



Graduate Teaching Assistant Class Observation Form

Graduate Assistant: Molly Ryan

Faculty Observer: Derek Mueller

Term: Spring 2024

Date Observed: Friday, March 15, 2024

Course: ENGL1106: First-year Writing: Writing from Research

Evaluate the GA's performance on the following criteria by marking the check box next to the statement that best characterizes the class you observed.

1. Organization and Structure of the Class

- Class session was well-organized, with sufficient time allotted for planned activities.
- Class session was organized and with only minor exceptions allotted sufficient time for activities.
- Class may have been planned but only partially adhered to the plan or reflected marked shifts away from timely progression through activities.
- Class session reflected significant concerns with planning, organization, or timing.
- Not applicable or no basis for response.

2. Helpfulness to Students

- Appears to actively seek ways and opportunities to be helpful to students.
- Appears helpful and receptive when approached.
- Answered questions from students but did not appear to welcome them.
- Appeared to discourage questions and/or belittles or berates questioner.
- Not applicable or no basis for response.

3. Knowledge and Facility with Course Materials

- Appears excellent, demonstrating a strong grasp of key concepts or core curricular principles.
- Appears quite good, but would benefit from further background knowledge in Composition theory and best practices
- Appears ineffective due to only partial or provisional familiarity with key concepts or core curricular principles.
- Ineffective due to lack of effort or limited interest in or engagement with key concepts or core curricular principles.
- Not applicable or no basis for response.

4. Communication Skills

- Appears highly effective, explained difficult concepts or instructions well, clear and concise in delivery or responses.
- Appears effective, explained most concepts or instructions well, needed little follow-up.
- Appears to have some problems communicating, explains most concepts or instructions to an extent but requires frequent follow-up.

- Appears ineffective, reflects difficulty in explaining concepts or instructions.
- Not applicable or no basis for response.

5. Ability to Engage Students with Course Materials or Activities

- Readily engaged students effectively and placed appropriate emphasis on important points.
- Engaged students with material or activities in a followable, organized manner.
- Engaged students with materials and/or activities but would benefit from providing further context.
- Did not engage students successfully or present materials or activities well to students.
- Not applicable or no basis for response.

Summary of primary strengths observed:

The class opened with ambient music and an offer of breakfast snacks. As students filed in, it was evident that they were stepping into a hospitably configured environment. Eight students were present; with their laptops up, Molly started the session at the front of the classroom with a title slide on mapping and outlines, two co-informing topics that would engage students in articulating visually the structural topographies beginning to form among their in-progress research projects. The opening segment of the class included an acknowledgement of the schedule, gesturing appropriately to a bifocal horizon of the current lesson (today) in relationship to the longer arc of the project (upcoming sessions, including a deadline for the annotation project, which is already well underway and nearly completed). Next, Molly showed a slide with a QR code linking to a Menti poll, which students could access on their phones or laptops; the poll consisted of one question, "Your week in a word?," which elicited responses ranging from "overwhelming" to "empty," and as each response populated the word cloud on the slide, Molly discussed the terms, exploring their meaningfulness during this brief segment.

In the next segment of the class, Molly showed examples of cluster maps and document maps for distinguishing hierarchies of information—both as a planning heuristic and as an interpretive guide (e.g., potentially applied to an existing document). Students then were prompted to visit a website (missed the name) where they would rank orders of detail in the process of making pizza. This showed a proficiency with seamless technology integrations in Molly's teaching; these platforms appeared to be appropriately selected, tested out in advance, and genuinely engaging, albeing in low stakes ways, in that students could participate from their devices. It also showed that brief walk-throughs could forecast the context for the next activity, which would ask students to engage in mapping their own in-progress research projects.

For this portion of the class, Molly gave each student a set of paper handouts and asked them to generate a 'rapid prototype' of a worknet linked with their in-progress research projects. Conventionally, worknets are used for mapping one academic source using a variety of stages, or phases, keyed upon to bring into magnified light qualities of the article that amplify its context. With this creative, thoughtful variation on worknets, Molly adapted them, continuing to position them as exploratory, holarchic radial diagrams, but in this case posting them as an inventional aid for articulating nodes and ties among tangential premises (points), sources and methods, keywords, and the central research question guiding the project. This

adaptation of worknets appeared to work well in the sense that students took it up and appeared to apply it capably to their own in-progress research projects. Granting that the development timeframe was quickened, it staged what one could easily imagine as a more expansive timeframe likely to extend beyond this single class meeting. With this activity, the overarching premise of dwelling at intersections between outline and mapping was more fully realized. Concepts of structuring and arranging while in the early stages of a project's development also accorded well with the ENGL1106 curriculum at Virginia Tech, and with this particular moment-Week Eight-of the fifteen week semester.

Near the end of the class, students talked in pairs about their research projects; these were quick, verbal exchanges meant to practice the concise, dialogic review. All students appeared to be engaged during this brief exchange, which was followed by a round of writing in which students were prompted to pose a structuring strategy brought forward in their thinking as a result of the day's activities. The session concluded with brief discussion and with a few reminders about upcoming deadlines.

Summary of suggested areas for improvement:

Only in the lightest of senses did I have any impression that something in this class session could be improved. In the opening segment, I thought for a moment that one example of a cluster map or document map, elicited from a tangible project (either a student example or applied to a reading they had done) might have brought the mapping distinctions one step closer to concrete rather than abstract. I mention this with the important caveats that such examples can accumulate over time, drawing upon past classes, and also that such models might be figured in through other class meetings, either before or after this particular class session. Beyond this very minor detail, I observed in the class meeting a thoughtful plan, smartly integrated with technologies, scaffolded from conceptual framing to applied practice and back again, and wholly in-synch with the class goals and this particular moment in the semester.

[There's no need to sign this, Molly, unless you would like to write a response, or have this made more official for any reason. -Derek]

Class Observer_____

Date_____

Graduate Assistant_____

Date_____