

Transitioning to UW

A Writing Guide Presentation

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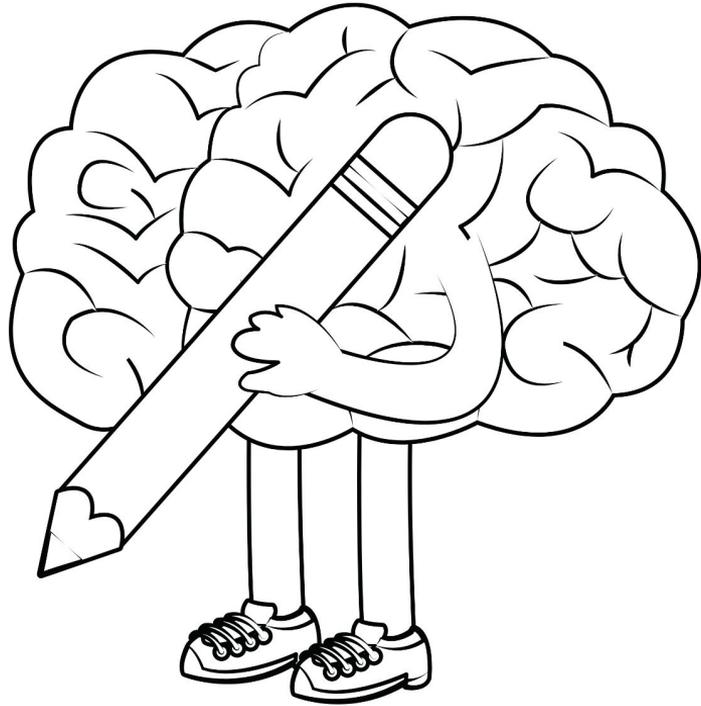


Goal of this workshop:

What you
already know
how to do



What you're
now being
asked to do



What's on the menu?

1. **Understanding UW & its goals**
2. **How to Speak UW: a glossary of terms and how to use them**
3. **How to apply these to your writing**

Think about the last educational context you were in before UW. In that context, what are some of the "rules" of essay writing you were expected to follow?

Discussion

Understanding UW & Its Goals

How you're being asked to shift your approach to writing



Philosophy of University Writing

WRITING = THINKING

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Three shifts you're being asked to make:

1. From thesis-driven essays to **inquiry-driven** essays
2. From predetermined structure to **logic-driven** structure
3. From language-focused evaluation to **idea-focused** evaluation

Shift #1: From **thesis-driven** essays to **inquiry-driven** essays

- from prompts to interpretive problems
 - You're essentially generating your *own* prompt questions
- from knowledge demonstration to knowledge creation
 - It's not about showing you know something, but about bringing readers to a new understanding
- from critique to curiosity
 - Rather than trying to prove someone right or wrong, we're seeking to advance the conversation as a whole

Shift #2: From **predetermined** structure to **logic-driven** structure

- BEFORE: 5-paragraph essay and other formulas
 - Useful for simple arguments
 - “How can I fit my argument into a given structure?”
- NOW: freedom to use the structure that makes the most logical sense
 - Useful for complex arguments (the kind you’re making in UW!)
 - “In what order do my readers need the information in order to follow the logic of my argument?”

Shift #3: from **language-focused** evaluation to **idea-focused** evaluation

- Clear idea transmission is more important than “flawless” grammar & mechanics
- Goal is complex ideas communicated through simple (clear) language

How to Speak UW

A glossary of key terms & writing moves – and how to use them



AUTHOR'S PROJECT

Definition: what is the author trying to accomplish, and how are they doing it?

Components of a project:

- aims (what the author tries to do)
- methods (how they do it)
- materials (what they use)
- motive (why they do it)

Why this matters:

- Starting point for analysis/argument (need to know *what* you're analyzing first!)
- Allows you to distinguish between what the *author* is doing & *your* analysis/argument
- It's how we enter any academic conversation

AUTHOR'S PROJECT

Definition: what is the author trying to accomplish, and how are they doing it?

Sample description for author's project:

"In TITLE, AUTHOR [does/strives to/claims/etc.] AUTHOR'S AIM by AUTHOR'S METHODS/MATERIALS so that AUTHOR'S MOTIVE."

CLOSE READING

Definition: reading a text not just to understand WHAT an author said, but reading a text to make **observations** about HOW an author has expressed their ideas

Things you might observe through close reading:

- word choice
- structural choices
- patterns (& pattern breaks)
- tonal shifts
- formatting choices
- unexpected moves

Why this matters:

- Observations from close reading feed directly into formulating Interpretive Problems
- Analyzing text using close reading can serve as *evidence* for your Claims
- The ability to observe closely and notice details is useful across academic disciplines

INTERPRETIVE PROBLEM

aka Problem, aka IP, aka
Tension, aka Scholarly
Problem, aka Driving
Question, aka “that’s
weird”

Definition: a tension or
dissonance that, when
resolved, advances our
understanding of
something (in P1, a text)

To find an IP, locate in your observations at least two things in tension with one another:

- element & whole
- element & element
- pattern & pattern break
- function & form
- presence & absence
- expectation & observation
- audience & text
- convention & observation
- context & text

Why this matters:

- IPs form the basis for our claims
- The ability to generate good questions is a crucial skill in any academic field! (think scientific method)

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Sample questions that articulate IPs:

- “If OBSERVATION #1, then why does the author OBSERVATION #2?”
- “How can we reconcile OBSERVATION #1 with OBSERVATION #2?”
- “Given that the text OBSERVATION #1, how can we make sense of the fact that it also OBSERVATION #2?”

CLAIM

aka argument, aka thesis, aka hypothesis

Definition: an idea that someone else could reasonably disagree with

In UW (and other fields) claims arise from the questions we ask (aka our IPs)

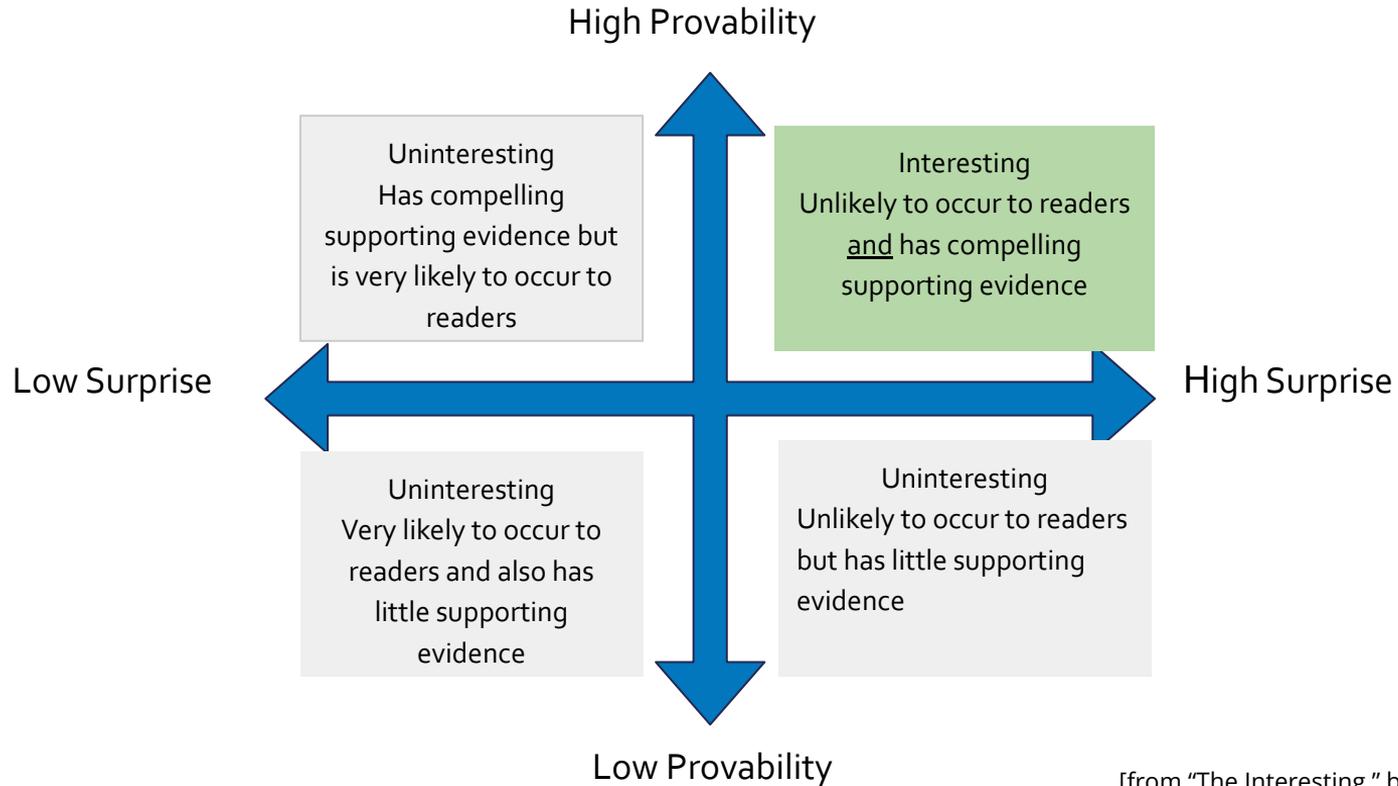
To brainstorm claims, ask: How can I explain or resolve the IP? What are the consequences of the IP? For example:

- Does the IP force us to rethink the author's underlying beliefs?
- Does the IP make us realize something new about the author's text or argument?
- Does the IP change my understanding of the author's actual project or intended audience?

Why this matters:

- Claims allow us to bring something new into the conversation
- Every academic field requires us to make arguments

Is your claim interesting?



[from "The Interesting," by Mikhail Epstein, as cited/illustrated in *How Scholars Write*, by Aaron Ritzenberg & Sue Mendelsohn, Oxford University Press, 2020]

Task: Choose a quadrant in Figure 1 in which to place each of the following claims about Albert M. Bender's poster "Jobs for Girls & Women." Answers appear on page 60.

- a. The woman exudes happiness.
- b. With his poster, Bender intended to create an image that would launch a new vision of domesticity for working class white women.
- c. The woman on the poster is showing that her favorite part of domestic service is dishwashing.
- d. The poster's Depression-era depiction of a beaming housekeeper offers women who were struggling to find employment a vision of domestic service as honorable—and even joyful—work that would not diminish their social status.



CLAIM

aka argument, aka thesis, aka hypothesis

Definition: an idea that someone else could reasonably disagree with

In P1, claims articulate your new understanding of the text:

- “At first it seems OLD UNDERSTANDING but actually NEW UNDERSTANDING.”
- “Although it appears that OBSERVATION #1 conflicts with OBSERVATION #2, in fact NEW UNDERSTANDING.”
- “While the text seems to assert that AUTHOR’S CLAIM, the choice to AUTHOR’S FORMAL MOVES leads us to see that NEW UNDERSTANDING.”
- “Given the presence of OBSERVATION #1, the surprising absence of OBSERVATION #2 suggests that we must rethink the text in this way: NEW UNDERSTANDING.”

This **NEW UNDERSTANDING** is your claim!

YOUR PROJECT

Now we're talking about
YOUR project (as opposed
to an author's project)

Sample description for your project:

"I am writing about TEXT to come to a better understanding about PROBLEM so that my audience will understand CLAIM."

Your Writing Process

How to apply this to your own writing at UW and beyond!



Writing Process for Analyzing a Text

5. Resolving the INTERPRETIVE PROBLEM will bring the reader to a new understanding (which is your CLAIM)

4. Using CLOSE READING to return to the text in search of a resolution to the INTERPRETIVE PROBLEM

3. Finding two or more observations that stand in tension to articulate an INTERPRETIVE PROBLEM

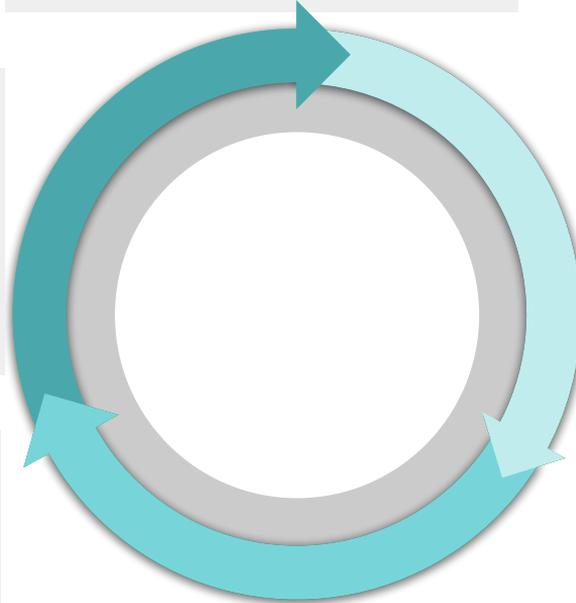
6. Your CLAIM allows you to articulate YOUR PROJECT

1. Reading a text to understand the AUTHOR'S PROJECT

2. CLOSE READING the text to make observations about the author's writing choices



Start Here



One more shift: from writing in isolation to writing in community

- Talk to your professors
- Visit the writing center
- Use each other as readers



What's one thing you're taking away
from this workshop to apply to your
next UW essay?



Questions?

- Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams, *The Craft of Research*. University of Chicago Press. 2003.
- Harris, Joseph. "Coming to Terms," *Rewriting: How to Do Things with Text*. Utah State UP, 2006.
- Jacobs, Valerie Seiling. "Workshop: Developing Claims" presentation. Columbia University Writing Center, 2021
- Mendelsohn, Sue. "9 ways to an interpretive problem" handout. Columbia University Undergraduate Writing Program.
- Ritzenberg, Aaron and Sue Mendelsohn. *How Scholars Write*. Oxford University Press, 2020.