to take.

21. Qualitative grading is much “scarier” but participation based could be ineffectual if no feedback is given to the writer. The overall idea is very ideal. It would allow writers the opportunity to be more open and personally expressive with their writing.

Survey 2

1.3

2.1

3.1 / 3 (earlier survey)

4.2 / 3 ""

5.2 / 1

6.2

7.3 / 2

8.3 / 4

9.2

10.2

11. None / I think that I have learned that I do like having qualitative grading. As much as I wish I liked a participation-based system for grading, I think having a qualitative grading system allows me to understand the assignment as well as receive feedback on my writing skills. (interesting that this comment was removed)

Student 22:

Survey 1

1.Y

2.3

3.3

4.3—If I feel really motivated to complete it, grades aren't that much of a concern.

5.3—Rough drafts help me the most.

6.4—Need some kind of structure of what is expected in the paper.

7.3

8.4

9.4—I am more focused on the content & pretty much write what I think.

10.3

11.N

12.3

13.2

14.3

15.2—Would like to know what is expected but not to the point where all I focus is the rubric.

16.2—I find it a little bit more stressful since I don't know the page layout, how many pages to write.

17.3

18.4

19.3

20.3

21.Makes it really easy to write an essay the night before, but I like how we are required to go to the writing center.

Survey 2

1.4

2.3—For #2, I think being graded like that doesn't fully provide accurate representation of my ability to write because English still does include grammar + stuff, which I continue to struggle on.

3.3—I don't think creativity struggled, but more of what to write about. With structure it might encourage me to think of something I might not have without that instruction.

4.2

5.2—Wouldn't say it was easy, but a little bit harder when I don't know what you expect out of a paper.

6.2—I like structure, so a few rules to follow, but not enough to restrict me

7.2

8.4—Unless I choose to do it on my own, I find it as work.

9.4

10.4

11.