What Is “College-Level” Writing? Volume 2: Assignments, Readings, and Student Writing Samples

In the five years since volume 1 of What Is “College-Level” Writing? appeared, its title question has remained on the lips and keyboards of many in our profession. This second volume continues the discussion with focus on “specific and pragmatic questions about first-year college writing” (xii). It includes contributions from high school teachers, two- and four-year college writing faculty, writing center tutors and directors, and students.

The first section enacts the cross-sector high school/college dialogue that compositionists often advocate, offering an alternative to shouting matches of “You didn’t prepare them!” versus “College writing expectations are unclear!” A representative chapter from the section is a discussion by high school and college writing teachers who have responded to and graded the same essay about the challenges faculty face when students transition from standardized, test-focused writing practice in high school to a more nuanced, varied approach in college. Even acknowledging some difficulties—differing purposes for writing, differing audiences—the teachers remind us that high school and college faculty are partners.

The second section, “The Importance of Writing Assignments,” begins with Edward M. White’s recent classic “My Five-Paragraph-Theme Theme,” which satirizes and encourages us to move beyond formulaic writing instruction. Howard Tinberg’s and Muriel Harris’s chapters provide wonderfully thorough advice about how students (mis)read assignments and how teachers can write effective assignments that guide students beyond prefabricated essay formats.

Sections three and four pay positive attention to less-often-heard basic writing, community college, and student perspectives. Cheryl Hogue Smith, a community college faculty member, valorizes often-criticized underprepared students and their teachers, praising basic writing students as “some of the hardest-working students on any college campus” (211). The three student writers agree that argument-driven
critical thinking defined their college writing and offer sometimes surprising advice—one advocates assignments without drafts and feedback—for faculty to help students in that direction.

In the final section, White and Kathleen Blake Yancey synthesize the collection. White heads off one potential criticism, noting that the collection deliberately avoids providing one stable definition of “college-level writing,” but he does highlight students owning their ideas and expressing them nonformulary as important features of college writing. Yancey’s closing essay nicely bookends the opening section, reminding us that high school and college faculty—despite apparent differences in the types of writing we teach—are partners in the larger goal of improving students’ critical reading, writing, and thinking and are responsible to continue this discussion and effort together.

The collection’s major strength is providing detailed resources. Observations about student writings are supported with full reproductions of those writings; most chapters contain at least one student essay. The co-grading chapter even includes the grading sheets and instructor notes. Advice about writing assignments includes the texts of assignments and directions. This feature distinguishes this book from many pedagogy texts that lean toward theory and provide few or no practical models.

Another strength is generosity of spirit: among specific contributors to the collection, between college and high school writing teachers, toward and from students. Finger-pointing and blaming are avoided; respect for colleagues at all levels and support for students are emphasized. An end-page directs readers to more essays on the NCTE website, where readers are invited to a discussion board. In these ways, the book builds and models community among teachers.

The collection’s weakness is reluctance to follow problematic ideas to their conclusions, placing perhaps too much responsibility on instructors and institutions that might best be ascribed to students and their academic behaviors. Muriel Harris admits that “some students falter with college-level writing because they can’t read the assignments critically” (183), and Patrick Sullivan adds that today’s students often have inadequate reading skills and study habits (246). Hogue Smith does advocate “set[ting] and keep[ing] the bar high” (227). I would have preferred that her chapter—as well as others—had focused entirely in this way rather than including such qualifiers as “we can often tell what basic writers are trying to say” (219), which is true but ultimately irrelevant to the expectations students will face for their writing in subsequent academic and professional settings. These and similar concerns throughout are sometimes overshadowed by a focus on faculty adjusting to these issues rather than on a stronger insistence on student responsibility to meet professors’ and institutions’ standards. Sustained looks at these concerns might appear in a future volume of What Is “College-Level” Writing?

Volume 2 of What Is “College-Level” Writing? will find a well-deserved place on many composition studies bookshelves and syllabi. Graduate students and early-career faculty will benefit from the practical advice and assignment models. More experienced
faculty, especially those who have spent many years in one institution or sector of education, will appreciate the variety of perspectives. The collection’s boundary-crossing dialogue will also assist faculty moving or considering moving from one sector to another. What Is “College-Level” Writing? Volume 2 is a solid, helpful second entry in this series. It will be thoroughly read and appreciated by many who ponder and are asked to answer—often with high stakes—the title’s question.

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A Second Review of What Is “College-Level” Writing? Volume 2

TETYC readers in high schools and colleges/universities will find particular interest in the second volume of What Is “College-Level” Writing? (WICLW2) because editors Patrick Sullivan, Howard Tinberg, and Sheridan Blau “dig” (carefully through) both high school and college sites—all the while showing the cultural value of each.

Most numerous in WICLW2 are artifacts from cultural observers at high schools and colleges. Readers will find rewards in studying the constraints on how writing is taught in the high school because of state and standardized testing (Tom Thompson and Andrea Gallagher); revelations about Advanced Placement, including required background reading on the program by David A. Jolliffe; and what the research on reading (Sullivan) and basic writing (Cheryl Hogue Smith) brings to the table. There are also essays available at NCTE’s companion website (http://www.ncte.org/books/collegelevel2), the most desirable of which invokes the Walter J. Ong/Lisa Ede/Andrea Lunsford debate on audience, “When Writers Imagine Readers” by Tom Liam Lynch and Kerry McKibbin. Collectively, the many WICLW2 articles represent valuable insiders’ insights about the diverse locations where students prepare to write successfully before, in, and beyond first-year composition.

One place, however, still requires representation: dual-credit high school and college teachers, many of whom move within and across both cultural boundaries. In this second volume of college-level writing inquiry, dual-credit insights remain oddly along the margins. This leaves readers to wonder how dual-credit experts might contribute to what Edward M. White calls central, “certain essences . . . , [the] characteristics [that] clearly must be present in writing for us to call it college level” (296). Their voices are silent in the collection. The only additional gap, one that Abby Montgomery also cites, remains that of “best practices” following from the collection’s title. It is true that many assignments and class activities appear in the individual articles that make up the book. However, readers practicing in the classroom may expect more. In other words, I champion the idea of including practical materials, yet I finished this anthology with a sense of desire; of wanting a grasp of “exemplar” assignments, activities, and ideas that would translate well to both high school and college settings. This is not a flaw in the collection but an area to visit again, perhaps in a final volume.

Perhaps the most utilitarian contributions of WICLW2 to the daily
work of writing teachers are those that address assignment authorship and execution. First on the list is the model assignment sequence offered by Peter Kittle and Rochelle Ramay using the popular “My Turn” column published in Newsweek. Of merit are their connections to professional and academic genres, and their summary of essential assignment guides represents what we all (might or should) share as teachers of writing, whether in high school or college (115–16). Along with Kittle and Ramay’s work, the aforementioned Lynch and McKibbin document makes a welcome companion because it advocates literacy by inviting students to publish their work within and beyond the boundaries of classrooms. This reality is increasingly made possible with the help of mobile composing devices (personal digital hand-helds, computer “pads,” and WiFi networks), content management systems (Blackboard, Sakai, Moodle, etc.), and networked classrooms (laptop programs, computer-SMART classrooms, online classes, etc.). And there is value in the pedagogical models for instructor interaction narrated by Sherian Blau and the assignment coherence championed by Howard Tinberg. Blau presents an entertaining first-person, participant-observer account of his workshop model, while Tinberg offers a model assignment from a transfer discipline that includes ideal support documents and describes much-desired teacher interactions.

Finally, Kathleen Blake Yancey’s response is a welcome ending to WICLW2 because it invokes how she designed one new feature in College Composition and Communication (http://www.ncte.org/cccc/ccc/posterpages). First, she collected a group of colleagues in various fields and asked them to generate key concepts or terms of which readers should have a shared understanding. The next step was to negotiate the terms and generate a final list, from which editor Yancey edited a Poster Page for each term in subsequent journal issues. Yancey’s response suggests how we might work this way as high school and first-year composition teachers by identifying cultural “points of agreement” (301). Her response offers a methodology with which to actualize the goal of WICLW2’s dig: in fact, we do agree on a great deal, and we can make use of our unique cultures and work strategically for a shared purpose.

WICLW2 provides a great foundation, and we might begin with those that Yancey and White summarize from the collection (“genre,” “rhetoric,” and “revision”) along with additional choices such as “publication” and “accreditation.” We need to know what these “points” (and others of importance to the field) mean and the diverse realities they represent to those unified by the common, cultural function of teaching college-level writing.

Kip Strasma
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Abigail Montgomery’s Response to Kip Strasma’s Review

Kip Strasma’s review of volume 2 of What Is “College-Level” Writing? impressively combines a detailed précis of the book’s contents with discussion of how those contents connect to various audiences and broader projects within the study and teaching of first-year compo-
sition. He offers a wealth of information that will assist those considering adding the book to their personal or institutional libraries and also guide them in subsequent application of the book to their professional growth in and out of the classroom.

The review highlights this book’s potential usefulness for faculty development at every level from pedagogy courses for graduate teaching assistants to on-campus seminars for faculty with various levels of experience. *What Is “College-Level” Writing?* models a multilevel, multiperspective conversation among teachers; it also serves as the possible centerpiece for face-to-face versions of those conversations in our own institutions.

Strasma also extends in very practical terms the pedagogical possibilities suggested in *What Is “College-Level” Writing?* He highlights the collection’s inclusion of writing assignments based on varied academic and professional genres and assignments intended for out-of-class, multimedia publication, noting that such assignments are both more possible and more relevant than ever before due to the increased availability of Internet-based coursework systems, online publishing platforms, and multimedia devices. I would have liked to see the review focus also on more traditional academic writing considerations or express some hesitation about problems that may arise when instructors trade, for example, one of a course’s traditional essays for a class blog.

A third element this review adds to the discussion around the teaching of first-year writing is consideration of another constituency group whose voice should be added to the ongoing discussion. Strasma points out that while this book includes chapters from high school writing teachers, two-year and four-year college writing teachers, basic and advanced writing teachers, writing tutors, and students, it does not feature a specific chapter by dual-enrollment or dual-credit teachers. He further notes that such teachers—including college faculty going into high school classrooms, high school faculty teaching specialized high school sections, college faculty with some high school students in their standard classrooms, and other variations—are people likely to be interested in and able to speak to questions of just what exactly college-level writing is, especially in circumstances where “writing done at a college” definitions would be insufficient.

My own review praises the collection’s intentionally positive dialogue across different sectors of secondary and postsecondary education, and Strasma likewise appreciates this collection’s reminder that all of us who teach college writing “agree on a great deal, and we can . . . work strategically for a shared purpose” (p. 410). Currently, colleges, universities, and high schools all face the dual stresses of budget pressure and ever-increasing accountability requirements. Writing teachers face internal versions of that pressure from colleagues in other departments who need students to transfer sophisticated academic reading and writing skills into their courses. It is perhaps more important than ever for writing teachers to articulate for ourselves—and to each other—what we do, how we do it, and why. Volume 2 of *What Is College-Level Writing?* and
this “Cross Talk” review of the book aim to further just such a productive conversation.

Kip Strasma’s Response to Abigail Montgomery’s Review

Reading Abby Montgomery’s review of the second volume of What Is “College-Level” Writing?, I see that we both picked up on the shared enthusiasm that high school and college teachers have for unifying their efforts in a singular purpose. From the very outset, she highlights the “lack of finger-pointing” in the first section of the book; and later, Abby talks of “generosity of spirit” and “boundary-crossing dialogue” that emanate from the pages and efforts of the collection. Beyond the specific research efforts put forward by authors, some of which remain incomplete or underrepresented as noted in both of our reviews, the overarching “spirit” (I like this word) or “points of agreement” (what I referenced in my review) come through as a central consideration.

While I’d like Cross Talk author and editor contributors to comment on the book’s “gaps” that we’ve identified, more important are the editor’s thoughts on the “spirit of agreement,” if I can synthesize what Abby and I have articulated. Where might we extend this in TETYC and at professional conferences? How? And, more importantly, upon what might we agree in spirit and actuality? Beyond those areas Abby and I have identified (portfolio, process, revision, etc.), where should we focus as two collectives in future dialogue?

It is unfair to preview the remaining Poster Pages that CCC editor Kathi Yancey plans to include (as I and other colleagues have been actively brainstorming and selecting as I complete this Cross Talk), but it is fair to suggest a parallel process that might benefit all of us. What if we gather a group of representative professionals from both high school and two-year college ranks, generate and select a group of terminology that ought to represent our “spirit of agreement,” and then dialogue about them in the pages of this journal? Such an exchange might begin with professionals from key fields (or individuals experienced in both) and commence with an exchange about how the selected terms configure in high school and two-year colleges.

Beyond the obvious benefits of the initial exchange, the public list of selected terms, and a public record of definitions surrounding them, it seems evident that we could share key understandings that often escape us in our daily professional lives—the spaces that sometimes represent gulfs or fractures. Perhaps we could begin with terms that authors have identified in the collection or this Cross Talk. Among these, I’d establish public writing, college writing, revision, testing, and peer review. What else could we add?

What else should we refine?

Howard Tinberg Replies

On behalf of my coeditors, Patrick Sullivan and Sheridan Blau, I’d like to thank Kip Strasma and Abigail Montgomery for their astute and sympathetic consideration of our collection. As both reviewers have pointed out, too often the “dialogue” between secondary and college faculty devolves to finger-pointing and the blame-game.
As editors, what struck us from the start was the respect that each contributor showed toward the others, regardless of institutional context. Even more strikingly, as Montgomery observes, the contributors expressed a “generosity of spirit” in a free exchange of ideas about this essential question. Readers of this journal know that there is nothing like sitting around a table to discuss student writing to focus teachers’ attention and energies. But, as several of the essays in the collection exemplify, the most productive shared readings are those that start from the assumption that each has something significant to contribute to the conversation and that much is to be gained from exposure to diverse and reasoned points of view.

Clearly, I am a beneficiary of such an exchange right here and now, drawing from the thoughtful comments of the reviewers. For example, Strasma’s point that dual-credit writers (high school students taking college-level courses) and their teachers have much to contribute to this conversation seems right on the mark and quite interesting. Strasma is following up on the observation put forward by Ed White near the end of the collection, “It is clear that the concept of ‘college-level writing’ is not solely a matter of location” (295), and perhaps drawing on the recently published collection on dual-credit writers edited by Kristine Hansen and Christine R. Farris. High school teachers who find themselves preparing to teach a college-level course—typically, first-year composition—to high school students go where the rubber meets the road: they must actively and quite pragmatically search out the answer to our question. And when college instructors find themselves teaching high school students, must not those instructors be clear as to the objectives of their own course and be fully aware of expectations and practices brought by these high school students? Imagine the wealth of knowledge and wisdom that these students and teachers bring to the question as to what constitutes college-level writing.

Surely, Abigail Montgomery has it right when she observes, “It is perhaps more important than ever for writing teachers to articulate for ourselves—and to each other—what we do, how we do it, and why.” In this era of the Common Core Standards and Race to the Top, intense pressure has been placed on high school and college instructors alike to demonstrate what students are learning in their courses. Our collection works from the assumption that the best way to make such a demonstration is to point to assignments and written student response. Moreover, if students fail to achieve success, we assume that designing better assignments or reading student writing with a sharper eye can yield better results. But here I’m reminded also of Montgomery’s caveat: students have a responsibility to step up to the challenge posed by college-level demands while instructors have a responsibility to ensure that expectations remain rigorous. Is it disciplinary heresy, I wonder, to think that the best assignments might not lead to student success or that the most perceptive reading of student writing may still yield a failed paper?

Both reviewers wisely note that efforts to address the question of “What is ‘college-level’ writing?” must continue at both the high school and college
levels. While we editors do not perhaps make this point consistently enough, it is worth asserting now that community college faculty have an important mediating role to play in sorting out the varied expectations of high school and faculty instruction. Kip Strasma’s suggestion that the pages of TETYC might serve as a suitable space for such a conversation seems particularly apt to me. But we community college faculty also need to be vigilant that everyone take up his or her share of the burden, including research universities. Just as the teaching of writing ought not to be relegated to one segment of the high school and university spectrum, so a consideration of what makes for “college-level” writing needs to engage the full attention of all.

**Work Cited**


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**2013 Call for Promising Researcher Award**

Established in 1970 and given by the NCTE Standing Committee on Research, the Promising Researcher Award Competition is open to individuals who have completed dissertations, theses, or initial, independent studies after the dissertations between December 1, 2010, and January 31, 2013. Studies entered into competition should be related to the teaching of English or the language arts, e.g., language development, literature, composition, teacher education/professional development, linguistics, etc., and should have employed a recognized research approach, e.g., historical, ethnographic, interpretive, experimental, etc. In recognition of the fact that the field has changed in recent years, the Committee on Research invites entries from a variety of scholarly perspectives.

Candidates must submit a manuscript based on their research. Manuscripts should be written in format, style, and length appropriate for submission to a research journal such as Research in the Teaching of English, College Composition and Communication, Curriculum Inquiry, Teaching and Teacher Education, or Anthropology and Education. Normal manuscripts range from 25–50 double-spaced, typewritten pages.

Manuscripts should be sent to: Felisa Mann (fmann@ncte.org); subject line should read: Promising Researcher Award 2013. Manuscripts must be received on or before March 1, 2013. For more information, see www.ncte.org/second/awards/pra.

In the essay “Contesting the Territoriality of ‘Freshman English’: The Political Ecology of Dual Enrollment,” Miles McCrimmon observes that “77 percent of dual-enrolled students [are] receiving two-year college credit” (208), illustrating the pressing need for disciplinary conversations about these courses for two-year colleges. Dual enrollment/concurrent enrollment (CE) courses—those courses taught in a high school setting, often by high school teachers, for college credit—continue to grow. As Joseph Jones notes in this collection, 25 percent of graduating seniors took at least one AP test in 2006. Clearly, the time could not be riper for Kristine Hansen and Christine R. Farris’s collection of essays, College Credit for Writing in High School: The “Taking Care of” Business, which explores theoretical and practical dimensions of “taking care of” the first-year college writing requirement during high school. The writers examine this issue from myriad vantage points: WPAs, high school teachers and principals, professionals deeply embedded in the “business” of Advanced Placement testing, two- and four-year college faculty, and academic outreach coordinators. Diverse voices trace broad questions, such as “What is the purpose of college composition?” and “What is the best method for fulfilling that purpose?”

Kristine Hansen’s trenchant opening chapter masterfully uses the language of the marketplace to evaluate the “brands” of first-year writing—Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), concurrent enrollment (CE), and first-year composition (FYC) in the college setting. Hansen contextualizes her evaluation within Labaree’s theories about the purpose of education, reviewing what each brand offers students and institutions; Hansen’s use of the language of currency emphasizes the modern student’s—and institution’s—tendency to talk about college credit instead of college learning.

Two sections follow: “Advanced Placement: Issues and Answers” and “Concurrent Enrollment: Programs and Policies.” Each provides diverse perspectives: a historical overview of the development of AP along with a cur-
rent “taking stock” of the state of AP in the United States (with some attention paid to IB, at least in the introduction), Joseph Jones’s historical review of the evolution of AP, and a personal reflection by Steve Thalheimer recalling his own past as an AP high school student and his present role as a concurrent-enrollment/dual-enrollment (CE/DE) teacher, for example. Colleen Whitley and Deirdre Murray Paulsen use student voices to argue for the inexact parallels between AP and college composition courses to prepare students for the kinds of thinking, reading, and writing they can expect at the college level. Kathleen M. Puhr provides a historical tracking of how AP has changed over time—and draws upon recent conversations between AP policymakers and the Council of Writing Program Administrators to build a case for the “exchangeability” of AP and FYC credit, while acknowledging some irreconcilable differences in what AP can test for.

The second section focuses on CE/DE courses, primarily those taught by high school teachers credentialed by college English departments to teach their curricula in the high school setting to high school students. Joanna Castner Post, Vicki Beard Simmons, and Stephanie Vanderslice discuss the establishment of institutional infrastructure for their CE program and playing “catch-up” at putting in place some of the best practices in CE program development and assessment. Complementing this essay is Patricia A. Moody and Margaret D. Bonesteel’s chapter, which posits the Syracuse Project Advance as a model program—in essence fulfilling the assessment model that Chris M. Anson has brilliantly contributed in “Absentee Landlords or Owner-Tenants? Formulating Standards for Dual-Credit Composition Programs,” which aims to establish “assessment-based standards for dual-credit composition.” He offers a preliminary rubric describing six features of CE/DE that programs should attend to—pedagogical integrity, programmatic integrity, student needs, faculty development, economic fairness, and fairness in labor practices. More theoretical is Miles McCrimmon’s contribution arguing for dual enrollment as a kind of “hybrid space” with unexplored pedagogical and learning possibilities for students, teachers, and institutions.

The book is less groundbreaking than it is necessary—as Post, Simmons, and Vanderslice’s chapter illustrates, many universities are struggling to catch up with CE/DE programs that have emerged on their campuses, perhaps not from a department but from an administrative or outreach office without the careful curricular oversight of the faculty. As a result, Hansen and Farris offer an important contribution to our developing national sense of how CE/DE is already transforming the educational landscape at both the secondary and postsecondary levels.

For two-year college faculty who are administering, teaching in, or considering CE at their institution, the collection offers a wealth of resources on the challenges and benefits of developing such programs and what it can offer students, particularly those in rural areas (see the chapter by Randall McClure et al.). Anson’s essay in particular provides a framework departments can use to assess the effectiveness of CE/DE programs—or evaluate how they
want to set up a program that meets standards in pedagogy, faculty development, student learning, and economic/labor fairness. Though this is a book that is not specifically a practical discussion of teaching, it would be of value to any high school or college faculty member or administrator who is interested in the contexts, arguments, advantages and disadvantages of earning credit for college writing in high school.

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Writing about Writing: A College Reader
by Elizabeth Wardle and Doug Downs.
New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2011.
747 pp.

Writing about Writing is a first-of-its-kind textbook that offers a guided course of study for a composition course or sequence of courses with a focus on, as the title suggests, writing about writing. Writing about writing is a current and growing focus in composition studies, an approach to the teaching of writing based on the claim that students learn to write best when they read and write about the field of writing studies, rather than some other content area, such as popular culture or race and ethnicity. Drawing upon the arguments of knowledge-transfer theorists David Perkins and Gabriel Salomon, Elizabeth Wardle and Doug Downs have evolved an approach to teaching writing that, they claim, offers the best chance at students effecting the kind of metacognitive awareness of their own writing habits and skills that will enhance their abilities to transfer their knowledge to new situations. As such, Writing about Writing breaks new ground by providing writing instructors everywhere the support needed to create a new composition curriculum based on this theoretically underpinned approach.

Writing About Writing is a large text, over seven hundred pages, broken into four large chapters and an introduction section. The chapters are organized around questions addressing different aspects of the field of research on writing: How do readers read and writers write? How do you write? How have you become the reader and writer you are today? How do communities shape writing? The chapters are also titled by content: texts/constructs, writing processes, literacies, and discourses. Each chapter presents articles both scholarly and popular, “classic” to current—such as Sondra Perl’s “The Composing Processes of Unskilled College Writers,” Stephen King’s “What Writing Is”—as well as student writing in progress, detailed assignment options, and suggested additional readings and resources. Moreover, both Wardle and Downs maintain an active blog linked from the text’s website.

For me, the strengths of this new text are two. First, it brings all of these key articles and texts about writing together in one place. We have James Paul Gee, Joseph Harris, and Shirley Brice Heath, along with Anne Lamott and Susan Sontag. Plus, these are organized in a very thoughtful way, each building on the earlier texts to facilitate...
a student’s greater understanding of not
only the world of research and writing
on writing but also their own reading
and writing histories and practices.
Second, the apparatus that Wardle and
Downs have developed is very impres-
sive, thorough, and wholly usable. In
fact, I’ve found myself revising my writ-
ing assignments based on their models.
In addition to the assignments are very
useful introductions to the text and
to each chapter, as well as substantial
material (more than fifty pages) in the
instructor’s edition. As a whole, the text
manages to present the approach of
“writing about writing” in a way that
can work for faculty and for students,
while simultaneously instantiating the
claim that “writing about writing” is the
most theoretically supportable approach
to teaching composition.
However, I can see that I have
probably gone too far for some. Critics
can note that the research on knowl-
dge transfer is far from incontrovertible
and thus perhaps cannot warrant an
entire overhaul to current approaches
to teaching composition—certainly
Writing about Writing can’t serve a pro-
gram whose aims are critical literacy,
for example. But for those teaching a
generalized composition course, with
learning outcomes that include, for
example, writing as a process and critical
thinking, this text and the background
research and theory should be seriously
considered.
A second concern I and my col-
leagues have is the apparent inclusiv-
ness of the text. But no one should
mistake this for a text that introduces
“composition studies.” This is not meant
to replace Victor Villanueva’s Cross-
Talk in Comp Theory (NCTE, 2003),
for example, or some other anthology
that might be used in an introductory
graduate seminar. A third concern is
simply size: there is far too much here
for a single semester’s use. I used only
a tiny fraction of the text during an
eleven-week quarter.
Nonetheless, Writing about Writing:
A College Reader is an exciting devel-
opment in our field. The knowledge-
transfer debate, grounded in the work
of Perkins and Salomon, has provided
Wardle and Downs and others a sound
foundation for developing a theoretical
approach to teaching writing. As Wardle
says, “writing about writing as a cur-
riculum seems to be, at least partly, a
response to the belief that composition
classes can’t train students to be expert
writers in specialized disciplinary com-
unities, but that they can help students
learn how to learn (as Anne Beaufort
says) in those specialized communities
if they know something about writing.”
Together, the authors have created a
textbook with enough support and
enough breadth that it can be used by
brand-new instructors as well as sea-
soned veterans who are looking for a
new (and better) way to help students
learn about writing and thus how to
become better writers.

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