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The First-Year Writing Curriculum at New Jersey Institute of Technology: A Coordinated Framework

This document is designed to provide a conceptual framework for curriculum design and assessment of the first-year writing curriculum in the Department of Humanities at NJIT. In drafting the document, the members of the Committee on Writing were interested in setting forward a set of guidelines to provide a coordinated design for the first-year writing curriculum that would allow all shareholders—administrators, faculty, students, and their parents—to more clearly understand the values held by those entrusted to deliver a writing-based curriculum to students enrolled in one of the nation’s most diverse campuses. Because the nature of writing is itself shifting, the instructional and assessment orientation we offer here should be taken as a promising heuristic—not a rigid set of rules—to allow a unified curriculum.

Background: Teaching and Assessing Writing

While many post-secondary institutions experience a schism between teaching and assessing writing, NJIT has not allowed such divisiveness to occur. As part of New Jersey’s efforts in the closing two decades of the twentieth century to develop a state-wide placement test, faculty in the Department of Humanities assumed leadership roles in what was to become a national movement in direct writing assessment. As a result of the ensuing development of a culture of assessment, NJIT has never subjected students to exit examinations that undervalue the complex nature of writing instruction. Rather, administrators and faculty regularly assess the programmatic nature of their efforts, relying on summative assessment results from those best equipped to evaluate students: the classroom instructor. Because of this programmatic approach—one that operates according to best assessment practices that are regularly published in peer-reviewed journals and presented in national and regional conferences—NJIT continues to be regarded as innovative in the area of educational assessment.

Recent developments within NJIT—the creation of a second-semester course (Hum 102) offered in the first-year curriculum, a librarian-led emphasis on information literacy, advancements in automated scoring and web-based course management systems, and an

emerging new strategic plan for the College of Science and Liberal Arts—call for a new articulation of the curriculum.

Student-Centeredness: The First-Year Curriculum

The first-year writing curriculum at NJIT is grounded in two three-credit courses: Hum 101 (Writing, Speaking, Thinking I) and Hum 102 (Writing, Speaking, Thinking II). While both courses offer a curriculum addressing broad issues of communication and critical thinking, the courses are nevertheless based on the teaching of writing.

Because students enter NJIT with a broad range of writing ability, they are placed into three cohorts by a validated placement assessment system: the basic writing curriculum (Hum 099), the traditional curriculum (Hum 101) and the honors curriculum (Hum 101H). Students whose best written language is not English are placed into either the basic writing curriculum (Eng 095 or Hum 099S) or an English as a second language version of the traditional curriculum (Hum 101S).

Such student-centeredness in placement and curricular design affords student-centered environment in which small classes may work closely with their instructors to ensure retention and advancement.

Definition: Construct Validity and Writing

Whether students are enrolled in the basic, traditional, or honors curriculum—whether their best written language is English or not—they uniformly encounter a uniform definition of writing.

The definition, referred to as a construct in the educational measurement community, represents a vision of writing as a socio-cognitive activity. That is, as a cognitively-based activity, writing is shaped by—and shapes—the communities within which it occurs.

At the present time, the definition of writing offered by Roberta Camp serves as a unifying construct.

- Writing is “a rich, multifaceted, meaning-making activity that occurs over time and in a social context, an activity that varies with purpose, situation, and audience and is improved by reflection on the written product and on the strategies used in creating it.”

Attachment 1, The Variable Model for First-Year Writing, presents the present model for Hum 101. Attachment 3, The Rubric for Hum 101, shows the present rubric for Hum 101. Specifically, critical thinking, revising and editing, content and organization, and sentence construction and mechanics are the variables of interest in instruction and assessment in the first year writing curriculum.

However, a complementary expansion of the present construct has emerged at NJIT that is concurrent with rapid advances offered by digital technologies. While our students will always communicate in traditional print-based environments, the new media—blogs used for course diaries, wikis used for course collaboration, podcasts used for oral presentations, and ePortfolios used for demonstration of course competencies—offer students unique ways to explore innovative rhetorical forms.

Hence, our construct has expanded to allow engagement with digital technologies.

- As such, writing within a digital environment is an activity that emphasizes audiences within and beyond the classroom, an activity that resonates with the writer’s use of image and voice and improves through collaboration and experimentation.

Definition: Construct Validity and Information Literacy

Across the curriculum offered by the Department of Humanities, researched writing has always been a part of the NJIT composition emphasis. In 2005, efforts in information literacy led by NJIT librarians brought the emphasis on researched writing into sharp focus by a new emphasis on the ways that information is gathered in a digital environment.

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education defines information literacy as

- “an intellectual framework for identifying, finding, understanding, evaluating and using information. It includes determining the nature and extent of needed information; accessing information effectively and efficiently; evaluating critically information and its sources; incorporating selected information in the learner’s knowledge base and value system; using information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose; understanding the economic, legal and social issues surrounding the use of information and information technology; and observing laws, regulations, and institutional policies related to the access and use of information.”

It is the presence and extent of such literacy that we are assessing as it exists within undergraduate courses offered by the Department of Humanities at NJIT.

Attachment 2, The Variable Model for First-Year Writing and Information Literacy, presents the growth of the writing assessment model to as it has expanded to allow the study of information literacy in the curriculum. Attachment 4, The Rubric for Information Literacy in Hum 101, shows the present NJIT values of researched writing. Specifically, citation, evidence of independent research, appropriateness, and integration are the variables of interest in instruction and assessment in the first year writing curriculum.

Constructed Response Format and Evidence-Centered Design: Connections

However, even with a firm definition of the construct of writing, both instruction and assessment will suffer if teaching and assessing are not offered within a unified framework. When unified, teaching and assessing writing are viewed as complementary frameworks. What is needed is evidence-centered instruction resting upon two complementary principles.

The first, constructed response assessment,

- features performance tasks that require examinees to display knowledge within a framework signifying planned structure. The performance is designed to allow the most robust construct representation permitted by the allocation of resources under demanding economic constraints.

The second principle, evidence-centered design,

- features an approach to crafting educational assessments based on the belief that substantiated, process-oriented evidence, rather than static claims, will yield robust construct representation.

Unification of the two principles allows students studying writing to know what is required of them, allows a fuller sense of the schema required to yield robust construct representation, and allows precision in assessment. Such unification allows multiple aspects of literacy—from craft issues of effective clausal style to visual representation of images—and allows authentic (re)creation of the social contexts in which writing appears. Critical, as well, is that such a unification allows assessment compatibility with that which we know about writing (the socio-cognitive nature of writing in which context mediates cognition) and that which we are presently exploring (the place of writing within a digitally-mediated environment).

Curricular Design: Sequence

The first year writing curriculum is centered on five fundamental discourse concerns: critical thinking, process, audience, research, and craft. Differentiation in the first-year writing sequence is shown in Figure 1.

- By critical thinking, we mean the aims and modes of writing.
 - By aim, we mean the expressive, referential, literary, and persuasive aims defined by James Kinneavy. (Kinneavy's aims of discourse are shown in Attachment 5.).
 - By mode, we mean the traditional discourse patterns of narration, exposition, cause and effect, classification, comparison and contrast, and definition, as well as more abstract modes such as periodization, persuasion, and metaphor.

- By process, we mean both the traditional writing-as-process structures of prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and submitting, as well as the post-process theories that hold that there is, in reality, no archetypal writing process and that attention must be paid to the public, interpretative, situated, and mediated nature of writing.
- By audience, we mean the complex interactions that occur when writers serve themselves and others both within and beyond academic settings. (Linda Flower's socio-cognitive depiction of the relationship between writer and reader is shown in Attachment 6).
- By researched writing, we mean the processes of information literacy as they are demonstrated in citation, independent research, appropriateness, integration, and holism.

Figure 1 serves as a visualization of these five fundamental discourse concerns.

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Figure 1. A Unified Structure for First-Year Writing: Visualization

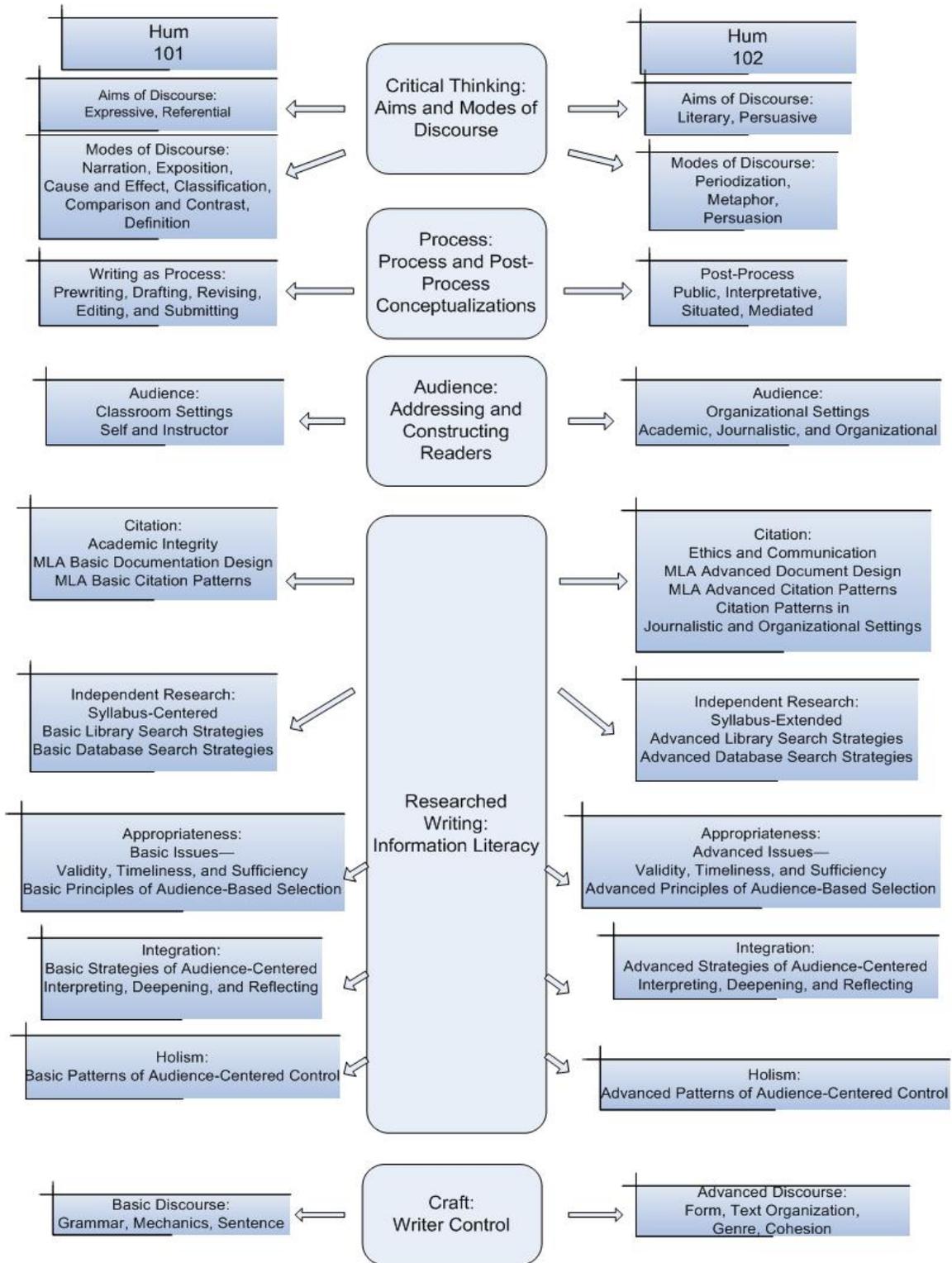


Table 1 below demonstrates differentiation of these five discourse concerns across the first-year sequence. Table 1 reflects the curricular values expressed in Figure 1.

Table 1. A Unified Structure for First-Year Writing: Delineation

Hum 101	Hum 102
<p>Critical Thinking: Aims of Discourse</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student gains experience with referential discourse by writing about the process of observing nature in the following texts: Natalie Angier, "In Mandrill Society, Life is a Girl Thing," Loren Eiseley, "The Flow of the River," and Plato, "The Allegory of the Cave" 	<p>Critical Thinking: Aims of Discourse</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student gains experience with persuasive discourse by writing about the use of setting in the following text: John Keats, "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer"
<p>Critical Thinking: Modes of Discourse</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student gains experience with modes such as classification and cause and effect by reflection on the following statement: "Observing nature is not as simple as it may seem; nature is sometimes hesitant to reveal itself and the human observer is sometimes reluctant to perceive what may contradict long-held and cherished beliefs," Robert E. Lynch, Thomas B. Swanzey, and John M. Coakley 	<p>Critical Thinking: Modes of Discourse</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student gains experience with modes such as metaphor by examining the following statement: "Nothing in the context of the article makes clear whether Beach meant Balboa or Cortez, but in either case the interpretation misses the point of the poem. . . Keats meant Cortez." V. C. Wicker.
<p>Writing as Process: Peer Review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student gains experience with peer review by developing a rubric for the task based on question that arose during the audience analysis stage of the writing process (such as "How am I showing that observing nature scientifically is a complex process?") 	<p>Writing as Process: Instructor Review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student gains experience with instructor review by submitting an MS Word document with comment editor activated and questions posted for the instructor (such as "Is this source from JSTOR too old to be valid here?")
<p>Audience: The Instructor</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student gains experience with audience analysis by reflecting in a blog diary entry how the responses of fellow students were both different and similar to the response of the instructor 	<p>Audience: Fellow Students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student gains experience with audience analysis by creating a script and podcast for fellow students that is different than the academic essay prepared for the instructor.

Hum 101	Hum 102
<p>Information Literacy: Citation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student gains experience with basic MLA document design by following requirements for physical characteristics of printed manuscripts and by adhering to citation patterns by citing sources from the anthology (cross-references) and the Web. 	<p>Information Literacy: Citation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student gains experience with advanced MLA document design by following inclusion of illustrations for printed manuscripts and by adhering to advanced citation patterns by citing sources gathered from JSTOR and from other Van Houten data bases.
<p>Information Literacy: Independent Research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student gains experience with syllabus-centered research by identifying and using one book focused on experimental design from Van Houten (such as a volume from the <i>Best American Science Writing</i> series) 	<p>Information Literacy: Independent Research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student gains experience with syllabus-extended research by identifying and using volumes focused on literary theory from Van Houten (such as <i>The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism</i> and its emphasis on postcolonial criticism)
<p>Information Literacy: Appropriateness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student gains experience with validity, timeliness, and sufficiency by examining how a peer-reviewed article from an academic journal (such as a selection from <i>Science</i>) differs in its exposition of the scientific process from the selection taken from the <i>Best American Science Writing</i> series. 	<p>Information Literacy: Appropriateness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student gains experience with validity, timeliness, and sufficiency by examining how a peer-reviewed article from an academic journal (such as a selection from <i>College English</i>) differs in its exposition of critical theory from the selection taken from <i>The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism</i>.
<p>Information Literacy: Integration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student gains experience with basic strategies of interpreting, deepening, and reflecting on a source by providing exposition for the process of science by paraphrasing from Angier and Easley. 	<p>Information Literacy: Integration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student gains experience with advanced strategies of interpreting, deepening, and reflecting on a source by providing exposition on the differences on interpretation of the Keats poem by providing exposition from Joseph Warren Beach (<i>PMLA</i> 49.4 [1934]: 246-57), C. V. Wicker (<i>CE</i> 17.7 [1956]: 383-87), and the entry on postcolonial studies from <i>The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism</i> (2004).

Curricular Design: The Task

The concepts introduced thus far are unified in the task. Because students want to know what is expected of them, tasks yield enhanced student-centeredness. Because tasks vary according to a planned curriculum, they yield writing sequences that allow robust construct representation.

Representative tasks for Hum 101 include asking students to write a cultural autobiography, to maintain a digital course diary with a blog, and to write traditional academic, researched essays. Attachment 7 includes a representative task for Hum 101. The task is based on Table 1 and Figure 1.

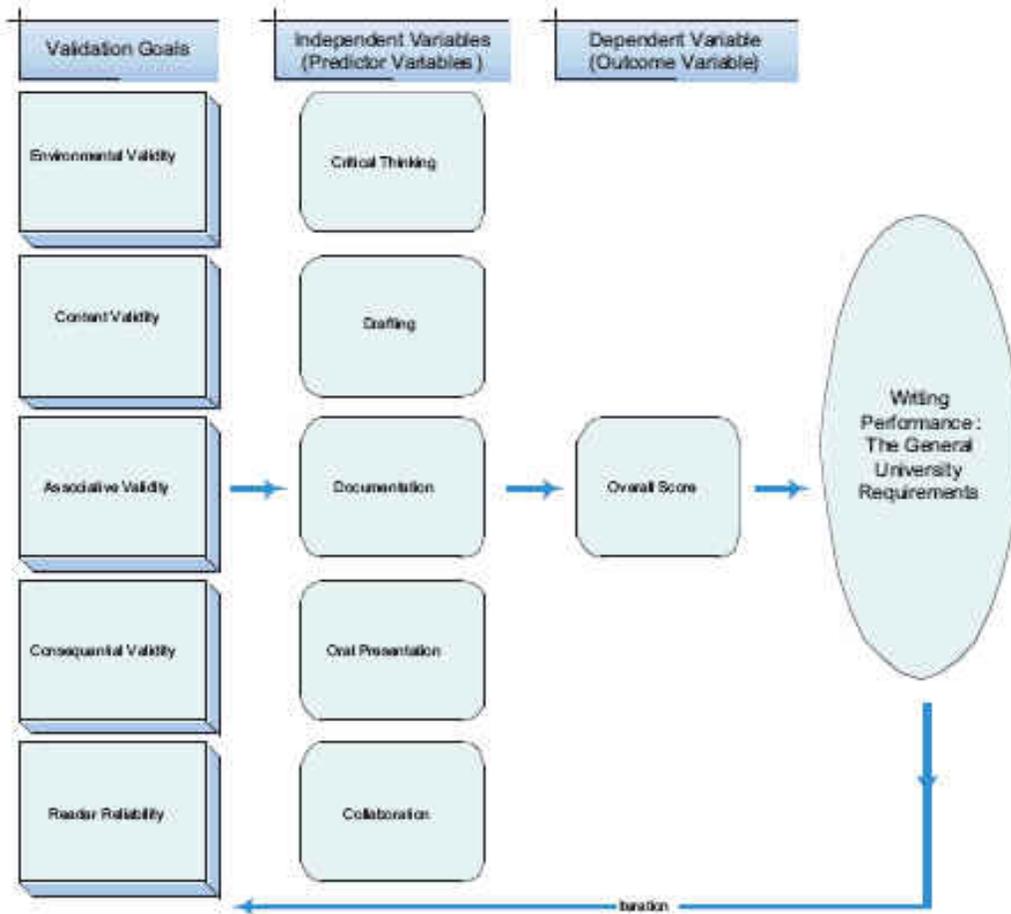
Representative tasks in Hum 102 include an intellectual autobiography, a proposal for a researched academic essay, a finalized researched essay with the instructor as audience, and a revision of that essay for a podcast with a student audience in mind. Attachment 8 includes a representative task for Hum 102. The task is based on Table 1 and Figure 1.

A Way Forward

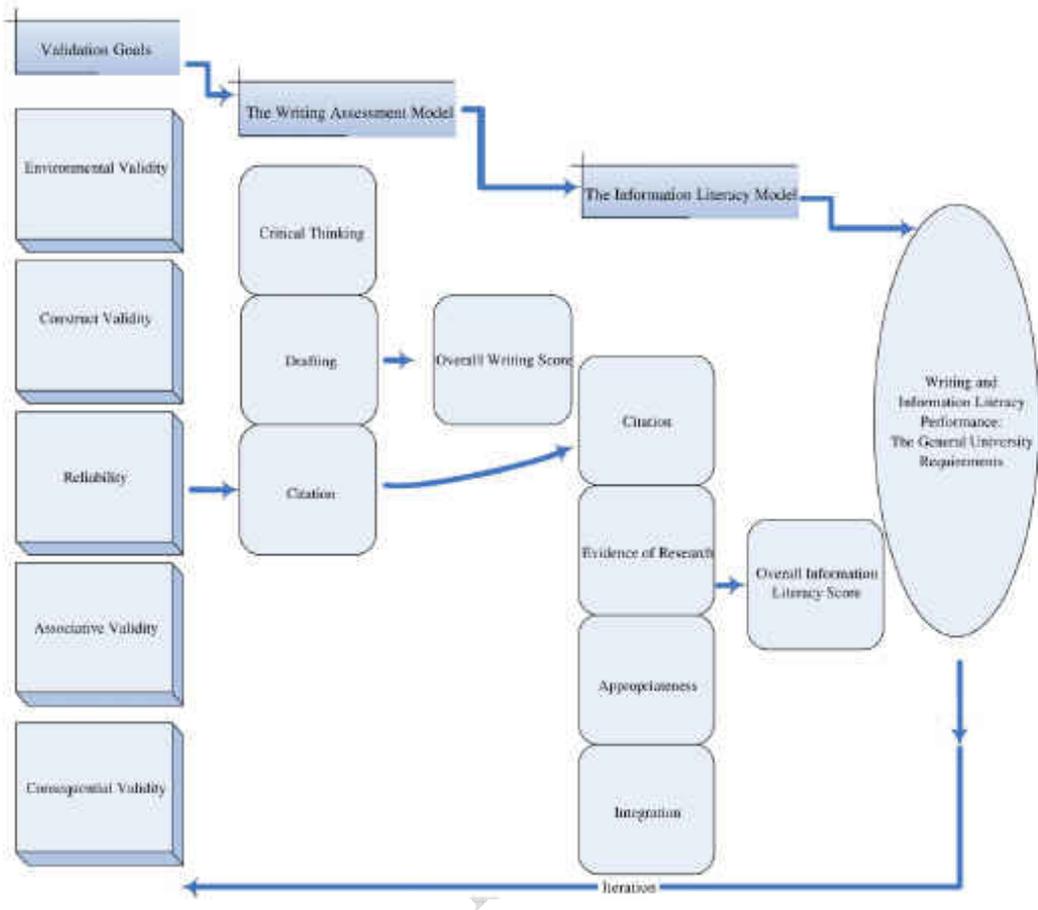
The orientation of this document is not meant to be prescriptive. Rather, the orientation is a vehicle intended to serve as a cohesive framework that will allow administrators, faculty, students, and their parents to better understand the first-year writing curriculum.

It is our hope that, over time, a series of tasks will emerge that will be based on the model we have offered in this document. As those tasks come forward from the instructors, students will have a clear idea of what is expected of them and will, therefore, have a structured opportunity for success in this most critical aspect of the NJIT curriculum: the first year writing experience.

Attachment 1. The Variable Model for First-Year Writing



Attachment 2. The Variable Model for First-Year Writing and Information Literacy



Attachment 3. The Rubric for Hum 101

Holistic Portfolio Score Provide an overall, holistic impression of the portfolio.

Very Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Very Strongly Disagree
The materials in the portfolio demonstrate <i>excellent</i> work in the class.	The materials in the portfolio demonstrate <i>very good</i> work in the class.	The materials in the portfolio demonstrate <i>solid</i> average work in the class.	The materials in the portfolio demonstrate <i>below average</i> work in the class.	The materials in the portfolio demonstrate work that is at a level <i>near failure</i> .	The materials in the portfolio demonstrate work that is at a level of <i>failure</i> .

Provide an analytic reading in which you focus on the FOUR traits identified below:

1. Critical Thinking 2. Revising and Editing 3. Written Language 4. Information Literacy

1. **Critical Thinking:** The contents of the portfolio demonstrate that the student has thought critically in preparing written assignments.

Very Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Very Strongly Disagree
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2. **Revising and Editing:** The contents of the portfolio demonstrate that the student has drafted and successfully revised papers before they were submitted.

Very Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Very Strongly Disagree
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3. **Written Language**

A) Content and Organization: The contents of the portfolio demonstrate that the student writes with purposeful organization and makes connections between ideas that progress clearly from beginning to end.

Very Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Very Strongly Disagree
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B) Sentence Construction and Mechanics: The contents of the portfolio demonstrate that the student writes clear, well-formed sentences, using accurate grammar, punctuation and spelling.

Very Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Very Strongly Disagree
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Attachment 4. The Rubric for Information Literacy in Hum 101

NJIT Assessment Scales: Information Literacy

Reader's Name: _____	Date: _____
Student's Name: _____	Course: _____

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education defines information literacy as "an intellectual framework for identifying, finding, understanding, evaluating and using information. It includes determining the nature and extent of needed information; accessing information effectively and efficiently; evaluating critically information and its sources; incorporating selected information in the learner's knowledge base and value system; using information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose; understanding the economic, legal and social issues surrounding the use of information and information technology; and observing laws, regulations, and institutional policies related to the access and use of information." It is the presence and extent of such literacy that we are assessing as it exists within undergraduate courses offered by the Department of Humanities at NJIT.

1. Citation: This portfolio includes sources that are documented so that the original source can easily be found. Discussion: All information needed to identify a source must be present. The audience-centered ability of students to present a source that may be *retrieved without undue burden* is more important than stylistic adherence to a particular citation system.

The contents of the portfolio demonstrate that the student has cited sources so that the original source can be easily found.

Very Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Very Strongly Disagree
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2. Evidence of Independent Research: This portfolio includes evidence of research independent of sources indicated within the course syllabus. Discussion: While it is important that students reference information from textbooks, readers, and bibliographies provided by the instructor, researched work demands that students have sought, evaluated, and used information *beyond the syllabus*. An authentically researched assignment demonstrates that the student has sought ideas from a variety of sources to become truly informed about the topic at hand.

The contents of the portfolio demonstrate that the student has performed independent research.

Very Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Very Strongly Disagree
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3. Appropriateness: The sources used in this portfolio are appropriate to the topic the student addressed. Discussion: Academic integrity demands that authoritative sources must be used in researched work. Research that is appropriate to the topic at hand will be sensitive to issues of *validity, timeliness, and sufficiency*. An authentically researched assignment will demonstrate a student's ability to identify valid sources that have been reliably reviewed by those recognized as knowledgeable about the topic at hand, to select sources that offer time-appropriate views on that topic, and to ensure that the sources used are adequate to support the demands of the topic.

The contents of the portfolio demonstrate that the student has used appropriate sources.

Very Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Very Strongly Disagree
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4. Integration: The sources cited in this portfolio have informed the course work. Discussion: Authentically researched work will demonstrate that the student has incorporated information in order to deepen critical thought. Authentic integration will demonstrate that the student has used sources to *interpret, deepen, and reflect* on the topic at hand.

The contents of the portfolio demonstrate that the student has integrated sources.

Very Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Very Strongly Disagree
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5. Overall Information Literacy Portfolio Score:

The contents of the portfolio demonstrate that the student has employed an information literacy framework.

Very Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Very Strongly Disagree
The materials in the portfolio demonstrate superior information literacy skills.	The materials in the portfolio demonstrate very good information literacy skills.	The materials in the portfolio demonstrate an acceptable level of information literacy skills.	The materials in the portfolio demonstrate below average information literacy skills.	The materials in the portfolio demonstrate information literacy skills at a level near failure.	The materials in the portfolio demonstrate information literacy skills at a level of failure.

Attachment 5. Kinneavy's Aims of Discourse

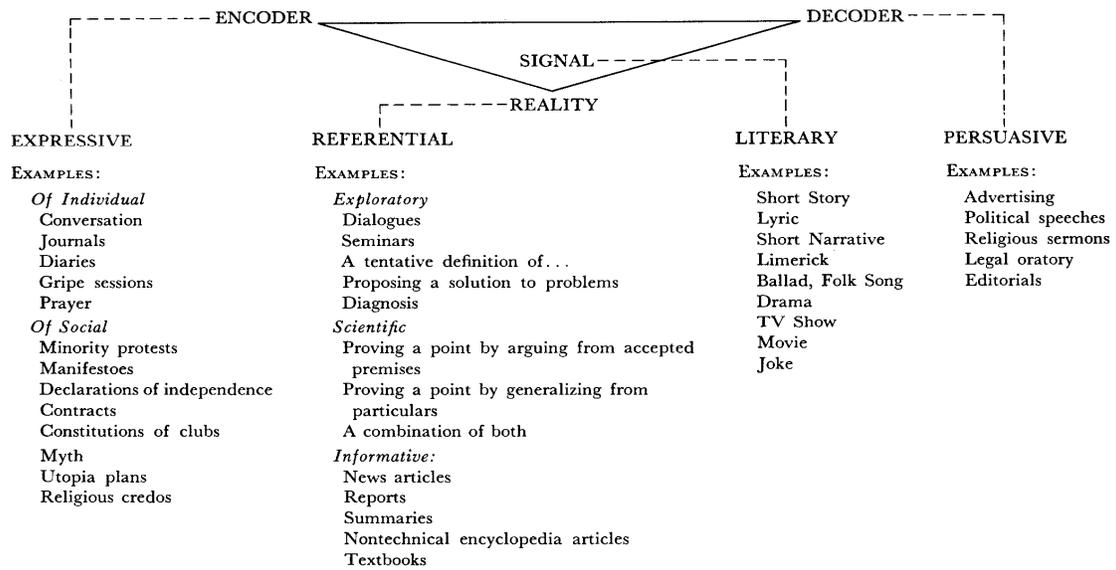


Figure II, 1: The Aims of Discourse

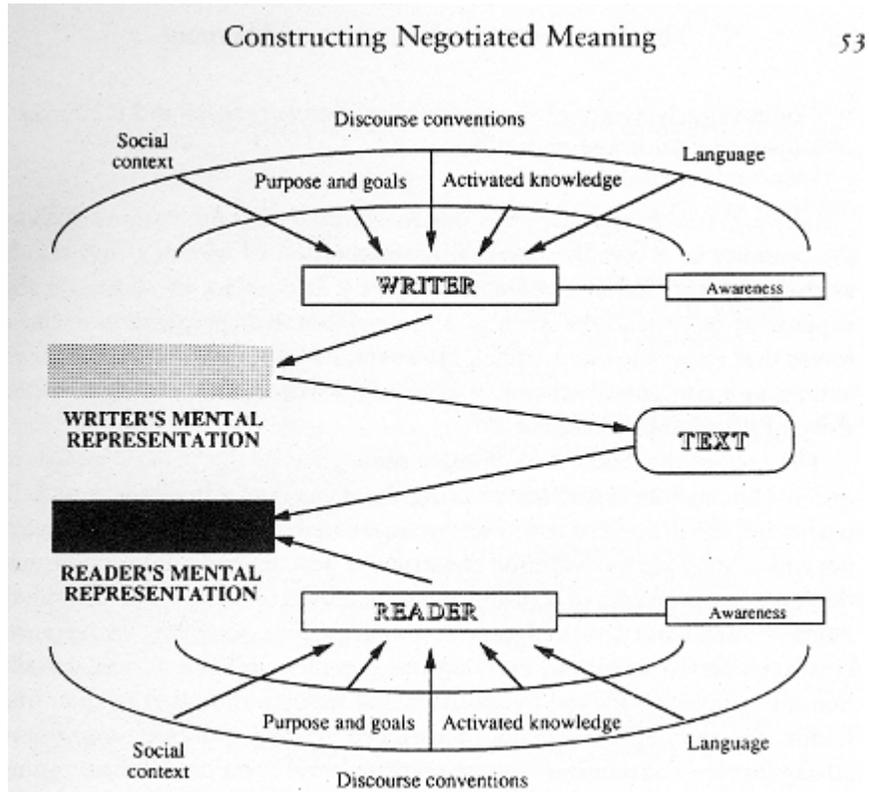


Figure 1. A model of discourse construction (figure from *Reading-to-Write: Ex-*

Attachment 7: Sample Hum 101 Task

Task Title: Observation—The Process of Science

Course Value: One of Four Major Course Tasks

Point Value: 20 points of the 100 points in the course

Task Aim: To write an academic essay for your instructor on the process of observation in science

Required Readings:

Angier, Natalie. "In Mandrill Society, Life is a Girl Thing." Lynch, Swanzey and Coakley. 49-53. Print.

Lynch, Robert E., Thomas B. Swanzey and John M. Coakley, eds. *The Example of Science: An Anthology for College Composition*. 3rd ed. Boston: Pearson, 2003. Print.

Eiseley, Loren. "The Flow of the River." Lynch, Swanzey and Coakley 55-60. Print

Plato. "The Allegory of the Cave." *A World of Ideas: Essential Readings for College Writers*. Ed. Lee A. Jacobus. 7th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2006. 445-453. Print.

Also required: Selections from *Best American Science Writing Series* in Van Houten Library; selection from *Science*.

Process: Prewriting using freewriting techniques; drafting with Assignment Criteria; peer reviewing with writer-prepared rubric; revising with peer review response in mind; submitting for first instructor revision; revising with instructor revision in mind; submitting final copy.

Assignment Criteria: "Observing nature is not as simple as it may seem; nature is sometimes hesitant to reveal itself and the human observer is sometimes reluctant to perceive what may contradict lone-held and cherished beliefs, "Robert E. Lynch, Thomas B. Swanzey, and John M. Coakley write (36). In this essay, I would like you to analyze the process of observation.

You should begin by setting forth the concept of observation. You should enhance your discussion with the class lectures as they focused on deduction, induction, and the rise of science during the seventeenth century. As you develop your essay, attend closely to those aspects of observation that deal with structure, epiphany, and bias. As you close your essay, offer a set of guidelines that link the concept of observation to the aim of observation.

To inform and deepen your essay, you must use the sources from the Required Readings to demonstrate that you have sought, evaluated, and used information *beyond the syllabus*.

Finalize your manuscript in guidelines provided by the Modern Language Association. In *The Scott Foresman Handbook for Writers*, pay special attention to Chapters 22, 53, and Appendix A. Papers not following the MLA (MLA) format, including the documentation of sources, will not be accepted

Attachment 8: Sample Hum 102 Assignment

Assignment Title: Reflections in Keats Poem “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer”

Course Value: One of Four Major Course Tasks

Point Value: 20 points of the 100 points in the course

Task Aim: To write an academic essay for your instructor on the writer, cultural context, poetic form, tone, speaker, setting, and interpretative complexities on the poem. Then, to transform that essay into a podcast for NJIT first-year students about to take Hum 102.

Required Readings:

Beach, Joesph Warren. “Keats’s Realms of Gold.” *PMLA* 49.4 (1934): 246-57. Print.

Wicker, C.V. “Balboa—Not Cortez.” *CE* 17.7 (1956): 383-87. Print.

Also required: Selections from *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*; sources from Van Houten databases JSTOR and Academic Search Premiere.

Process: Prewriting using freewriting techniques; drafting with Assignment Criteria; peer reviewing with writer-prepared rubric; revising with peer review response in mind; submitting for first instructor revision; revising with instructor revision in mind; submitting final copy. Then, repeating the process with the first-year student in mind.

Assignment Criteria: This assignment has two parts. In the first, I would like you to analyze the Keats poem for the course instructor. You should focus on the writer, cultural context, poetic form, tone, speaker, setting, and interpretative complexities on the poem. I want you to especially focus on the character of Cortez in the poem. Then, I would like you to recast that essay in a script that you will use for a podcast on the poem for an audience for first-year students who are about to begin the Hum 102 course.

For the academic essay, I would like you to begin with a generative section that sets forth the organization of the essay. I would then like you to move, section by section, through the Task Aims, making certain to give full treatment of the interpretative complexities of the poem. To inform and deepen your essay, you must use the sources from the Required Readings to demonstrate that you have sought, evaluated, and used information *beyond the syllabus*; to demonstrate this mastery, I would like you to present the articles you plan to use with a briefly annotated 3 X 5 note card on the article in which you both summarize the article and highlight the way you will use it in the essay.

For the podcast script that will lead to the actual podcast using the Camtasia Relay software, I would like you to begin with a statement that draws your listeners into the subject of the podcast. I would then like you to tell your listeners what is most important about Keats, the world in which he lived, the poetic form he used, the poem’s tone, the role the speaker plays, and the setting of the poem. I would especially like you to examine the interpretative complexities on the poem as they pertain to the framework provided by post-colonial theory: Whose realms did Keats survey, and who might be said, geographically and metaphorically, to possess those “realms of gold” that the poet identifies?

For the academic essay, finalize your manuscript in guidelines provided by the Modern Language Association (MLA). In *The Scott Foresman Handbook for Writers*, pay special attention to Chapters 22, 53, and Appendix A. Papers not following the MLA format, including the documentation of sources, will not be accepted.

For the podcast script, follow the MLA *What’s The Word?* radio program models provided in class.