Graduate Instructors at Work:

A Narrative Inquiry into the Development of Writing Assessment Literacy

A Dissertation Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

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May 2025

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This Dissertation Is Dedicated To:

The memory of my grandfather, Dr. Robert G. Crozier

The legacy of Dr. David A. Hambright ('77), a Graduate Teaching Associate whose story inspired my commitment to honor the invaluable work of graduate student instructors

Acknowledgements

I first want to thank the eight GTAs who participated in this study. I learned so much from your stories that can improve the lives of future GTAs. This project exists because of you.

My endless gratitude extends to Dr. Tanita Saenkhum, my dissertation chair, teacher, mentor, and guide throughout this journey. I have been so fortunate to work with you at UTK. As many times as I have thanked you, it hasn't been enough to truly capture my appreciation for your mentorship, support, and good humor. At the start of this process, you advised me to choose a dissertation topic that I'd be willing to think about every single day. You were right, and your guidance helped me enjoy many parts of this process more than I thought possible.

I am grateful to my inimitable dissertation committee, Dr. Kirsten Benson, Dr. Lisa King, and Dr. Jennifer Morrow. This project would not be as thorough, ethical, and well-grounded without your advice. Kirsten, you have inspired me with your steadfast support for graduate students. I especially thank you for sharing your institutional knowledge. Lisa, thank you for allowing me to join alongside you to think about how to support GTAs. Jennifer, I appreciate your willingness to share your expertise to shape the early design of this project.

I cannot begin to express my gratitude to my family—there are too many of you to name, but you know who you are. To my mom, Ann, thank you for the infinite support and wisdom during my journey through higher education. I could not ask for a better cheerleader, role model, and best friend. To my dad, Rolf, I would not have achieved this goal without your unfailing encouragement. To my brother, Adam, I appreciate the support and many laughs over the years.

To my husband, Jared, who has been by my side through the days, the months, and the years—thanks for always listening to me on our walks with Bea and Dee, unfailingly reassuring me to keep writing, and doing all of the dishes—all to make this dream of ours possible.

Abstract

Writing assessment shapes what students learn and the extent to which they invest in their writing development, with lasting consequences on academic growth, literacy development, and retention. University writing programs often rely on Graduate Teaching Associates (GTAs) to teach first-year composition (FYC) courses and assess student writing; however, GTAs often receive incomplete or inadequate training in writing assessment theory and practice. English Departments that provide writing pedagogy education have not yet fully considered how GTAs learn to assess writing nor the assessment challenges they face in the FYC classroom, creating a significant gap between the importance of effective writing assessment and the often-minimal preparation instructors receive to deliver that assessment. To address this gap, this qualitative study examined how new GTAs developed writing assessment literacy. Using narrative inquiry as a research methodology, I followed eight GTAs during their first year teaching FYC courses as instructors of record at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK). I collected stories through a series of three interviews with each participant over the 2023–2024 academic year, triangulating interview data with focus groups and assessment materials. Then, I composed eight individual narratives that document and analyze GTAs' writing assessment literacy. Based on the narratives and thematic analysis, I developed an expanded conceptual model for tracing writing assessment literacy development that emphasizes lived experience, prior knowledge, affect, and labor in teacher learning. I use the results to redefine the development of writing assessment literacy as *literacy labor* to draw attention to the material, intellectual, affective, and embodied dimensions of GTA development. Key findings suggest that the conditions that most impacted writing assessment literacy were peer support, classroom teaching experience, and prior knowledge and experience. The formal aspects of writing pedagogy education that most

influenced writing assessment literacy development were ranked as teaching assistantship, tutoring, composition pedagogy coursework, and departmental workshops. Based on these findings, I suggest that writing program administrators refocus writing pedagogy education to foster the development of writing assessment literacy. Graduate student instructors need experiential learning, guided reflection, and ongoing support beyond the first year to thrive as they teach and assess writing.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

I confess that, for the longest time, I never wanted to teach. Since elementary school, my own teachers suggested that I should become an educator. I grew up with the legacy of my GiGi, a high school English teacher, and my grandfather, who taught abroad in Malaysia. But I never saw myself standing in front of a classroom. Only when my writing studies research led me to pursue a PhD in Rhetoric and Composition did I realize I would have to teach first-year composition (FYC) courses to earn a degree. Although I previously tutored in a Writing Center and took courses in composition theory and pedagogy, I came to the PhD program without any teaching experience. It was Fall 2020—the first autumn of the global COVID-19 pandemic—when I taught my first FYC course a first-year PhD student at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK). Isolation and asynchronicity marked my first semester as I took online courses, taught one asynchronous English 101 course, and received pedagogical training from the Composition Office through Zoom and Canvas. August Workshops provided a two-week crash course in teaching FYC, so I presumed I knew everything I needed to know to enter the classroom and teach my first cohort of students. But when I sat down to grade my first batch of papers, I felt stunned with uncertainty. As I read the comparative rhetorical analysis essays, I contended with ambivalence about how to assess the papers fairly. In the template course's conventional grading system, point values seemed an arbitrary and inaccurate measure of student learning and growth. Despite the preparation I received, nothing in my prior experience, coursework, or two-week training truly prepared me for the first day, week, and semester that I taught first-year composition as a GTA and first-time instructor of record at UTK.

§

I begin this dissertation with a story. But I am here to tell a much larger story, one composed from many voices. It is the story of my participants; it is the story of GTAs in the Department of English at UTK; it is the collective story that resonates, in some small way, with all graduate student instructors who have taught composition courses.

In my story, I find camaraderie with each of the eight participants in this study. Like Sage and Camden, I grew up with a strong sense of myself as a reader and writer, and the fusion of literacy and identity led me to graduate study in English. Like Grey, I entered my PhD program without teaching experience. Like Theresa, I used conventional writing assessment practices for one semester before converting to labor-based assessment. I have felt my heart flutter with anxiety as I stood in front of a room of first-year students, like Lainey; I have worried about how writing assessment might affect my students, like Rose; I have tried to maintain a commitment to socially just writing instruction and assessment, like Keegan; I have felt that I evolved into the best version of myself as an instructor from the training provided at UTK, like Scarlet. Though I risk generalization, I do not find it an exaggeration to say that every graduate student instructor who has taught English composition courses shares some facet among our mutual experience.

The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of how graduate teaching associates (GTAs) develop their writing assessment literacy, particularly through the teaching of FYC courses. By *writing assessment literacy*, I mean the knowledge, beliefs, and practices that reflect what instructors know about writing assessment and how they engage that knowledge in their pedagogies (Crusan et al., 2016). In the U.S., university writing programs often rely on GTAs to teach FYC courses and assess student writing, which means that GTAs play a significant role in the academic growth, writing development, and retention of undergraduate students (O'Neill et al., 2009; White, 2009). However, writing programs often deliver incomplete

or inadequate preparation to train GTAs how to effectively assess writing (Crusan et al., 2016; Estrem & Reid, 2012). Weigle (2007) observed that "many teachers enter the classroom without a thorough grounding in assessment issues" (p. 207) and Saenkhum (2020) found that "the topic of assessment is not often included in teacher education or teacher training programs" (p. 7). Without enough training on the theories and practices of writing assessment, GTAs often struggle to support student learning through assessment (Wisniewski, 2018, 2024). This leaves a significant gap between the importance of effective writing assessment and the often-minimal preparation GTAs receive to deliver that assessment.

To address this gap, I conducted a narrative inquiry to explore how GTAs develop their writing assessment literacy through the teaching of FYC courses. Narrative inquiry is an empirical research methodology that "focuses on the stories of the lived experiences and personal practical knowledge of participants" with the ambition to "listen to, record, and construct stories of lived experience within the narrative dimensions of time, place, and personal-social relationships" (Casanave, 2005, pp. 21–22). I followed eight GTAs at UTK over the course of the 2023–2024 academic year to document how they developed their writing assessment literacy—their writing assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices—as they taught FYC courses as first-time instructors of record at UTK. The eight participants recruited for the study comprised three first-year PhD students, three second-year MA students, and two second-year MFA students. The participants reflected the Department's three divisions: Literature, Criticism, & Textual Studies; Creative Writing; and Rhetoric, Writing, & Linguistics (RWL). The study documents the prior writing assessment knowledge that GTAs bring to the classroom, investigates what factors impact whether and how GTAs' writing assessment literacy evolves over time, and explores how writing assessment knowledge and beliefs inform writing

assessment practices. By studying writing assessment literacy narratively, the project aims to improve training and support for GTAs. The implications can impact the pedagogical and programmatic work of writing program administrators (WPAs) in FYC programs and writing across the curriculum/writing in the disciplines (WAC/WID) initiatives. Thus, this research study turns inward, questioning not what GTAs should learn about writing assessment but rather what the discipline of rhetoric and composition can learn from GTAs about their experiences of writing assessment literacy development.

Three-Dimensional Narrative Inquiry Space

Following narrative inquiry methodology, I use the introduction of this dissertation to craft a three-dimension narrative inquiry space. I do so to amplify the materiality, context, and setting of the narratives crafted in this study. Researchers D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly (2000), who created narrative inquiry for teacher education research, understand *three-dimensional* space to account for the "'directions' this framework allows inquiries to travel—*inward, outward, backward, forward*, and *situated within place*" (p. 49). The three-dimensional inquiry space is composed of the "*past, present*, and *future* (continuity)," "the notion of *place* (situation)," and "*personal* and *social* (interaction)" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). First, I use the key term *continuity* to introduce the statement of the problem and purpose of the study. I situate the purpose within scholarship in writing studies, applied linguistics, and education. Then, I use the key term *situation* to describe the institutional context of this research study, articulating its response to local needs and circumstances. Finally, I use the key term *interaction* to explore the interface between myself and my participants. Here, I tell more of my story to describe my positionality, describing how the narrative inquiry responds to my personal exigences to focus this research study on graduate student instructors and FYC courses. Altogether, the key terms

give shape to a research framework accountable to the study's participants and their narratives. I further detail the qualitative and narrative inquiry methodologies in Chapter 3.

Continuity: The Statement of the Problem

Narrative inquiry projects always "have temporal dimensions and address temporal matters" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). Continuity attends to temporal alignment across past, present, and future, situating the study within disciplinary histories and imperatives that formulate the following statement of the problem. Writing assessment shapes *what* students learn, *how* students learn, and the extent to which they invest in their writing development, with lasting consequences for the academic growth, literacy development, sense of self, and retention of undergraduate students (Carless, 2015; Earl, 2012; Wiggins, 1989). Despite the significance of effective writing assessment, postsecondary writing instructors too often receive inadequate preparation to assess writing effectively and justly (Crusan et al., 2016; Estrem & Reid, 2012). Persistent realities of racial discrimination and linguistic bias in higher education (Baker-Bell, 2020), framed by a national political landscape of exclusion evidenced by anti-DEI legislation (Bryant & Appleby, 2025), highlight the need for research on teacher training that investigates the role of writing assessment in educational access, attainment, and achievement. These institutional tensions are complicated by the exploitation of graduate student instructors (Brown, 2023), who have been reported to make up 41% of instructional staff at public, doctoral-granting institutions across the U.S. (qtd. in Cicchino, 2020), yet receive comparatively inequitable resources, support, and pay (Osorio et al., 2021). Writing assessment literacy, the sum of instructors' writing assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices, reveals what assessment methods and tools teachers use, how they apply those methods and for what purposes, and how their approaches reflect their beliefs and values (Crusan, 2021; White, 2009). GTAs' experiences

with writing assessment are problematized by the complex political, economic, and sociocultural contexts in which they live, work, and learn.

The training and preparation of graduate student instructors who teach FYC courses is a key concern for WPAs, one equally fraught with significance and complexity. GTAs do not typically receive enough training on writing assessment theory and practice (Saenkhum, 2020; Yancey, 2001). Similarly, it is difficult for WPAs to know what GTAs actually learn from their training and how they apply their preparation to the composition classroom (Driscoll, 2013; Estrem & Reid, 2012). Relatedly, GTAs often struggle to assess writing in efficient, ethical, and equitable ways (Restaino, 2012; Wisniewski, 2018). Further, GTAs often become overburdened by their workload, a weight exacerbated by material conditions that render them feeling underpaid and underappreciated by their institutions (Brown, 2023; Osorio et al., 2021). WPAs know that GTAs contribute essential labor to writing programs, but "despite graduate students' crucial role in making writing programs work, there exist proportionally few efforts to study their experiences" (Restaino, 2012, p. 18). Much scholarship about new writing instructors "focuses on the program structures rather than beginning with new teachers' identities and their learning" (Anglesey, 2023, pp. 170–171; see also Gramer, 2023). Therefore, the goals of this research study include documenting how GTAs develop and use their writing assessment literacy as they teach FYC courses, investigating what facets of teacher preparation programs impact whether and how GTAs' writing assessment literacy change over time, and contextualizing GTAs' writing assessment literacy within broader economic, political, and social discourses.

The scholarship cited above and throughout the literature review in Chapter 2 situates this research study within an interdisciplinary tradition of research on writing assessment, graduate student instructors, and the teaching of first-year composition. Particularly, this study builds

upon the groundwork laid by five seminal publications in the discipline of composition studies. While I take inspiration from aspects of these works, I extend them to develop the current study. Like *First Semester: Graduate Students, Teaching Writing, and the Challenge of Middle Ground* (Restaino, 2012), I focus on the experiences of new graduate student instructors as one of the discipline's richest sites for understanding the teaching of FYC. However this research study extends beyond the first semester to include the first *year*, which provides more insight into how teaching experience itself shapes GTAs' writing assessment literacy development. Like *Conceptions of Literacy: Graduate Instructors and the Teaching of First-Year Composition* (Brewer, 2020), I study the phenomenon of literacy development, though I focus exclusively on writing assessment literacy development to understand how GTAs develop assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices. Similar to *Terms of Work for Composition: A Materialist Critique* (Horner, 2000), I see *work* as a crucial theoretical framework for understanding composition instructors' experiences in the discipline, though I turn the lens completely on graduate students. Farther along in the process of writing this dissertation, as I worked recursively through data analysis and reporting results, I garnered inspiration from *Textual Carnivals: The Politics of Composition* (Miller, 1991) and *The Managerial Unconscious in the History of Composition Studies* (Strickland, 2011) to bring labor relations and material working conditions into view, overlaying historical, disciplinary contexts with GTAs' narratives. Distinctly from each of these previous works, I use narrative inquiry as a methodology to study GTAs' experiences, working conditions, and literacy development *narratively*.

This longitudinal qualitative research study uses narrative inquiry, which identifies relationships among the narratives people construct about their experiences (Clandinin, 2016), to think narratively about the phenomenon of writing assessment literacy. By explicating the

writing assessment literacy of GTAs, the study also attempts to make sense of the uneven working conditions and spatial, material, and economic exploitation of one of the most overburdened and underresourced groups in higher education. The study uses theories of *work* (Smith, 2005) and *labor* (Harvie, 2007) to uncover the invisible labor of writing assessment literacy development and trace the reverberations of this development for GTAs. Insights from this study address some of education's most pressing questions about how to train teachers toward more socially just, equitable writing classrooms. By documenting and analyzing GTAs' narratives, the study identifies pathways to strengthen the professional development of writing instructors, advance equity in teacher training and graduate education, and support GTAs to use assessment to enhance undergraduate students' educational experiences. Given that an investment in teacher preparation reflects a commitment to undergraduate student success and the next generation of faculty and staff, findings can inform curricula, instruction, and teacher training to better serve all graduates and undergraduates in higher education.

Place: The Institutional Context

Narrative inquiries always "occur in specific places or sequences of places" that shape peoples' lives, experiences, and stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). This research study took place in the FYC Program in the Department of English at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK), one of the largest public institutions in the southeastern U.S. At the time of the study during the 2023–2024 academic year, approximately half of the department's 83 GTAs taught FYC courses in both Fall and Spring semesters, accounting for more than 20% of the population of FYC instructors. The study took place amidst a three-year equitable assessment program (2021–2024), which reflects a significant turn in the department toward supporting the use of equitable and ethical assessment practices in FYC courses. By the end of the program,

more than one-third of FYC instructors in the department used labor-based assessment, including all the participants in this study. I provide greater detail about the institutional context, including the equitable assessment program, teacher training program, and FYC curriculum, in Chapter 3.

Instead, I begin here with a story about this place and the people in it to illustrate the broader local context in which this research study occurred. The impact of the Department's Annual Performance Review (APR) on graduate students, faculty, and staff—including participants in this research study—was unanticipated when this project began. Completed once every ten years, the APR identifies the strengths and opportunities for improvement in the Department, helping set goals and priorities across curricular development and departmental growth for the next decade. The APR began badly for GTAs, they collectively felt, when a scheduling poll was sent to all graduate students in early October 2023 vaguely requesting availability for a meeting called "Graduate Student Meeting with Department Head." A separate email later sent by a Department Administrative Specialist stated that the meeting is for the department head to "talk to you about the upcoming APR that is going to happen in 2024. I know some of you have emailed already asking what the meeting is going to be about, and I didn't know at the time, but just found out this is what it will be a discussion with you and how you can contribute to the process" (October 3, 2023). Later that month, all graduate students received a calendar invite for the meeting without additional context. When graduate students attended the meeting, they learned that the APR review team would meet with them in the spring.

In Spring 2024, graduate students took seriously the opportunity to raise major concerns that had been building since the COVID-19 pandemic and perhaps before. The exigence of the APR steered the Graduate Students in English (GSE) organization, led by vice chair Kaitlyn Alford, to distribute a "Graduate Student Experiences" survey, which received 56 responses

(67.47% response rate). As Assistant Director (AD) of FYC, I supported the graduate student community during this time by collaborating with Kaitlyn and fellow GTAs to design the survey, analyze the qualitative and quantitative results, and co-author a memo sent to select department administrators. Significant themes from the survey later voiced in the APR meeting included the inaccessibility of resources, vast inconsistency in GTA experiences, lack of professionalization support, and a general feeling of the Department being "out of touch" with the harsh realities graduate students face. In May 2024, Kaitlyn and the chair of GSE hosted a closed-door listening session attended by eight department administrators and moderated by an RWL faculty member. During the session, five graduate students representing each program and division shared their individual stories to further illustrate broader themes uncovered by the survey. I attended the listening session to take notes, which were distributed to all graduate students after the session.

The overarching concern of GTA workload—that graduate students did far more work than they were paid to do—had been echoing in the Department (and the university) for many years. At the university level, meager conditions for GTAs persisted. UTK's United Campus Workers (2024) reported that "55% of grad stipends fall below the minimum cost of survival in Knoxville, and 100% of graduate stipend minimums are still far below a living wage." Pushed into action by the upcoming APR, the English Department Head, at the start of the Fall 2023 semester, asked the Composition Office to devise a way to collect data about exactly how much GTAs were working. As AD of FYC, I designed a small study to collect and analyze data with the support of the Director and Associate Director. We developed a "real hours" project that asked GTAs to keep track of the work they did for the teaching of FYC for two weeks, noting the amount of time spent per task. Of the 34 GTAs teaching FYC courses in Fall 2023, 11 tracked their labor through Weeks 5 and 6 (32.4% response rate). We found that GTAs spent on average

17 hours per week per course—70% more than the 10 hours per week per course stipulated in GTAs' contracts. I had hoped the data would be used to secure increased pay for GTAs, but it was instead utilized in a memo to the Dean to propose reducing second-year MA/MFA teaching loads from 2-2 to 2-1, which was ultimately unsuccessful. Instead, the College agreed to reduce English PhD teaching loads to 2-1 with an added professional development requirement.[1] The Department made several additional changes, such as providing stipends for the GSE chair and vice chair, securing improved office space, and implementing new professional development opportunities for graduate students.

I share the story of the APR and subsequent listening session in a limited retelling because the chronicle reflects broader attitudes and concerns that circulated during the time of the study. Through the duration of this study, multiple voices contributed to conversations around workload, labor, and fairness circulating in and around the Department to help improve conditions for current and future GTAs. I hope readers see this study as an effort that comes alongside parallel conversations to create meaningful, lasting programmatic change.

Interaction: The Personal and the Social Justification

Narrative inquiries must "focus on the personal and the social in a balance appropriate to the inquiry" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). I have already introduced myself as the researcher and author of this study and as a fellow GTA to participants; I also work as a tutor and tutor trainer in the Judith Anderson Herbert Writing Center (JAHWC). I find it necessary to also explain my role as AD of FYC. Every year, the Composition Office selects a fourth year (or

[1] The arrangement was articulated in an email from Department Head Dr. Misty Anderson as follows: "everyone in the PhD program will have a baseline 2/1 load, either through an existing or a new RAship. First and fourth year loads are still at 1/1 thanks to Hodges funds, and key Fall fellowships remain in place as well. This arrangement includes the understanding that in the Spring, with the 1 course load, you will have something like 5 hours of RA-style professional development time. This allows us to keep everyone at 50%, or 'graduate student full time,' for which we have to show 20 hours of work each semester" (August 23, 2024).

above) GTA to join the program as, essentially, a graduate WPA, working alongside the Director (a tenure-track faculty member who serves a three- or four-year term) and Associate Director (a non-tenure-track lecturer who serves a three-year term). Although the role is always framed as a "liaison" between GTAs and the Composition Office, the job title reflects some level of programmatic oversight and supervision. Before I began this research study, I understood that my positionality as the incoming AD of FYC would inform my approach to the study. At the time I collected data for this study, I actively led the FYC Program by facilitating workshops, creating curricular materials, sharing resources, and supporting GTAs and FYC instructors. I created syllabus templates, course calendars, Canvas shells, and alternative assessment guidelines that many GTAs, including participants in this research study, used in their own teaching.

No one could have prepared me for the amount of work involved in writing program administration nor could I have anticipated the level of sincere care that I would feel for graduate student instructors. Teaching is an expression of identity, a sentiment I realized each time I would talk with GTAs about teaching and writing in conversations that laid bare their anxieties, fears, self-doubts, hopes, dreams, biases, and morals. My research amplified the responsibility I felt as AD to serve as an advocate for GTAs in the Composition Office and a liaison between department administrators and the student community. From my participants specifically, I learned more about the support that graduate students need and tried to apply those insights immediately to my administrative practice. My participants became the faces I saw when I created new resources, sent supportive emails to the ENGGRAD Listserv, and baked a weekly rotation of cookies. I believe that being an administrator made me a better researcher *and* being a researcher made me a better administrator. I can unequivocally state that this study developed my administrative practice to anticipate the needs and concerns of graduate students. Conducting this

research helped me become a more empathetic, open-minded, and responsive administrator. I am so grateful to my participants for allowing me to work and learn alongside them. In Chapter 3, I analyze how my positionality impacted research design, data collection, and data analysis.

I seek to evoke personal and social interaction when I state that this study takes place within a departmental tradition for RWL graduate students to conduct dissertation research on the experiences of graduate student instructors. Since 2000, RWL graduate students published five dissertations that place the experiences of graduate teaching assistants/associates at the center (see Appendix A). I honor these projects to recognize the doctoral researchers who came before me who also used their dissertation research as a platform to give voice to GTAs. Like four of the authors, I was the AD of FYC while I collected data for my dissertation. With this study, I join a tradition of the graduate students in the Department actively working to intervene and improve their learning and working conditions by conducting research, including activist departmental research by GSE, programmatic research projects such as the equitable assessment program, and dissertation research projects. Through the process of conducting this research study, I learned, as narrative inquirers do, to see myself "as always *in the midst*—located somewhere along the dimensions of time, place, the personal, and the social" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 63). I hope readers have a sense of how this study began and took place *in the midst* of a Department in flux and a community of GTAs committed to institutional and social change.

The personal and the social extends to the disciplinary. As I have stated, the field of rhetoric and composition needs to understand how GTAs develop writing assessment literacy to provide enhanced training and curate a more equitable, supportive environment in which novice instructors learn to teach. While the construct of writing assessment literacy has been studied in the fields of L2 writing (Crusan et al., 2016) and teacher education (Xu & Brown, 2016), it has

not been broadly explored in rhetoric and composition, perhaps in part due to the discipline's complex, tense history with the use of GTAs to teach FYC courses. This research study concentrates on (a) GTAs, because of their standpoints as novice instructors; (b) FYC courses, because of their ubiquitous role in institutions; and, more specifically, (c) GTAs who teach FYC courses, where writing, writing assessment, and writing assessment literacy converge.

Significance of the Study

This research can make a lasting impact on the experiences of graduate student instructors and new writing teachers in postsecondary institutions across the U.S. by explicating the theoretical construct of writing assessment literacy, advancing teacher training and writing pedagogy education, and improving student learning and writing development. The study contributes to the body of knowledge on writing assessment literacy, which impacts writing program administration, writing pedagogy, and curriculum design. Based on this study, the curriculum design of writing pedagogy education seminars, workshops, and trainings can adapt to better respond to the needs of new GTAs, particularly as they learn how to assess writing ethically and equitably. The findings provide immediate implications for UTK's GTA preparation program while constructing theoretical and practical models for teaching training initiatives useful across postsecondary institutions. The research supports WPAs as they design writing pedagogy education, programs, composition practicum courses, teacher trainings, and mentorships to prepare new instructors to teach FYC courses. In the improvement of higher education, "few things are more important than providing teachers with the knowledge, tools, and support that will enable them to teach writing effectively" (Deane, 2022, p. 2), and effective teaching and learning begin and end with writing assessment. The present study has the potential to identify how GTAs assess writing, trace the impact of writing assessment literacy on writing

assessment practices, and uncover the opportunities and challenges that instructors face when assessing writing in FYC courses, which can ultimately lead to more effective teaching, training, and learning for undergraduate students, graduate students, and beyond. In Chapter 6, I offer implications for the discipline of rhetoric and composition as well as UTK's English Department, Composition Office, and ENGL 505: Composition Pedagogy course.

Definitions of Terms

This section provides definitions of key terms used throughout the research study. These preliminary definitions are expanded throughout the dissertation.

Assessment Material

In this research study, I collected participants' assessment materials to provide examples of their writing assessment practices and help GTAs recount and tell stories about their experiences. I define an *assessment material* as a single document (usually a piece of student work) with all of its associated feedback. For example, a five-page essay with twelve marginal comments and one summary comment counts as one assessment material. Assessment materials collected in this study include drafts, final papers, rubrics, grading contracts, summary and marginal comments, and other anonymized written commentary on student work (see Chapter 3 for a detailed explanation). Relatedly, *assessment practices* in the context of this research study include all activities related to feedback, response, grading, and evaluation. In Chapter 4, I present examples of each participants' written feedback to showcase their assessment practices.

Writing Assessment Literacy

Writing assessment literacy, the phenomenon under investigation in this research study, has been defined as the sum of instructors' assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices (Crusan, 2021; Crusan et al., 2016). The tripartite classification mirrors several definitions, such as

Davies' (2008) assessment skills, knowledge, and principles and Fulcher's (2012) practices, principles, and contexts. However, writing assessment literacy is distinct from assessment literacy (Stiggins, 1991) because of its emphasis on how writing is conceptualized, operationalized, taught, and learned. Deborah Crusan (2021), a leading scholar on writing assessment literacy, defines it to include the ability

> to create effective assignments and their accompanying scoring tools, to understand the reasons for assessing their students' writing, to recognize the value of student self-assessment, to identify why, how, and when to use data gathered from assessments, and to carry on their assessment duties ethically and conscientiously. (p. 431)

In this research study, I operationalize writing assessment literacy to include the sum of instructors' assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices. In that, I define *knowledge* as the range of possibilities for assessment gained through education or training; which combines with *beliefs*, deeply held ideas that sub/consciously drive assessment decisions; which materialize in *practices*, which refer to specific methods and tools instructors use to assess writing.

Literacy

The study frames writing assessment literacy development as one facet of GTAs' literacy development. *Literacy development* is a multidimensional, recursive processes closely linked with GTAs' identity development and constrained by institutional, programmatic, and classroom contexts and discourses (e.g., Gee, 1989). Because *literacy* as a construct often evades clear definition (Scribner, 1984), the study draws from several key voices to build this framework, including Deborah Brandt (1998), who finds literacy learning to be bound by culture, community, and economy; Brian Street (1993), who considers literacy as "a social and ideological practice involving fundamental aspects of epistemology, power, and politics" (p.

434); and Megan Brewer (2020), who articulates a conception of literacy as personal growth to locate the individual and their agency amidst these broader social and cultural contexts. Brewer (2020) defines a conception of literacy as "a set of values and beliefs about literacy that color one's way of viewing language and, consequently, the world" (p. 15). Three understandings about literacy prove essential to the construct of writing assessment literacy used in this research study: literacy as a socially bound process (Barton et al., 1999), literacy as a cultural, ideological phenomenon (Street, 1984), and literacy as personal growth (Brewer, 2020).

Graduate Student Instructors

In this study, the term *graduate student instructors* refer to graduate students in English or Rhetoric and Composition programs who teach composition courses as instructors of record as a required component of their graduate education. Institutions use various terms to refer to graduate student instructors, such as Graduate Teaching Associate (GTA), Graduate Assistant (GA), Teaching Assistant (TA), and Graduate Student Instructor (GSI); some scholars prefer *graduate employee* to emphasize their role in the university's workforce (Bérubé, 1998; Bousquet, 2008). While the specifics of these positions vary by institution, GTAs often collectively experience unstable working conditions, low pay, and inconsistent or nonexistent access to benefits such as healthcare (Osorio et al., 2021). At UTK, second-year MA/MFAs and first-year PhDs who teach FYC courses in the English Department are GTAs. As such, this study uses the terms *graduate student instructor* and *GTA* interchangeably to the mirror institutional language at UTK and acknowledge the official titles of the participants in this research study.

Writing Pedagogy Education

Writing pedagogy education (Estrem & Reid, 2012) refers broadly to the various types of training, mentorship, instruction, and preparation that GTAs receive to prepare them to teach

composition courses. Common components of writing pedagogy education include composition pedagogy courses, tutoring and tutor training, teaching assistantship, Departmental workshops, seminars, practicums, orientations, mentorships, and professional development opportunities (Dobrin, 2005; Estrem & Reid, 2012). UTK's writing pedagogy education program for MA/MFAs includes four main components: teaching assistantship, tutoring/tutor training, composition pedagogy coursework, and Composition Office workshops and resources.

Work

Work, the study's first theoretical framework, describes what people create through their employment. Work refers to what people do that demands physical, mental, material, and affective engagement. In its broadest conception, *work* includes both material and immaterial products (Smith, 2005) so that, for example, the work of a graduate student instructor includes lesson planning, teaching, and grading papers as well as their ongoing learning and professional development. I primarily borrow from Smith's (2005) sociological constructs of work and work knowledge to think expansively about what constitutes the work of graduate student instructors.

Labor

Labor, the study's second theoretical framework, refers to the time, energy, and effort that people exert to do their work. Labor accounts for the physical and mental energy applied to do work and create work products. In academic capitalism, GTAs sell their labor in exchange for degree completion (Carter, 2008). Labor describes the very real tensions that GTAs feel in the divisions between numerous roles and responsibilities, such as graduate student, instructor, and scholar. I draw from analyses of academic labor (e.g., Gregory & Winn, 2016) as well as Osorio and colleagues' (2021) articulation of GTA labor struggles to uncover the invisible labor of

GTAs. Pairing the terms for research study, work refers to the products of the effort expended through labor; work is what gets done and labor is how it gets done.

Organization of Dissertation

Narrative inquirers, as D. Jean Clandinin (2016) wrote, often need to justify their research approach in three ways: "personally, in terms of why this narrative inquiry matters to us as individuals; practically, in terms of what difference this research might make to practice; and socially or theoretically, in terms of what difference this research might make to theoretical understandings or to making situations more socially just" (p. 35). To this list, I add methodologically, in terms of why narrative inquiry offers an appropriate approach for the study given the research questions. Following this directive, this narrative inquiry project consists of six chapters. Chapter 1 (this chapter) provides the personal, practical, and social justifications that brought me to this research study. Chapter 2 offers theoretical and social justifications that situate the research study within the broader disciplinary history of writing pedagogy education and first-year composition. Chapter 3 details the methodological justifications for the research study. Chapter 4 presents the eight participant narratives crafted through this research study, "leaving evidence" (Mingus, n. d.) of GTAs' experiences with writing assessment literacy development. Chapter 5 applies thematic analysis to the narratives to answer the study's research questions, blending results and discussion as the presentation of data and data analysis overlap. Chapter 6 ends the study with a discussion of its implications and conclusion, describing key recommendations and the significance of the study for WPAs and educators.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

University writing programs have long relied on graduate student instructors to teach first-year composition courses (Berlin, 1987), often with incomplete pedagogical training (Estrem & Reid, 2012; Tremmel, 2001) and even less preparation to assess writing (Saenkhum, 2020; Weigle, 2007). To analyze this assertion and explicate the current state of GTA preparation, this chapter explores the interchanges between three histories: the history of first-year composition, the history of GTA training, and the history of postsecondary writing assessment. I layer these entangled histories to argue that the pervasive debasement of FYC (Miller, 1991; Samuels, 2017), intwined with the exploitative labor demands of writing assessment (Hairston, 1986), led to the subordination of those who teach FYC courses, particularly GTAs, rendering invisible their labor and labor struggles. It is within this uneven landscape that GTAs live, work, and learn, revealing the significant labor demands of writing assessment literacy development.

The first section, "Layered Histories: Teacher Training & Writing Assessment in FYC," traces the overlapping histories of first-year composition, GTA preparation, and postsecondary writing assessment situated within sociocultural and disciplinary contexts that shaped U.S. higher education from the late nineteenth century. Composition instructors, including GTAs, received little pedagogical training to prepare them to teach FYC courses until the mid-twentieth century. GTA preparation to assess writing typically focused exclusively on the marking of mechanical errors. I attribute the overall lack of attention to writing assessment in teacher training to pervasive negative perceptions of the FYC course and its students as well as the emphasis on grading as a gatekeeping tool for correctness. I demonstrate that the discipline's

eventual move away from remediation and mechanical correctness in the FYC classroom inadvertently resulted in a reduction in teacher preparation on writing assessment. Due in part to these historical factors, GTAs often enter the composition classroom without enough training on assessment theory and practice. Building toward present day, the second section, "The Landscape of Contemporary Writing Pedagogy Education," synthesizes contemporary approaches to GTA preparation, including current research on writing pedagogy education that considers how to effectively prepare graduate students to teach composition courses. In doing so, it highlights stories of GTA preparation that center the voices of graduate student instructors. Reviewing a broad swath of literature on teacher preparation and writing assessment, the section notes that research on training teachers to assess writing has received insufficient attention.

Addressing this absence, the third section, "Factors that Impact the Writing Assessment of GTAs," identifies and describes five factors that impact GTAs' writing assessment: inadequate training, prior and tacit knowledge, resistance, liminality, and labor demands. The fourth section, "Studying Writing Assessment Literacy Narratively Through Work and Labor," defines and explores *writing assessment literacy* as a construct and an object of study in scholarly discourse across the disciplines of educational theory, L2 writing/applied linguistics, and composition studies. I pair the phenomenon of *writing assessment literacy* with theories of *work* and *labor* to identify literacy development as an area to which GTAs devote significant time and energy. The chapter concluded with a review of key gaps in the literature that situate the purpose of this research and its contribution to the field of rhetoric and composition.

Layered Histories: Teacher Training & Writing Assessment in FYC

The history of preparing new instructors to teach postsecondary writing in the United States is a complex story perhaps best told alongside the changing contours of writing

assessment theory and practice. Writing instruction, writing assessment, and the corresponding training of writing instructors at the postsecondary level have all been shaped by sociocultural movements and disciplinary imperatives. Underlying ideologies and pedagogies that shape writing assessment in the composition classroom also inform approaches to training GTAs. The following pages map a selected history of GTA preparation alongside the history of writing assessment in U.S. higher education. Loosely following the contours of established waves of writing assessment (Wardle & Roozen, 2012; Yancey, 1999), each sub-section begins with prevailing historical contexts, social movements, and educational theories to show how postsecondary education has shaped GTA training and the use of writing assessment in FYC courses. The literature review overlaps waves of writing assessment with movements in GTA preparation to show interconnections between writing assessment and teacher training. I provide a broad overview of my argument in the next two paragraphs to preview how the development of writing assessment theory and practice relates to GTA preparation on writing assessment.

As an overview, the earliest graduate student instructors appeared as teaching assistants in the first English Composition courses at Harvard University in 1885 (Kitzhaber, 1963; Stewart, 1982). The institution of a written English Composition entrance exam led to the creation of the first remedial composition course, which used assessment as a tool for mechanical correctness. Consequently, the first GTAs were graders who used assessment to serve a gatekeeping function for the university (Connors, 1985). The first seminar designed to train graduate students to teach English composition began at Harvard in 1912 with a limited focus on using assessment to criticize and critique students (Greenough, 1913). Increased college enrollments after the 1944 GI Bill led to a proliferation of FYC courses, the creation of the field of rhetoric and composition, and the call for more training for composition instructors (Downing

et al., 2002). Yet, increased teacher training aimed to serve undergraduate students and English Departments rather than support the professional development of composition instructors (Stenberg, 2005). Conceptions of assessment as objective tests and a lingering focus on grammar continued the trend of inattention to writing assessment in GTA preparation. FYC carried a negative corrective label, which led to condescending perceptions of the course and the status of those who taught it—contingent faculty, part-time lecturers, and graduate student instructors (Johnson, 2003; Miller, 1991), and often women.

Through the 1970s and 1980s, efforts to train and professionalize teachers increased (Wilhoit, 2001). English Departments took responsibility to better prepare GTAs to teach FYC courses (Eble, 1972). Concurrently, the emergence of holistic essay scoring meant that grading required high exertion of effort (Hairston, 1986). Even with more expressive essays, assessment was used widely to rank and sort students (Adler-Kassner & O'Neill, 2010) and instructors spent more time than ever assessing writing. Alongside cognitive and process-based models of composition emerged programmatic assessment, turning critique inward to improving writing programs, writing assessment, and teacher training. GTAs remained a significant labor force to teach FYC courses, and the field acknowledged more of the challenges associated with high workloads and incomplete training. A chronological layering of the histories of teacher training and writing assessment in the context of the FYC classroom demonstrates how both areas have been shaped by powerful external forces and how, at their intersection, the construct of writing assessment literacy has been historically underexplored and undervalued as an area of inquiry.

First-Year Composition and the First Graduate Student Instructors

Although the field of rhetoric and composition forwards composition pedagogy as a key disciplinary charge, the need to train new instructors to teach composition courses precedes the

establishment of the discipline. The genesis of FYC, postsecondary writing assessment, and the use of GTAs to teach composition courses traces to the first written college entrance examination developed at Harvard University in 1874 (Berlin, 1987; Crowley, 1998; Kitzhaber, 1963). The university's unprecedented move from oral recitation to written examination established the use of writing assessment for admission, placement, and curricular decisions in higher education. The written entrance exam primarily served to assess applicants' grammar, spelling, and use of rhetoric (Grommon, 1986; Miller, 1991). Writers were judged harshly on mechanical correctness; due to errors in grammatical conventions such as capitalization, punctuation, and syntax, more than half of the students did not pass (Connors, 1985).

Low passing rates joined the social milieu of the late nineteenth century, marked by "Western expansion, post-Civil War dislocations and unease, [and] industrialization," to foster "linguistic social anxieties" (Miller, 1991, p. 48). The industrialist economy and burgeoning class systems of the early twentieth century conflated social and educational issues, which consequently "establish[ed] stronger boundaries (and a stronger frame) around language and practices considered 'acceptably' aligned with the values and ideologies" of the white and wealthy elite (Adler-Kassner & O'Neill, 2010, p. 43). These conditions created a cultural basis for standard language ideologies and the gatekeeping role of early entrance examinations and writing assessment (Gomes, 2012). The emphasis on accuracy and uniformity on the written exam, enforced by the creation of the College Entrance Examination Board in 1900, deepened the "American cultural preoccupation with linguistic correctness and the first American college literacy crisis" (Crusan, 2010, p. 21). These conditions created and justified Harvard's decision to create *remedial* composition courses rooted in a hyperfixation with marking mechanical errors

(Miller, 1991). High failure rates on the entrance exam led to the institution of remedial courses to teach students the grammar and style rules they lacked.

From its inception, the college composition course was associated with fixing errors and the students who made them. The "prototypical freshman English course" at Harvard, labeled English A, began in 1885 (Miller, 1991, p. 50). The content of the course included reading classic literature, writing narrowly constructed arguments, and learning grammatical rules (Adler-Kassner & O'Neill, 2010; Connors, 1985; Crowley, 1998; Stewart, 1982). English composition courses began, by design, as corrective. In response to the mechanical incorrectness of students' entrance exams, "the goal of the freshman writing course came to be teaching the avoidance of error rather than teaching genuine communicative competence" (Connors, 1985, p. 65). The curriculum and the assessment of student work "focused on technical skill in grammar and usage, paragraph coherence, and the modes of discourse" (Pytlik, 2001, p. 4). The first graduate student instructors were teaching assistants who functioned as graders in these English composition courses; James Berlin (1987) marks "the use of graduate students as 'temporary faculty'" at the time as "the beginning of the graduate assistantship" (p. 6). While graduate student instructors contributed significantly to their assigned courses, English Departments at Harvard and universities throughout the northeast began to receive student complaints that reflected the "inadequacy" of instructors' purported "[in]ability to teach elementary English composition" (Greenough, 1913, p. 109). Chester Noyes Greenough (1913), WPA and English A instructor at Harvard University, wrote that the inadequacy was most evident in "the dismay with which even the best of [the graduate student instructors] have approached the unfamiliar task of teaching Freshmen to write" (p. 109)—dismay perhaps associated with bearing the huge responsibility for teaching first-year students without adequate training.

Accordingly, in 1912, Harvard developed English 67, the first seminar of its kind designed to instruct graduate students in teaching English composition (Marshall, 2004). The course description read: "English 67—English Composition. Practice in Writing, in the Criticism of Manuscript, and in the Instruction by Conferences and Lectures. Discussion of the Principles of Composition and of the Organization and Management of Courses in English Composition" (Greenough, 1913, p. 109). Graduate students in English 67 practiced composing the themes from English A, provided criticism and corrections on sample student work, and listened to lectures. Graduate students "observed classes of experienced teachers, wrote lectures for an imaginary freshman class which they presented to their classmates for discussion, and simulated the conference situation by going over with the course instructor the themes of the 10 freshmen" (Pytlik, 2001, p. 7). Given that the leading conception of writing assessment at the time was the *criticism of manuscript,* GTAs primarily learned how to deliver critique and correct errors. Thus, the role of assessment in GTA preparation was constrained to the judgment of grammatical correctness. Greenough (1913) clarified that "the course is one in English composition rather more than in methods of teaching," emphasizing the practical nature of the course and the focus on judging writing rather than teaching writing (p. 110). Despite these early measures to properly prepare graduate student instructors to teach, Greenough (1913) operated based on the idea that

> [t]he chief requisite for success in teaching freshmen to write is to be able to write everything that a freshman would be required to write, and to do it enough better than a freshman can be expected to do it to make everybody concerned feel that the instructor belongs behind the desk and not down among the beginners on the benches. (p. 110)

These perceptions provide documentation of the double-bind that GTAs have experienced since the inception of the English composition course—that the purported most important quality of

teaching writing was to write *better than a first-year student can be expected* to do so, yet the training GTAs received focused primarily on mechanics, grammar, and style above meaning and substance. The main modes of instruction in English 67 and English A were lectures, which further reflects a transmission model of education. The earliest graduate student instructors, first as teaching assistants and soon after instructors of record, were positioned by a transactional model of education as graders with the duty to mark grammatical errors in student writing.

Moving through the early twentieth century, labor conditions exacerbated the challenges of novice graduate student instructors. During this time, the "standard practice" was "lecture-sized" English composition courses with "between 140 and 200 students," which meant a significant amount of time and effort was used to "grade hundreds of papers each week—often more than 3,000 a year" (Connors, 1985, p. 66). With so many students, and so much writing to grade, instructors had no choice but to deal with student compositions by marking errors on a surface level rather than engaging with student ideas. The "'work' of composition" was "a staggering number of essays whose correction was all anyone had time for and which invited irritation with any errors that impeded reading" (Miller, 1991, p. 60). Despite the implementation of a course designed to teach graduate students how to teach English composition, instructors did not receive enough preparation for classroom teaching and assessment (Crowley, 1998; Tremmel, 2001). The training GTAs did receive gave little attention to composition theory and pedagogy, emphasizing instead mastery of grammar and style rules. The origin of the English composition course in response to ungrammatical entrance exams, along with the penalizing nature of the grammar-based assessment, permanently built FYC upon "corrective, remedial ground" (Miller, 1991, p. 63). This foundation cemented the low status of FYC courses and those who teach them—frequently graduate student instructors—even today.

The Creation of a Discipline & Doctoral Education in Rhetoric and Composition

The development of doctoral education in English, which began in the early twentieth century, further intertwined the relationship between GTAs and FYC. English graduate programs mandated that their students teach composition courses to earn their degrees. The establishment of English as a research discipline systematized the institutional structure that Stephen North (2002) calls "College English Teaching, Inc." (p. 118). Under this configuration, "doctoral students contributed to the university economy through both their tuition dollars and their labor, payments that ultimately served to maximize graduate faculty's profits as researchers" (Stenberg, 2005, p. 9). By working as teaching assistants and instructors of record, "doctoral students generate[d] credit hours at a fraction of the price of full-time faculty" (Stenberg, 2005, p. 9). Because of its clear benefits to Departments of English, their faculty, and institutional budgets, the use of GTAs to teach FYC courses became a commonplace in postsecondary education in the early 1900s (Connors, 1985; North, 2002). With the increase in the use of GTAs, some universities followed Harvard's lead to offer a formal teacher training course. In 1912 and 1913, the *English Journal* documented scholarship that asked questions of how to train writing teachers (Dobrin, 2005), indicating a growing interest in GTA preparation. In perhaps one of the most significant developments after the turn of the twentieth century, the Institute for Administrative Offices of Higher Institutions centralized its conference at the University of Chicago in 1930 around the theme of "The Training of College Teachers" (Marting, 1987, p. 35)—perhaps the earliest one-time gathering for university administrators to discuss GTAs preparation. While the conference identified current limitations in teacher training, these conversations did not ye translate into actionable commitments for universities (Marting, 1987).

Sociocultural change and the creation of a discipline converged during the mid-1940s and mid-1950s to motivate the improvement of teacher training. Increased college enrollments led to the proliferation of FYC courses while universities faced public pressures to develop a more literate working class. The 1944 GI Bill brought more than two million veterans to college courses (Downing et al., 2002; Skinnell, 2016). The steep increase in enrollments and the need for writing education for new college students led to a steep increase in FYC courses, which were primarily staffed by graduate student instructors (Bryan, 1950). The impact of the GI Bill also linked the influence of the government need to public and private postsecondary education (Downing et al., 2002). The establishment of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) and emergence of rhetoric and composition as its own discipline in 1949 marked a significant turning point in GTA preparation writing programs and in English departments. Rhetoric and composition took, as its disciplinary charge, the teaching of writing to first-year students and, by association, the training of the instructors who would teach such courses, many of whom were GTAs. Throughout the 1950s, the *CCC* journal published articles about teacher training and GTA seminars on composition pedagogy (Pytlik, 2001, p. 12). Nationally, "the advent of the Cold War and the launching of *Sputnik* in 1957" inextricably linked "education to national security interests" (Downing et al., 2002, p. 7). During this time, Downing and colleagues (2002) notice, "university disciplines in the humanities functioned in part to bolster the patriotic mythos of the nation-state" (p. 7). Within the uneasy political landscape, FYC courses served pivotal assessment purposes for universities.

As one of the first courses that college students took upon entering the university, and as the primary course designed to teach writing skills, FYC courses "produced an economically useful process of sorting, screening, and selecting students whose basic literacy skills could then

be certified as eligible to contribute to the ranks of the professional/managerial class" (Downing et al., 2002, p. 7). The post-WWII era brought booms in student enrollment (Minkel, 1987) that, paired with rising popularity of doctoral work in English, led to the first widespread arguments that doctoral education must include adequate teacher training (Stenberg, 2005). However, the primary reason for providing appropriately educated instructors centered around undergraduate student needs rather than the professional development of the instructors themselves. The ancillary learning of composition instructors only occurred in service of the need to meet university staffing and enrollment demands.

In response to increasing and changing student demographics, English Departments gradually implemented pedagogy courses (Pytlik & Liggett, 2001) that focused on both the theory and practice of teaching English composition (Dobrin, 2005), though composition pedagogy was still seen as a small, practical, and peripheral part of English studies. The separation of rhetoric and composition from English studies also created institutional structures that reinforced divisions between teaching and research. FYC programs, as divisions within English Departments or as independent writing programs, meant that universities could devote more time and effort to the training of new instructors (Pytlik & Liggett, 2001). WPAs gained expertise in composition pedagogy, which led to an increase in rhetoric in FYC curricula (Connors, 1985) and, eventually, broadening writing assessment theories and practices.

Objectivist Epistemologies & Objective Tests

The legacy of industrialization from the early 1900s coupled with ongoing urbanization continued the influence of the industrial economy on postsecondary education and teacher training that expanded in the 1960s. Increasing enrollments in the post-war years marked "the beginning of the large-scale employment of graduate students as teachers" (Chism, 1998, p. 2).

The use of GTAs also became commonplace in lower-division courses in mathematics, speech communication, physical sciences, and languages (Chism, 1998). Despite the implementation of composition practicum courses, teacher preparation programs were still in their earliest days. Albert Kitzhaber, in the 1963 Dartmouth Study of Student Writing, characterized composition instructors, typically "graduate students and junior instructors" (p. 4), through the difficulties they experienced due to uneven preparation: "Some of these teachers are enthusiastic, experienced, expert; more are bored or resentful, lack previous teaching experience, are ill-informed on what they are supposed to teach . . . and are teaching with little supervision or guidance" (p. 14). The status of composition suffered alongside its teaching and its instructors; Kitzhaber (1963) observed that the FYC course is "often viewed as subcollegiate, thought of as a practical, a 'how-to,' and denied intellectual rigor" (qtd. in Miller, 1991, p. 11). Institutional perceptions of the remedial, corrective, low status of the FYC course seemed to subliminally justify the lack of training provided to novice instructors.

As universities increasingly employed GTAs in "independent teaching roles, student criticism of the quality of education escalated, and institutions began to respond" with more concerted and "formal efforts to prepare graduate students to teach" (Chism, 1998, p. 3). Previously, graduate students relied on faculty mentors to model university teaching as well as the occasional teaching course (Ronkowski, 1998). Departments continued to operate under the legacy assumption that "anyone who had completed a given level of education could turn around and teach" introductory undergraduate courses (Labaree, 2008, p. 291). Teacher preparation across universities "involved neither formal instruction nor informal apprenticeship. Instead, the rule was simply: take the class, teach the class" (Labaree, 2008, p. 291). During this era, however, discipline-specific teacher training programs began, and the mid-twentieth century saw

a rise in concentrated efforts to train GTAs (Chism, 1998) and the larger population of composition instructors (Tremmel, 2001). The "training device of choice" for GTAs often included "protocols, which involved watching and then imitating ideal teaching behaviors modeled on videotape or by a demonstrator" (Chism, 1998, p. 3). The interest in teacher preparation in the mid-1960s refracts in landmark publications at the time, including *The Education of Teachers of English for American Schools and Colleges* (Grommon, 1963)*, Themes, Theories, and Therapy: The Teaching of Writing in College* (Kitzhaber, 1963)*, and The College Teaching of English* (Gerber, 1965) (Marting, 1987).

The 1960s and 1970s brought an increased emphasis in the FYC curriculum on rhetoric and writing processes (Adler-Kassner & O'Neill, 2010) and, slowly, a shift toward expanding conceptions of writing assessment. In the early 1960s, more graduate students became responsible for teaching college writing courses as instructors of record. At the same time, the content of the FYC curriculum experienced a sweeping turn toward rhetoric and rhetorical strategies rather than grammar and mechanics (Bridges et al., 1986, p. 13). During this era, GTA training commonly utilized approaches such as credit-bearing writing pedagogy courses, summer workshops, and rhetoric and composition graduate programs, alongside "emerging respectability for the teaching of writing" (Pytlik, 2001, p. 14). While the teaching of composition finally held a prominent disciplinary and institutional position that gained recognition of the teaching of composition as real "work," it was "work of a particularly subordinate kind;" the FYC course was still often seen as "literally 'ground work'" that preceded students' upper-division coursework (Miller, 1991, p. 128). The ancillary status of FYC continued to subordinate students and their instructors, who were most often graduate students and/or women.

Alongside changing preparation for the teaching of FYC courses, the discipline moved toward objective tests and rubrics as measures of writing ability. Writing testing used indirect measures of writing ability such as multiple-choice grammar tests to predominantly "test something assumed to be related to the behavior" of writing, not "the behavior itself" (Yancey, 1999, p. 486). In L2 writing studies, the ESL writing classroom also used multiple-choice and indirect tests (Weigle 2002), though it saw an earlier turn toward direct assessment and written essays than composition studies (Crusan, 2010). With written essays, instructors were pushed toward standardization, inter-rater agreement, and reliability (Yancey, 1999). These pressures amplified when the Educational Testing Service developed the first standardized writing rubric in 1961 (Broad, 2003). The widespread belief in the efficacy of indirect, objective testing methods gained dominance due to psychometric testing trends in the field of educational measurement (O'Neill et al., 2009). The positivist theories embedded within psychometric testing (Scarino, 2013), which valued "generalizability, context-independence, statistical analysis, secrecy, and control," shaped testing practices (Broad, 2003, pp. 13–14). However, as Yancey (1999) contends, any wave of assessment reflects only a dominant narrative, one that conveys a false sense of agreement within the field. Yancey (1999) found that the first wave of writing assessment was characterized by "disjunction between classroom practice and testing practice" (p. 487). Adler-Kassner and O'Neill (2010) agree that these "earlier positivist frames were primarily focused on sorting and ranking of students, while most writing teachers and assessment practitioners are more interested in using writing assessment to improve teaching and learning" (p. 73). The need to reconcile these disjunctions led to a new generative wave of writing assessment steered by the practices, pedagogies, and needs of FYC instructors, many of whom were graduate students.

Holistic Scoring & Accountability for Training New Teachers

By the early 1970s, departments and institutions began to acknowledge their responsibility to undergraduate and graduate students alike to train new GTAs comprehensively. By organizing efforts to professionalize and prepare GTAs, universities began to publicly acknowledge the significant impact that GTAs have on undergraduate education and key metrics like retention and achievement. But these commitments were not without challenges given that they surfaced unaddressed issues of labor and equity. The era was predicted by demographers to see a dramatic fall in student enrollments in the coming decades, which caused "those who controlled academic budgets" to "keep their budgets flexible to avoid commitments in permanent appointments" (Miller, 1991, p. 145). Although the fall did not occur and enrollment rates remained steady, institutions had made a permanent financial move away from hiring mostly tenure-track faculty toward hiring non-faculty teachers who teach lower-division courses, including non-tenure-track and part-time faculty, lecturers, and GTAs. Through the 1980s, "tenured faculty lines continue[d] to decrease while temporary, part-time, and graduate employees [did] the bulk of undergraduate teaching," including FYC courses (Downing et al., 2002, p. 8). To emphasize the significance of the institutional structures that keep NTT faculty and instructors in lower-division courses, Miller (1991) acknowledges, "it is difficult to imagine the status of composition and its professionals if this prediction and subsequent refusals to add or replace faculty positions had not occurred" (pp. 145–146). The increasing use of NTT faculty and GTAs in FYC courses further subjugated the status of composition and its instructors (e.g., Carter, 2008), who typically occupy contingent places in the institution. During these decades, contingent faculty "saw themselves not as a flexible workforce but as underpaid, disrespected professionals cheated by a system that was also cheating their students" (Schnell & Stock, 2001,

p. 16). FYC courses became dependent on a workforce of overworked, underpaid employees (Downing et al., 2002; Tremmel, 2001); what the university saw as *flexibility* was felt by instructors as *instability*. Universities created a deeply rooted reliance on the use of GTAs to serve as instructors of record in FYC courses. Since then, English Departments have "trace[d] an uneasy course between exploitation and apprentice training" for GTAs (Eble, 1972, p. 390).

Despite the disciplinary milieu to better equip new college composition instructors, "more talk than action" surrounded GTA preparation so far (Marting, 1987, p. 40). Reversing course, the 1970s marked steady growth in GTA training, development, and professional programs at U.S. universities (Eble, 1972). Departmental GTA training programs rooted in disciplinary specialization "were formalized as part of the movement that created instructional development and teaching excellence centers across the country" (Ronkowski, 1998, p. 41). This growth addressed a significant need; as Stephen Wilhoit (2001) reflected, few English Departments effectively prepared GTAs to teach before this time. Many of these revisions aimed to finally centralize teacher preparation as a key facet of graduate study (Bowman, 1963; Eble, 1972). Until the 1980s, most universities in the U.S. operated under the belief that "anyone who could write well enough to be in graduate school in English could teach writing without any instruction or support" (Weiser, 2001, p. 40). However, more programs aimed to reframe "the teaching of college composition as an activity requiring some specialized knowledge, some disciplinary familiarity, if not expertise" (Weiser, 2001, p. 41). Strategies for the preparation of GTAs commonly included "class visitations, mentors, apprenticeships, rhetoric courses, group grading of papers, reading assignments from professional journals, student instructor conferences, writing about teaching" (Pytlik, 2001, p. 14). The most common dimensions of teacher training programs included apprenticeship, composition practicum, and courses in,

separately, composition theory and composition pedagogy (Stenberg, 2005). The first official national conference on TA training took place at The Ohio State University in 1986 (Chism, 1998; Marting, 1987). This national and institutional attention publicly recognized "the fact that TAs were carrying a large part of the undergraduate load and that efforts to prepare these graduate students to teach were in their infancy" (Chism, 1998, p. 4). Despite national attention, GTA preparation efforts were slow to take off and grow beyond the local level.

Graduate student instructors faced significant challenges with writing assessment, even as the second wave of writing assessment surfaced in the postsecondary writing classroom from 1970 to 1986. Moving from indirect to direct writing assessment, the second wave emphasized holistically scored essays as a direct measure of assessment designed to generate "a sample of the behavior that we seek to examine"—a students' work (Yancey, 1999, p. 486). The second wave marked a significant turn "against current-traditional rhetorical practices that emphasized correctness and the assessment methods to enforce it" (Huot, 2002, p. 8). However, in practice, many composition instructors continued to operate under the "conventional wisdom" that good instructors do two things: "first, one must mark all student papers meticulously and comment on them copiously; second, one must hold one-to-one student conferences regularly . . . the assumption that underlies this doctrine is that students' writing will improve in direct proportion to the amount of time their teachers spend on their papers" (Hairston, 1986, p. 117). In "On Not Being a Composition Slave," Hairston (1986) acknowledged that

> this intensive model for marking compositions works the greatest hardship on the graduate student teachers. If they accept the doctrine that they must mark every error on a paper, make comments that show the students how to improve, and then have them review their papers, they will either invest far more time than they can afford on student

> papers, or they will constantly feel guilty because they are not doing their job right. Chances are that they will err on the side of too much grading because reading a text closely and criticizing it is what they do best. (p. 119)

In recognition of these challenges and the legacy of the apprenticeship model of learning to teach writing (see Johnson, 2003), teacher training programs began to more explicitly address writing assessment as an essential component of composition pedagogy.

Emerging composition theory in the discipline also inspired a concerted focus on writing assessment. The cognitive approach to composition that promoted writing as a process, led by scholars such as Nancy Sommers (1980) and Linda Flower and John R. Hayes (1981), marked a key turning point in the second wave of writing assessment (Adler-Kassner & O'Neill, 2010). As psychometric testing waned in the writing classroom (but remained central to programmatic and placement decisions), the second wave of writing assessment emphasized validity more than reliability. Through this wave, cognitive approaches to writing development led to sociocultural paradigms. Particularly in the 1980s, the field of composition studies broadened to study multiliteracies and sociolinguistics (Adler-Kassner & O'Neill, 2010). The influence of sociolinguistics, multiliteracies, and writerly identities paralleled the emergence of teacher learning as an area of research in education. Scholarly interest turned to how both first-year writers and graduate students learn to think. Building from a tradition of exploring "questions about the content of teacher learning," education research began to focus on "questions about how teachers acquire, generate, and learn to use knowledge in teaching" (Feiman-Nemser, 2008, p. 697). Research on teacher learning included instructors from P-12 levels and postsecondary education. Four broad themes—"learning to *think* like a teacher, learning to *know* like a teacher, learning to *feel* like a teacher, and learning to *act* like a teacher" (Feiman-Nemser, 2008, p.

698)—characterized teacher training and drove scholarship on teacher preparation. Entwined with applied linguistics, L2 writing pedagogy began to turn to communicative language teaching to emphasize the contexts in which students write. As student demographics continued to diversify at increasing rates, the turn to more social perspectives on writing and writing development led to more significant shifts in the theory and practice of writing assessment and broadening attention to assessment in teacher preparation at secondary and postsecondary levels.

By the late-1980s, the long-standing belief that anyone who can write well can teach writing well waned from teacher preparation (Weiser, 2001). More universities and composition programs started to see positive results in response to "viewing the teaching of college composition as an activity requiring some specialized knowledge, some disciplinary familiarity, if not expertise" (Weiser, 2001, p. 41). The increase in thorough teacher training emerged from the research of previous decades and from necessity. The results of a survey of teaching assistantship found that "77% of the freshman composition courses are taught by TAs" (Puccio, 1988, p. 11). Ten years later, a 1997 MLA survey found that "adjunct and part-time teachers and GTAs teach between 52 percent of first-year composition courses at institutions granting four-year degrees and 95 percent of such courses at institutions granting advanced degrees" (DeVoss et al., 2001, p. 262). These surveys document the significant number of FYC courses that GTAs taught and continue to teach at postsecondary institutions.

Comprehensive Teacher Training & Programmatic Assessment

In the 1990s, the increasing influence of process-based composition and consideration of theories of learning and development led to more research-informed teacher preparation from cognitive and social perspectives. Jody Nyquist and Jo Sprague (1998), educational researchers who focused on the graduate student experience in higher education, published seminal research

that used perspectives from human behavior and social science to study GTA development in the 1990s. What Feiman-Nemser (2008) characterizes as "learning to *think* like a teacher" shifted the focus in GTA preparation toward "a critical examination of one's existing beliefs, a transition to pedagogical thinking, and the development of meta-cognitive awareness" (p. 698). The discipline of rhetoric and composition experienced a parallel increase in attention to teacher learning with a focus on preparing new FYC instructors. These two disciplinary tracks of research, while complementary, remained separate. Historically, each discipline's research on teacher education maintains a more professional and practical mission rather than theoretical. Educational research typically focuses primarily on P-12 contexts, inclusive of teaching writing and any subject, while research on college-level teacher preparation becomes more discipline-specific. The division between these similar-yet-different fields of teacher education is evidenced by the separation of organizations like NCTE and CCCC without a national conference on writing pedagogy education that spans these contexts (Reid, 2011). Educational research certainly has much to offer the field of rhetoric and composition in best approaches for training new instructors, whether those instructors go on to teach high school seniors or first-year college students.

The increase in GTAs as instructors of record necessitated an increase in formal GTA preparation programs. By 1988, when Paul Puccio presented "Graduate Instructor Representation and Writing Programs" at CCCC, the popularity of teacher preparation had increased from previous decades (Wilhoit, 2001, p. 17). Puccio (1988) surveyed 50 English departments and found that the majority required GTA training through pre-service workshops and orientations, credit-bearing composition theory and pedagogy courses, and classroom teaching observations and evaluations. He reported that most writing programs provide some form of pre-service orientation, credit-bearing composition pedagogy course, and teaching observations from faculty

members. During this time, GTAs maintained a high level of responsibility and workload for first-year students, and many universities committed to more thorough training and preparation.

The discipline also began to recognize and make visible GTAs' challenges GTAs, bringing to light some of the difficulties GTAs had always experienced in the composition classroom. GTAs are often first-time instructors whose pedagogical approaches develop as they teach, adding a layer of difficulty to the first semester of teaching. GTAs also enter the classroom with variable levels of preparation. GTAs "are not only generally less experienced that most faculty; they have the added burden of being students as well as teachers, they do not have job security, and they are often closer in age to the students they teach" (Puccio, 1988, p. 2). By this time, institutions had begun a permanent and irreversible reliance on GTAs to teach FYC courses, but they had yet to address many of the difficulties of assigning graduate students to teach courses. Minkel (1987) summarized the key complications for programs that use GTAs to teach lower-division courses in any discipline as

> the use of graduate assistants who have no experience in teaching and who are given no pedagogical instruction; the use of graduate assistants who have completed little, if any, graduate-level training in the discipline in which they teach; the use of graduate assistants who lack interest in teaching or who are unsuited for it in terms of personality; and the placement of TAs in complete charge of undergraduate courses, without guidance or supervision. (p. 28)

As Dean of the Graduate School at the University of Tennessee, Minkel (1987) voiced concerns for teaching assistants and GTAs, recognizing that any graduate student set to interact with undergraduate students in a classroom context required appropriately thorough training.

During this era, departmental GTA training programs prepared instructors to teach courses to first-year students (Ronkowski, 1998). Centralized university-wide training programs and departmental programs became common (Mintz, 1998). The "idea of a developmental continuum for graduate students" gained prominence, providing continued professional development beyond the first year (Chism, 1998, p. 6). More programs recognized teacher training as an ongoing process for graduate students, a process that develops through stages and the need to progressively gain more responsibilities for teaching over time with guidance, mentorship, and support. Increased research in teacher education from discipline of education, coupled with ongoing research from rhetoric and composition, served to validate the need for GTA preparation. The paradigm shift from positivism to postmodernism significantly impacted teacher education research (Cochran-Smith & Demers, 2008, p. 1010). Based on this research, teacher preparation programs moved from transmission models of education to constructivist conceptions of teaching and learning (Cochran-Smith & Demers, 2008). These new theoretical lenses reshaped how graduate students were taught about writing, learning, and pedagogy, which subsequently changed how students were taught in lower-division courses such as FYC.

As departments turned inward to invest resources in their GTAs, they also began assessing inward with a rise in program assessment. The third wave of writing assessment, which spanned 1986 to 1999, centered around portfolio and programmatic assessment (Yancey, 1999). The prevalence of direct assessment in the previous wave enabled a new multifaceted approach that moved from assessing one singular text to assessing multiple texts over time in writing portfolios, which emerged in mainstream and ESL writing programs (Crusan, 2010). Portfolio assessment, rooted in individual writing development, saw a turn away from standardization and toward localization in the writing classroom. Portfolio assessment also drew the field's attention

toward more complex conceptions of identity and "the self" (Yancey, 1999, p. 499). The major theories of writing that undergird the third wave fully shifted from positivist and quantitative frameworks to interpretive and qualitative frameworks (Broad, 2003). Sociocultural views of learning turned the field firmly away from naturalist paradigms toward "interpretive views" of science that understand knowledge as subjective, contextual, and interactive (Scarino, 2013, p. 313). Sociocultural principles—"site-based, locally-controlled, context-sensitive, rhetorically based, [and] accessibility"—drove writing assessment decisions (Huot, 1996, p. 562). Consolidating debates from the previous movements, the third wave sought to balance validity and reliability in assessment methods.

As Yancey (1999) summarizes, assessment from 1950 to 1999 "can be narrativized as the teacher-layperson (often successfully) challenging the (psychometric) expert, developing and then applying both expertise and theory located not in psychometrics, but in rhetoric, in reading and hermeneutics, and, increasingly, in writing practice" (p. 485). Within emerging sociocultural paradigms of teaching and learning, the field turned a reflexive lens toward personal, social, and rhetorical dimensions of writing assessment. Assessment also gained a critical eye; "the idea that classroom assessment practices could both afford and constrain student learning began to gain widespread acceptance," recognizing that "most of the time, the impact of assessment practices was to limit, and even to reduce, student learning" (William, 2011, p. 13). The increasingly strategic lens on writing assessment mirrored an increased focus on writing assessment in teacher preparation programs. Assessment literacy emerged as a key construct for teacher preparation, as evidenced by its inaugural inclusion in the Standards for Teacher Competence in Educational Assessment of Students in 1990 (Xu & Brown, 2016).

Ecological Writing Assessment at the Turn of the 21st Century

The early 2000s continued the concerted interest in GTA training in writing programs and the addition of focus on professional development and career training for academic and non-academic jobs in English departments. A 2000 MLA Newsletter article titled "Job Market Remains Competitive" reasoned that as long as universities continue to devalue the teaching of lower-division courses, "graduate training will not adequately prepare students for the realities of the academic workplace'" (qtd. in Stenberg, 2005, p. xv). The article called attention to GTA preparation and training not just in service of helping first-year students succeed but also for the sake of GTAs themselves. Great strides had been made in the kinds of training GTAs receive, but questions remained about the purpose of such training. The teacher preparation, designed to "answer immediate program requirements" rather than "initiate the career-long development of graduate students," abstracted the value of teacher preparation for many GTAs (Stenberg, 2005, p. 7). During the late 1990s and early 2000s, there was, for the first time, a proliferation of empirical research that focused on GTAs' experiences, an era ushered in with the publication of Good and Warshauer's (2000) *In Our Own Voice: Graduate Students Teach Writing*.

Although English Departments struggled to help GTAs see the value of their training, the utility of assessment served to encourage program development. When Yancey (1999) composed "Looking Back as We Look Forward" at the turn of the 21st century, she predicted that the next wave of writing assessment may further emphasize programmatic assessment and "what assessment activities can teach us" about literacy (p. 485). The subsequent fourth wave of writing assessment, from 1999 to 2015, has been labeled as ecological writing assessment. As Wardle and Roozen (2012) expound, an ecological model of writing assessment "gathers data addressing students' wide range of experiences with writing and the impact those experiences

have on their ability to accomplish academic tasks" based in the belief that students' writing development happens "across an expansive ecology of literate activities rather than within any single setting" (p. 107). An ecological model includes the creation and revision of a portfolio over time and across contexts. While the third wave of assessment began to move away from a "vertical" conception of writing focused "within the boundaries of school," the fourth wave further promoted "rhetorical dexterity" (Wardle & Roozen, 2012, p. 108) and "broaden[ed] and humanize[d] assessment issues" (Broad, 2003, p. 10). During this time, the field leveraged critiques of reliability and validity (Gomes, 2012) to theorize cultural (Adler-Kassner & O'Neill, 2010) and decolonizing (Cushman, 2016) validity to acknowledge the role of ethnolinguistic diversity in writing assessment for all students (Lindsey & Crusan, 2011). Graduate student instructors, equipped with some reliable form of annual training, had the opportunity to draw from an expansive range of assessment theory and practice to use in the composition classroom.

Socially Just Writing Assessment & GTA Training

Since the inaugural English composition course at Harvard University, both writing assessment and the experiences of graduate student instructors have been intertwined. The field of rhetoric and composition and the role of GTAs within it developed in response to labor demands felt by English Departments in response to manufactured literacy crises (Brown, 2023). GTAs' lived experiences occur in the intersection between low-wage labor and writing assessment (Brown, 2023). The discipline of rhetoric and composition "has ardently served the needs of one population," first-year students, "while attending little" to the graduate students who often teach them (Yancey, 2001, p. 63). And "ever since teacher education emerged in mid-nineteenth century America," due in significant part to the first English composition course, "there have been debates about how, where, by whom, and for what purposes teachers should be

educated" (Cochran-Smith & Demers, 2008, p. 1009). Brown (2023) argues that "from its inception, composition's tenuous place in higher education has highlighted tensions between the relative value of research and teaching; the social constructions of access and excellence; and the costs of teaching and labor and its real value to the university bosses" (p. 8). GTAs reflect those tensions as they navigate the uneven terrain of overburdened, underpaid labor traditionally seen in service of an institutional cause greater than their own personal professional development.

Writing assessment is perhaps the site where the challenges of GTAs become most exacerbated and visible while literacy development remains least visible. Writing assessment—and the GTAs who deliver that assessment to the majority of FYC students—reflects and recreates social, cultural, and political conditions. The current and ongoing wave of writing assessment, which advocates for equitable writing assessment, explicitly calls attention the difficulties GTAs experience, particularly amidst the rise of neoliberal logics in higher education (Welch & Scott, 2016). The ongoing wave surfaced in 2015 with the publication of Asao Inoue's (2015) *Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies: Teaching and Assessing Writing for a Socially Just Future*. Still in its early stages, the equitable writing assessment movement promotes ethical assessment that works for social justice with a critical eye toward the cultural, political, and historical systems that impact writing ecologies. Responsive to social injustice, internationalization, and an ongoing "social period of 'superdiversification'" in the U.S. (Elliot et al., 2016), the equitable assessment movement builds on critical theory (e.g., Giroux, 2001) and antiracism (e.g., Flores & Rosa, 2015; Inoue, 2015) to equip students with the rhetorical and linguistic tools they need to promote equity. The movement unites composition studies, applied linguistics, and L2 writing studies to honor and support linguistic diversity (Matsuda, 2015; Weigle, 2002). CCCC revised "Writing Assessment: A Position Statement" (2022) to contend

that writing assessment practices must "be guided by sound principles that are fair and just and specific to the people for whom and the context and purposes for which they are designed" (para. 1), which decenters standard language ideologies in the discipline and the classroom.

This current wave of writing assessment marks one of the most significant and large-scale shifts in the history of writing assessment, one that continues to shape writing assessment toward social justice. For perhaps the first time in its history, writing assessment has taken on a complex role that transcends the individual student, classroom, or instructor. It is now within the realm of possibility for assessment practices to enable social justice and enact meaningful change that reverberates beyond postsecondary institutions into the cultural and political systems in which we live. The current movement of equitable writing assessment and its commitments to antiracism, linguistic diversity, and social justice will guide the trajectory of the next decade of assessment theory and practice. This literature review contends that both writing assessment theory and practice, and the teaching and training of graduate student instructors, stand to benefit from increased attention to equity and inclusion.

The Landscape of Contemporary Writing Pedagogy Education

Today, graduate students at U.S. universities almost universally teach courses in their discipline to progress toward their degrees; across postsecondary education, "about 46% of undergraduate students at four-year colleges take courses that have graduate students as their primary instructors" (Bettinger et al., 2016, p. 64). A report by the American Federation of Teachers (2009) found that GTAs made up 41% of instructional staff at public, doctoral-granting institutions across the U.S. (qtd. in Cicchino, 2020). GTAs have been reported to teach nearly 25% of FYC courses in the U.S. (Gere, 2009), a figure which has certainly increased, given that, combined, GTAs and non-tenure track faculty have been estimated to teach "more than 95

percent of all compulsory writing classes in PhD-granting English departments" (Bok, 2006, p. 83, qtd. in Wisniewski, 2014, p. 1).[2] Undergraduate students have even been found more likely to major in a discipline when a GTA teaches their first course in the subject (Bettinger et al., 2016), making graduate student instructors engines for recruitment and retention.

Because GTAs teach a significant number of composition courses, writing programs typically offer teacher training programs designed to professionalize graduate student instructors (Obermark et al., 2015; Schwaller & Miller-Cochran, 2020). Composition programs and English Departments steward writing pedagogy education programs that prepare GTAs through preparation, education, training, and mentorship to teach FYC courses. Key methods of GTA training can be classified in four ways: an information/inspiration approach, which uses speeches, lectures, and teaching demonstrations; skills training, which uses workshops and seminars; clinical/technical consultation, which includes observation, videotaping, and one-on-one consulting; and coaching/mentorship, which includes methods such as formal and informal observation (Angelo & Cross, 1998).

Writing pedagogy education can include any combination of composition pedagogy courses, seminars, practicums, orientations, workshops, trainings, mentorships, and professional development opportunities (Dobrin, 2005; Estrem & Reid, 2012; Tremmel, 2001). Composition pedagogy or practicum courses serve as cornerstones of writing pedagogy education programs, seeking to train graduate students how to teach FYC courses (Ebest, 1999; Farris; 1996) with an emphasis on teaching both composition theory and practice (Dobrin, 2005; Stancliff & Goggin, 2007). Additional approaches include pre-service orientations, apprenticeship programs, tutoring,

[2] National statistics for contingent labor in higher education are notably difficult to find; as Johnson (2003) argued, contingent workers (adjunct faculty, short-term hires, and GTAs) often "leave little institutional trace of their work or employment" (p. 63), making it purposely difficult to measure the quantity of contingent labor.

classroom observations, role-playing, teaching journals and portfolios, reflective practice, research and publication, and apprenticeship in writing program administration (Latterell, 1996b; Wilhoit, 2001). Writing pedagogy education aims to guide graduate students to learn effective pedagogical theories, develop teaching philosophies, and gain practice with lesson planning, classroom management, and writing assessment. In a writing pedagogy education curriculum,

> a good program is one that first, serves the needs of the students; second, prepares graduate students to teach both curriculum and individual students; and third, encourages the developing faculty member to reflect upon and learn from practice. It thus is a model that is itself theorized and that fosters the identity of a developing teacher. As important, it's a model of TA development that welcomes and socializes the TA without scripting him or her. (Yancey, 2001, p. 65)

Writing pedagogy education can include a range of approaches designed to support and teach GTAs; effective teacher training advances "well beyond" one composition pedagogy course or training session, "just as writing instruction does not begin, or end, with one class in an undergraduate student's first year of college" (Estrem & Reid, 2012, p. 224). Good instructors are made, not born (Korinek et al., 1999; Pelton, 2014), so writing pedagogy education programs offer a primary means for new graduate student instructors to learn their craft.

There are few national studies of GTA preparation across the curriculum (Cervantes & Inlow, 2022; Rodrigue, 2012) and fewer still of GTA training in English studies or rhetoric and composition. Amy Cicchino (2020), in the most recent effort to review the state of GTA preparation, surveyed WPAs at 38 institutions with doctoral programs in rhetoric and composition to document how these programs prepare GTAs to teach FYC courses. She found that writing pedagogy education programs typically consist of multiple components, including

"observation, workshop, coursework, and resources," and the central goals for these programs tend to include "developing local knowledge and preparing GTAs with the general pedagogical information needed to manage a classroom" (p. 97). *Local* knowledge focuses on institutional procedures, norms, and curricula and the day-to-day survival of teaching rather than broader composition theories and pedagogies. Writing pedagogy education typically spans GTAs' first year, including the summer before they begin teaching, but fewer than 25% of writing pedagogy education programs provide ongoing training throughout GTAs' graduate careers (Cicchino, 2020, p. 92). Lack of national research, including research beyond professional organizations like CCCC and CWPA, perhaps traces to the "dominant if wrongheaded idea that postsecondary faculty don't need instruction in teaching" (Reid, 2011, p. 688). However, Cicchino's (2020) study provides a valuable framework for understanding that most writing programs do provide writing pedagogy education, although it typically ends after one year.

Several in-depth case studies and longitudinal studies have explored about how GTAs experience their first semester or year in the FYC classroom (e.g., Farris, 1996; Rankin, 1994; Restaino, 2012), how GTA preparation informs teaching practice (e.g., Reid & Estrem, 2012), and how various facets of writing pedagogy education, such as mentorship or activities, influence GTA development (e.g., Dryer, 2012). Reid and Estrem (2012) conducted a three-year two-site (George Mason University and Boise State University) study of GTA preparation to explore how formal GTA training influences teaching in FYC. They collected 88 survey responses and conducted 41 interviews designed to analyze how GTAs integrate what they learn from writing pedagogy education into their teaching practices (p. 33). They found that GTAs' teaching practices were "influenced more strongly by prior personal experiences and beliefs and their experiences in the classroom than by their formal pedagogy education" (p. 34). GTAs also

reported more value from their own prior experiences, classroom experiences, and experiences from peers rather than what they learned in the preparation program. GTAs experienced uneven uptake of composition theory and practice from their formal training. These findings led to the recommendation that GTA preparation needs to extend beyond the first year and into the subsequent years in teaching FYC courses. They also advocate for writing pedagogy education to include more "reflective practice and problem solving" to help GTAs gain the metacognitive skills needed to more fully apply pedagogical strategies from their training to their own pedagogical principles (p. 32). In many ways, Estrem and Reid (2012) identified a problem in transfer, as many GTAs did not transfer what they learned in their pedagogy courses to their own FYC classrooms (e.g., Wisniewski, 2018). Dana Driscoll (2013) took up the question of GTA transfer in FYC courses. Her study included eight GTAs to explore their beliefs and practices about writing transfer, suggesting that GTAs did not have much awareness about writing transfer. As such, they could not teach for transfer well to their students, nor transfer their own learning from their preparation to the classroom. Driscoll (2013) argues that writing pedagogy education needs more teacher education around transfer. New instructors "need support, collegiality, and continuity" in their training (Ebest, 2005, p. 212).

The study of GTA learning and development reflects many of the ways that writing pedagogy education programs and GTA preparation positively impact graduate student instructors. Carolyn Wisniewski (2018) studied how reflective practice informs pedagogical thinking. GTAs in her study often struggled to apply "problem-solving strategies" or use "disciplinary or programmatic resources to resolve challenges," but critical reflective practice can help overcome these issues (Wisniewski, 2018, p. 36). Pedagogical training often improves self-efficacy and helps instructors develop student-centered approaches to teaching (Postareff et

al., 2008). Mentorship, as a component of a teacher preparation program, can also enhance GTA professional development (Gaia et al., 2003). Pelton (2014) found a teaching seminar course lowered sociology graduate students' anxiety and increased their confidence in teaching for the first time. Education and educational psychology research identified that training increases GTAs' teaching self-efficacy (Korinek et al., 1999; Pelton, 2014; Prieto & Altmaier, 1994). Teacher training programs can support GTA development in higher self-efficacy in areas such as classroom management, student involvement, and instructional approaches (Young & Bippus, 2008, p. 116). Teaching composition can even help graduate students become more effective writers (Shapiro, 2020) given that prior teaching experience and prior writing experience can both inform GTAs' pedagogical approaches (Ebest, 2005). In a review of 13 research studies on teacher training, Abbott et al. (1989) found that GTAs generally reported benefitting from training. Despite some benefits, the preparation, training, and education GTAs receive to teach FYC courses varies widely depending on the institution, and the investment in that training varies widely by individual instructor.

GTA preparation offers a unique challenge for WPAs and educators given that training always face institutional and time constraints. However, writing pedagogy education does not often spend enough time teaching new instructors about writing assessment. Without critical, recursive reflection and practice, writing assessment practices can work against GTAs' teaching praxis, exacerbating the instructional challenges GTAs experiences and inhibiting students' learning in their classrooms—a point that I argue at the end of this chapter.

The Stories of Graduate Student Instructors

The history of GTA preparation I have recounted so far has been told by WPAs and writing studies researchers. As such, the scholarship historically lacked "TA voices as

researchers and primary speakers" (Macauley et al., 2023, p. 5). It was only in the early 2000s that a significant thread of research emerged to center the voices of GTAs, which provides great insight into the lived experiences of graduate student instructors and contributes to current research on GTA preparation. These accounts highlight underrepresented voices and enable writing programs to learn how to better address the needs of GTAs. These contributions also recognize GTAs as the experts of their own lived experiences and learning (Taggart & Lowry, 2011). Perhaps the first book-length study that explored the experiences of graduate student instructors was Wendy Bishop's (1990) *Something Old, Something New: College Writing Teachers and Classroom Change.* Emerging from Bishop's dissertation research, the book asked how new college writing instructors learn how to teach, telling the stories of new graduate student instructors through narratives. Bishop followed five new instructors enrolled in a "Teaching Basic Writing" doctoral seminar course to study how their teaching practices changed over time and how their prior experiences and histories impacted those changes. Elizabeth Rankin (1994) took a similar approach in *Seeing Yourself as a Teacher: Conversations with Five New Teachers in a University Writing Program*, which follows five second-year graduate instructors and the challenges they experienced with theorizing composition pedagogy and embodying their identities as composition instructors. Christine Farris (1996) continued this line of inquiry in *Subject to Change: New Composition Instructors' Theory and Practice*, which presents an ethnographic study of four GTAs and how their classroom teaching experiences impact their theories and practices of composition pedagogy. These book-length studies explore how GTAs' knowledge, beliefs, and practices develop through the teaching of FYC courses.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, amidst disciplinary conversations about the shape and trajectory of the field of rhetoric and composition, there was a renewed interest in the

composition practicum and GTA preparation, with the publication of seminal works such as *In Our Own Voice: Graduate Students Teach Writing* (Good & Warshauer, 2000), *Changing the Way We Teach: Writing and Resistance in the Training of Teaching Assistants* (Ebest, 2005), and *Don't Call It That: The Composition Practicum* (Dobrin, 2005). Tina Good and Leanne Warshauer's (2000) edited collection highlighted the role of graduate student instructors as experts of their own lived experiences. It represents one of the first collections written *by* and *for* GTAs. The collection includes 30 first-person narrative essays composed by GTAs on a range of topics relevant to the FYC classroom, including classroom authority, academic genres, and responding to student writing. Another notable contribution, *First Semester: Graduate Students, Teaching Writing, and the Challenge of Middle Ground*, focuses specifically on the first-semester experiences of new GTAs (Restaino, 2012). This collection illuminates the labor struggles of new GTAs as they balance their roles and responsibilities as both students and instructors. Restaino (2012) concludes with suggestions for improving the support that university writing programs offer to their GTAs. Narrowing to focus on GTAs' beliefs about literacy development, Meaghan Brewer's (2020) *Conceptions of Literacy: Graduate Instructors and the Teaching of First-Year Composition* traces how new instructors' subconscious and personal attitudes, beliefs, and values impact their teaching practices.

In addition to these landmark works, two recent edited collections center the voices of graduate student instructors: *Exploring How We Teach: Lived Experiences, Lessons, and Research about Graduate Instructors* by *Graduate Instructors* (Clem, 2022) and *Threshold Conscripts: Rhetoric and Composition Teaching Assistantships* (Macauley et al., 2023). In *Exploring How We Teach*, graduate student instructors reflect on their own identities and experiences with writing instruction (Clem, 2022). The collection works to reflect the contingent,

multifaceted, and often conflicting roles that GTAs have at their institutions. *Threshold Conscripts*, an expansive collection with administrator, faculty, and GTA contributors, aims to provide insight into the experiences of graduate student instructors designed for use by WPAs who want to research GTA preparation to begin or revise their own programs (Macauley et al., 2023). A collection of research that champions the lived experiences of GTAs (Clem, 2022; Macauley et al., 2023; Restaino, 2012) and highlights underrepresented standpoints (Bishop, 1990; Good & Warshauer, 2000; Rankin, 1994) sets the stage for this research study to address how GTAs develop their writing assessment literacy through the teaching of FYC courses.

Empirical Research on Writing Assessment and Teacher Development

The assessment of writing is often at the center of the work in the writing classroom. The CCCC Statement on Preparing Teachers of College Writing (2015) classifies "providing constructive feedback on students' drafts" and "assessing students' writing formatively and summatively" as necessary theoretical and instructional knowledge for effective writing instruction (para. 4). The statement emphasizes that graduate student instructors should be provided writing assessment coursework (CCCC, 2015, para. 13). However, postsecondary writing instructors too often receive inadequate preparation to assess writing effectively and justly (Crusan et al., 2016), especially GTAs (Estrem & Reid, 2012; Saenkhum, 2020 Yancey, 2001). Weigle (2007) observed that "many teachers enter the classroom without a thorough grounding in assessment issues" (p. 207) and Saenkhum (2020) found that "the topic of assessment is not often included in teacher education or teacher training programs" (p. 7). Without enough training on the theories and practices of writing assessment, GTAs often struggle to support student learning through assessment (Wisniewski, 2018).

Research across the disciplines of L2 writing, teacher education, and rhetoric and composition has explored how new teachers learn to assess writing, particularly L2 writing, which champions ethical approaches to the assessment of multilingual student writing. Much of this research, however, focuses on students' perceptions of teacher feedback rather than teachers' perceptions of their own feedback (Montgomery & Baker, 2007). The absence of research on how instructors learn to assess writing reflects the need for "an explicit approach to teaching issues in assessment" (Saenkhum, 2020, p. 7). In "Teaching Writing Teachers about Assessment," Weigle (2007) contended that many graduate programs do not comprehensively teach or train new instructors in writing assessment. Deborah Crusan and colleagues (2016), who conducted seminal research on writing assessment literacy development for second language writing instructors, studied how teachers gain assessment knowledge, their assessment beliefs and practices, and the impact of linguistic background and teaching experience on their assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices. There is a lack of training in writing assessment in L2 writing and FYC contexts; without enough preparation, instructors are often left to conduct "uninformed assessment," which negatively impacts instructors by causing them "to feel uncomfortable and unprepared" and unable to build classroom community, and negatively impacts students with "losses in time, money, motivation, and confidence" (Crusan et al., 2016, pp. 43–44). When it comes to teacher training, "no other aspect of learning to teach composition is fraught with as much anxiety and concern as the assigning of grades" (Qualley, 2001, p. 278). Empirical studies on teacher training and writing assessment often address affective, material, and emotional dimensions of writing assessment associated with a lack of thorough preparation.

Education researchers have voiced that teachers do not receive enough training in writing assessment (Banta & Palomba, 2014; Dempsey et al., 2009; Shepard, 2000). Banta and Palomba

(2014) maintain that "many graduate programs do not prepare their graduates particularly well as teachers, and most provide no training or experience in outcomes assessment" (p. 39). Teacher education research on writing assessment tends to focus on P-12 contexts rather than higher education (Alsup et al., 2011; Tremmel, 2001); however, research from education provides instrumental perspectives on how teachers at any level learn how to assess writing. In a qualitative study of teachers' discussions of assessment in Norwegian primary schools, Matre and Solheim (2016) found that novice instructors tend to follow an instrumental and ritualized use of assessment, while more experienced instructors transition toward a more flexible and functional conception of assessment (p. 192). The factors that influenced this transition toward more complex and contextual writing assessment practice included "anchoring the assessment in the construct of writing and the norms of expected writing proficiency, use of relevant metalanguage, and connecting to teacher experiences and practice" (p. 192).

Similarly, Parr and Timperley (2010) studied written assessment for learning (rather than assessment of learning) with 49 instructors across six primary schools. With a focus on written response as formative assessment, they explore how instructors can use assessment as a "social, collaborative activity, aligned more with learning," that supports more collaboration between instructors and students (p. 70). Dempsey and colleagues (2009) studied preservice elementary teachers' writing assessment skills and self-efficacy. Their study found that instructors' opportunities to practice writing assessment enhanced teachers' confidence, skills, and clarity of their goals with writing instruction. Particularly for novice teachers, however, "developing expertise and efficacy in writing assessment should occur within a broader context of literacy instruction," one that teaches new instructors about "the mechanics of the language they are evaluating, the best literacy instructional practices available, and the functions and uses of

writing in society" (p. 57). The research suggests the intertwined nature of teaching writing and assessing writing where the closeness makes it difficult to perceive writing assessment on its own. Assessment and instruction are at once perceived as "curiously separate" (Graue, 1993, p. 291) yet they are so closely connected that teacher preparation often assumes that teaching instruction will also lead to GTAs learning about writing assessment. Writing assessment is often seen as a larger dimension of instructors' pedagogical approach; while writing assessment does reflect instructors' pedagogical beliefs, it should also be examined closely on its own.

While scholarship from rhetoric and composition tends to approach writing pedagogy education holistically, often subsuming assessment as part of pedagogical knowledge, some studies have generated useful insights about how GTAs learn to assess writing. Yancey's (2001) heuristic for designing preparation programs asks WPAs to consider facets such as local conditions of GTA experiences, departmental contexts, and institutional constraints; ethical GTA treatment; and questions about assessment (e.g., Estrem & Reid, 2012). The challenges of writing assessment were uncovered by Reid and Estrem (2012), who found that GTAs' primary concerns with assigning and grading essays were fairness, evaluation, time management, writing prompts, and giving feedback (p. 45). Because assessment closely intersects with pedagogy, the tensions of writing assessment overlap with the challenges of teaching. And particularly for new graduate instructors, challenges center around the development of teaching identity, with assessment as just one facet of their professional growth (Wisniewski, 2018). Yet, because assessment is so value-laden, much of the research on graduate students' experiences as instructors also implicates writing assessment. Restaino (2012) identified grading as a pedagogical challenge situated within "the theory/practice divide" (p. 30). Restaino (2012), who followed four graduate students (two MA and two PhD) during their first semester teaching,

focused in her analysis on the impact of assessment for GTAs. Grading, she wrote, can be "dangerously consumptive" for new GTAs, who may feel like they are "running in a grading wheel" (p. 45). It is not just the act of assigning grades but also the labor involved in the grading process. GTAs face a double bind when it comes to writing assessment:

> Grading thus functions as an attempt by new teachers to stay alive in the classroom; they perceive that their authority is aligned solely with the fact that they have the power to give students the grades they want. However, the authority is vested in the grades themselves. New teachers have become more of a factory for such grades than facilitators of writing development . . . In this sense, new teachers' experience is clearly split between grading as a means of quantifying students development and grading as a means of maintaining a 'managed' classroom. (Restaino, 2012, p. 45)

As this passage illuminates, the theories and practices of writing assessment are a key aspect of pedagogical training, although they are not always given due time and attention. GTA preparation remains "a practice steeped more in thoughtful lore than in systematic research" (Estrem & Reid, 2012, p. 224), which perpetuates an oversight of the importance of reflecting, developing, and learning writing assessment theory, beliefs, and practices.

Factors that Impact the Writing Assessment of GTAs

This literature review so far has reviewed scholarship that historicizes GTA training, maps the current state of GTA preparation, and locates the stories graduate students tell about their own experiences learning to teach and assess writing. To this point, the review has found that writing pedagogy education frequently uses measures such as composition pedagogy coursework, teaching assistantship, writing center tutoring and training, and departmental and programmatic workshops and seminars to train novice instructors. Writing pedagogy education

works to prepare GTAs to teach and it does impact GTAs' writing assessment practices. The comprehensive, localized preparation it provides is necessary for the success of graduate student instructors and their students. However, GTAs often enter FYC classrooms without adequate preparation on writing assessment theory and practice. Alongside the dimensions of formal writing pedagogy education explored in the previous section, this section identifies five key themes that describe factors that impact the writing assessment knowledge and practices of GTAs: inadequate training, prior knowledge, resistance, challenges of learning in liminal spaces, and labor demands. These themes emerged through the comprehensive literature review as disciplinary commonplaces in the preparation of GTAs in rhetoric and composition.

Inadequate Training & Preparation

Graduate student instructors are typically undertrained across all areas of teacher preparation (Restaino, 2012). Despite the prevalence of writing pedagogy education in English Departments, most programs still "do not adequately prepare or train new TAs for the very challenging task they are to perform" (Aminmansour, 1987, p. 26). As such, new GTAs typically enter the classroom without enough preparation in composition theory and pedagogy or, as Reed (2020) states, disciplinary knowledge about writing studies. As they enter graduate school and teach introductory courses simultaneously, GTAs tend to experience "a general feeling of having too much to do and difficulty balancing disparate responsibilities in the time allotted" (Grady et al., 2014, p. 8). The imperative to balance the courses they teach (as instructors of record) and the courses they take (as graduate students) often proves difficult, exacerbating the challenges of teaching an unfamiliar course at a new institution for the first time. The feelings of unpreparedness generally create a lack of confidence in GTAs' knowledge of the material they must teach and their ability to assess student learning (Aminmansour, 1987). The lack of

confidence, narrow understanding of the curriculum, and overwhelming labor all intersect in new instructors' lack of preparation to assess writing (DeLuca & Klinger, 2010).

Despite the importance of effective writing assessment (Banta & Palomba, 2014; Gipps, 2011; Shepard, 2000), instructors often receive inadequate training and preparation to assess writing well (Dempsey et al., 2009; Saenkhum, 2020; Weigle, 2007). Although teacher preparation programs attempt to prepare new graduate student instructors to teach and assess writing, several studies have questioned what GTAs actually learn and apply to the composition classroom (Driscoll, 2013; Reid & Estrem, 2012). Further, the composition practicum does not often adequately prepare new instructors to assess student writing (Weigle, 2007; Saenkhum, 2020). GTAs do not receive enough training to assess writing or use assessment tools such as rubrics effectively (Crusan et al., 2016; Dempsey et al., 2009; Saenkhum, 2020). Further, many instructors have deeply embedded concerns about their abilities to assess writing (Restaino, 2012) and use and create writing assessments such as rubrics (Crusan et al., 2016). GTAs struggle with writing assessment (Reid and Estrem, 2012; Restaino, 2012; Taggart & Lowry, 2011). In a survey of GTAs conducted by Taggart and Lowry (2011), graduate student instructors reported feeling most "ill-prepared" for grading and responding, followed by their ethos as instructors (p. 95). The GTAs in their study wanted more preparation for the "nuts-and-bolts" of teaching, which, to them, included the evaluation of student work (p. 97). Time management was also a concern for the majority of GTAs in the study (Reid & Estrem, 2012, p. 45). My prior research similarly found that the two biggest challenges GTAs report in writing assessment were time management and assessing writing ethically (Crozier, 2023). As such, the training—or lack thereof—that GTAs receive can greatly impact their writing assessment

practices, for good or bad. The quality and quantity of GTA preparation significantly impact what GTAs know, believe, and do with writing assessment.

In response to the lack (or perceived lack) of formal training, GTAs often turn to alternative sources of learning and support. Peer influence often serves as a significant site of support for new GTAs (Boud, 2001; Bruffee, 1999; Liggett, 1999; Wallis & Jankens, 2017; Weiser, 2001). Peer learning refers to "learning from and with each other in both formal and informal ways" (Boud, 2001, p. 4). Informally, GTAs share experiences and ideas as well as challenges and struggles due to their shared positionality within the university. As such, graduate students feel comfortable approaching their peers for advice to resolve difficult situations (Athnos et al., 2022; Staton & Darling, 1989). GTAs often have casual conversations about teaching approaches, lesson plans, and assessment strategies, providing immediate responses to pedagogical challenges. With these immediately useful discussions, GTAs often rely on past experiences and place more value on peers' advice rather than the formal preparation gained through writing pedagogy education (Estrem & Reid, 2012). GTAs can form communities of practice that sustain well-being and professional development (Athnos et al., 2022). Peer support can occur as a formal component of writing pedagogy education; Cicchino's (2020) study found that 66% of doctoral programs reported peer mentorship as an essential component of their teacher training program, though there is not clarification about the structure of the peer support. Respondents of the survey ranked the use of peer response groups among the most important aspects of their preparation, alongside practice responding to student writing, conducting conferences, and designing syllabi (Cicchino, 2020, p. 101). Measures of peer support such as "class visits by peers, peer mentors, and peer involvement in writing program decisions" help GTAs feel like valuable contributing members of programs and departments (Puccio, 1988, p. 2).

Although the knowledge and experiences GTAs share is not often a formalized component of writing pedagogy education, the ongoing teaching and assessment practices of graduate student instructors continue to be influenced by interactions with supportive peers in community.

Prior and Tacit Knowledge

The prior and sometimes tacit knowledge, beliefs, values, and experiences of new instructors impact their engagement with and uptake of teacher training as well as the choices they make in the teaching and assessment of writing (Grossman, 1990; Nyquist & Sprague, 1998). Prior knowledge includes any existing knowledge that instructors use "in a routinized way" or "in new ways that entail change, transformation, repurposing, and expansive learning" (Anson & Moore, 2016, p. 347). In the context of GTA preparation, prior knowledge encompasses any learned or lived experiences that impact teaching, such as knowledge about composition theory and pedagogy, writing assessment, and disciplinary values. Tacit knowledge, a construct theorized by Michael Polanyi, refers to knowledge that has been "internalize[d]" as "inexplicit functional knowledge" that instructors use and expand each time they engage in a particular action (Odell et al., 1983, p. 221), such as lesson planning or providing feedback. Implicit, tacit knowledge has been linked to a sense of "intuition" that informs instructors' decision-making and pedagogical choices in different contexts (Lejeune, 2011, p. 98). All tacit knowledge is prior knowledge, but not all prior knowledge is tacit knowledge (Crozier & Workman, 2023); both tacit and prior knowledge influence what instructors do through the process of transfer of learning (Nowacek, 2011). Transfer has been theorized extensively in composition studies, from David Perkins and Gavriel Salomon's (1992) distinctions between near and far and high-road and low-road transfer to posthuman adaptive transfer (Ringer & Morey, 2021). Conceptions of knowledge transfer include three components: "something learned

in the past, something applied in the future, and something that enables what was learned in the past to directly affect or influence what is done in the future" (Driscoll & Wells, 2012). Transfer research has identified that learners reuse and repurpose prior and tacit knowledge, skills, and beliefs in new contexts (Prior & Shipka, 2003; Roozen, 2010).

The pre-existing beliefs that new instructors bring to their training have been identified as one of the greatest influences on the effectiveness of their training. The greater the alignment between teachers' beliefs and "what was presented in the training, the more likely learning [is] to take place" (Tillema, 1994, p. 601). When instructors' existing beliefs around topics such as how writing should be taught and assessed correspond with the approaches presented in teacher training, instructors are more likely to be receptive to the content of the training and align their approaches with the training (Tillema, 1994). Further identifying the role of prior beliefs, in the three-year study conducted by Reid and Estrem (2012), GTAs "were influenced more strongly by prior personal experiences and beliefs and their experiences in the classroom than by their formal pedagogy education" (Reid & Estrem, 2012, p. 34). Previous experiences, beliefs, and knowledge proved dissonant to the new theories and practiced introduced in teacher training. Where this dissonance happened without reflection, "new composition principles were unevenly integrated into their composition pedagogy worldview" (Reid & Estrem, 2012, p. 34). GTAs bring to their teacher training "powerful (but often tacit) preconceptions of what literacy is and should be and these attitudes affect the way they teach their composition courses" (Brewer, 2020, p. 128). The "prior understandings of effective teaching" that GTAs have encountered, including from their own experiences as undergraduate students, also join the fabric of their pre-existing beliefs (Nyquist & Sprague, 1998, p. 64). The influences of prior and tacit knowledge are

complicated by the fact that "a universal set of expectations for GTAs' prior learning or preparation for teaching FYW does not exist" (Austin & Moreland, 2023, p. 142).

Writing assessment is a particularly salient site to surface tacit and prior knowledge because the assessment decisions that instructors make are central to their core identities as instructors. GTAs bring their prior and tacit knowledge to bear on their writing assessment practices. The writing assessment knowledge and beliefs that instructors have impact their writing assessment practices (Crusan et al., 2016), but writing assessment meta-knowledge is often tacit (Matre & Solheim, 2016). Consequently, teacher training programs need to "work with the often tacit preconceptions, beliefs, understandings, and worldviews about assessment" because these tacit notions "inform their conceptualizations, interpretations, judgments, and decisions in assessment" (Scarino, 2013, p. 309). Without reflection, GTAs may experience dissatisfaction, dissonance, and resistance to their teacher training, which may limit the usefulness of such training. In particular, the "effectiveness of assessment training might be offset by teachers' conceptions, emotions, needs, and prior experiences about assessment" (Xu & Brown, 2016, p. 155). Prior and tacit knowledge about writing assessment influences how GTAs engage with writing assessment during their teacher training.

Prior knowledge also includes the attitudes and dispositions that significantly impact whether, how, and to what extent knowledge transfer occurs (Driscoll & Wells, 2012; Wardle, 2012). Dispositions, along with knowledge and skills, have been identified as a key component of teacher education (Freeman, 2007; Welch & Areepattamannil, 2016). *Dispositions* often subsumes attitudes, habits, temperaments, and traits, (Freeman, 2007), but the term, in its complexity, also means more than the sum of its parts. Driscoll and Wells (2012) define *dispositions* through five characteristics:

1. Dispositions are a critical part of a larger system that includes the person, the context, the process through which learning happens, and time.
2. Dispositions are not intellectual traits like knowledge, skills, or aptitude, but rather determine how those intellectual traits are used or applied.
3. Dispositions determine students' sensitivity toward and willingness to engage in transfer.
4. Dispositions can positively or negatively impact the learning environment; they can be generative or disruptive.
5. Dispositions are dynamic and may be context-specific or broadly generalized.

Dispositions impact transfer of knowledge (Driscoll & Wells, 2012). GTAs' dispositions—including their orientation toward learning, positive or negative perceptions of past or current educational experiences, motivation, self-efficacy, and disciplinary orientations toward rhetoric and composition, creative writing, and English studies—can impact their ability to transfer knowledge from teacher preparation to the FYC classroom.

Because prior and tacit knowledge have such a significant impact on uptake of teacher training, scholars have argued for responsive preparation and training that surfaces existing tacit knowledge, beliefs, and values (Lejeune, 2011; Tillema, 1994). Purposeful reflection enables new instructors to better understand themselves as instructors and more fully integrate new knowledge. Effective writing pedagogy education considers GTAs' prior knowledge, experiences, and beliefs (Bishop, 1990, 1997; Driscoll, 2013; Farris, 1996; Welch, 1993). GTAs need reflection to integrate new and prior knowledge and surface tacit knowledge. As such, both prior and tacit knowledge need to be elicited through self-reflection or stimulated recall methods such as discourse-based interviews (Odell et al., 1983). Self-reflection has been seen as a useful

tool that can help instructors understand the value of fostering knowledge integration, making it more likely that new instructors benefit from the training (Zeeb et al., 2019). GTA preparation programs, in their "attempt to mediate both teaching *and* learning about teaching, must explicitly grapple with the complexity of practice while at the same time being sensitive to the fact that teaching is largely tacit by nature" (qtd. in Loughran, 2008, p. 1177).

Prior and tacit knowledge, beliefs, and values both influence teaching and assessment. Equipped with this understanding, WPAs and writing pedagogy educators can build training programs that take into account GTAs' existing knowledge, previous experiences, and deeply held beliefs, values, and ideologies. GTAs' prior knowledge combined with tacit lived experiences form their worldviews, which can be hard to alter (Bishop, 1997). Writing pedagogy education can build on the experiences GTAs have in their first year during what Reid and Estrem (2012) characterize as an *interteaching* mode, during which a GTA "is forming hypotheses about successful teaching by acting out both new and previously learned rules, testing whether those are workable in the current situation, and refining his or her practice—with varying degrees of success" (p. 34). Bishop (1997) explains:

> Learned theories of reading and writing are always foregrounded against a backdrop of tacit theories of learning, classrooms, and teaching roles that have been built up through students' astute observation of professors and English studies as an institution. Such a complicated matrix of interactions suggests that we can't just talk theory talk and ask our students to do the same. Instead, we have to examine the roles [GTAs] are asked to assume in our classrooms, and their own classrooms, as writers and as readers, in every course in the English curriculum. (p. 207)

Based on her research, Bishop (1997) argues that writing programs must necessarily ask GTAs to share expectations, beliefs, attitudes, assumptions, and goals. Surfacing tacit ideals can help mediate conflicts GTAs experience when new theories converge with long-held beliefs.

Enacting Resistance

The idea of resistance has become a commonplace in GTA training (Bishop, 1990; Brown & Conner, 2019; Grouling, 2015; Hesse, 1993; Reed, 2020; Rankin, 1994; Welch, 1993). *Resistance* means a "refusal to accept or comply with something; the attempt to prevent something by action or argument," with etymological origins from late Latin *resistentia*, from the verb *resistere*, "to hold back" (Oxford Languages, 2024). For GTAs, resistance often labels a particular stance of a graduate student instructor who does not readily adhere to the teaching expectations, norms, and conventions of a department or institution (Finn, 2023). Resistance can account for the ways that GTAs approach their training (Dryer, 2012; Farris, 1996; Reid, 2009). Some influence—namely, their prior educational experiences or disciplinary backgrounds—causes GTAs to hold back in their investment in and uptake of their pedagogical training. A well-developed GTA training program can be rendered ineffective if GTAs do not invest in it. Resistance can also describe the tensions, conflicts, and defiance, both conscious and subconscious, of composition pedagogy (Brown & Conner, 2019; Ebest, 2005), grading and inequitable labor practices (Restaino, 2012), and the theory/practice divide (Bly, 2000; Dobrin, 2005; Estrem & Reid, 2012; Michael, 2005; Restaino, 2012).

The perceived division between theory and practice, and novice instructors' tendency to focus more on practice than theory, often centers in discussions of resistance. Finn (2023) explains, "by turning to survival tools," graduate student instructors are "perceived as rejecting theory" (p. 95). Practice often appears more valuable and readily available to GTAs than theory,

especially in light of the demand to survive the first semester in the classroom (Anglesey, 2023). In one of the most in-depth studies on GTA resistance, Ebest (2005) found that "although composition pedagogy may incite resistance because it threatens some students' perceptions of self-efficacy, two factors determine the students' ability to overcome resistance: their already developed personal constructs coupled with engagement in and reflection on the very strategies they resist" (p. 19). Through case study, Ebest (2005) identified that GTAs experience theoretical, pedagogical, and epistemological resistance to their preparation. These classifications mirror Henry Giroux's (2001) three categories of student response to learning: accommodation, resistance, and opposition (Ebest, 2005). For WPAs and writing pedagogy educators, resistance is typically seen as a negative barrier that inhibits GTA learning and growth.

Some scholars have sought to reframe, complicate, and validate notions of resistance (Finn, 2023; Mapes et al., 2020; Schwaller, 2022). The term *resistance* flattens the complexities that GTAs experience and the many identities, knowledges, and motivations that might impact their engagement with their training. Further, I argue that the assumption of a division between theory and practice ignores the role of experience in GTAs' engagement with writing pedagogy education during their training and teaching. Instances of resistance or rejection may reflect an expression of GTAs' agency as new instructors. Finn (2023) characterizes the so-called resistance experienced by GTAs as evidence of dissonance and inability to transfer and make meaning across their multiple roles, experiences, and identities. Working from an adaptive transfer theory framework, Finn (2023) indicates that resistance can be reframed productively as adaptation. Resistance may be a necessary and valuable process that GTAs experience as they learn to become composition instructors.

Resistance has also been framed as ambivalence (Dryer, 2012; Mapes et al., 2020). Mapes and colleagues (2020), in exploring GTAs' experiences with learning and teaching genre, located ambivalence as "the felt tension between recognizing genre's relevance to teaching writing and struggling with the definition of the concept and its teachability" (p. 68). They claim that the experience of ambivalence may be necessary for learning threshold concepts (Mapes et al., 2020). Such ambivalence certainly applies to the teaching and learning of other threshold concepts in FYC contexts. Schwaller (2022) asserts that moments of resistance reflect necessary acts of well-being in which GTAs express their "needs for well-being and boundary setting" (p. 113). Working from a feminist standpoint that values well-being in professional and identity development, Schwaller (2022) calls for centering human welfare in teacher preparation and academia at large. Although resistance has been conventionally framed as negative, resistance may perhaps reflect learning and identity development in progress and in process—a transformation that effective writing pedagogy education should want and expect.

If resistance indicates a GTA's unwillingness to change, then one explanation of its impact on GTA preparation emerges from George Hillocks' (1999) *Ways of Thinking, Ways of Teaching.* The book draws on two years case studies featuring interviews and classroom observations with 20 writing instructors, 19 at community colleges and one at a high school, to explore the question, what are the decisions that teachers make to bring about learning in their students and why do they make them? The research begins from the assumption that teachers always bring with them "certain conceptions of teaching, learning, and epistemology" that inform each decision they make in the classroom, whether they are aware or not (Hillocks, 1999, p. 4). Hillocks' research applies to all novice instructors, including GTAs, teaching in new contexts to account for how instructors make decisions to change their teaching practices.

Hillocks (1999) found that instructors' willingness to change primarily traces to pedagogical stances of objectivism and constructivism. Constructivist, optimistic instructors use more reflective practice and grow in their teaching, while objectivist instructors tend to avoid chance and remain non-optimistic about their students (Hillocks, 1999). Attitudinal orientation is key to teacher learning:

> change will be a matter of far more than learning new methods of teaching or instituting a new curriculum for teachers to follow. Teachers who have adopted an objectivist stance and who are not optimistic about their students will have no reason to change. Because they so seldom engage in reflective practice, they will have little evidence of any need to change period and because they have low expectations of their students, they will not be surprised when their students fail to learn. They know, by their own lights, that there is no need to change. They are usually confident that if anything would succeed with their students, their methods would. After all, in their minds, they have made what it is to be learned as simple as possible, and their students still have not learned very well. (Hillocks, 1999, p. 134)

Due to deeply embedded stances, instructors are unlikely to change in response to their training. Any change that instructors experience comes a reconstruction of their epistemological stance and openness to change (Hillocks, 1999). This research can guide WPAs to understand that effective preparation programs have to better understand GTAs' existing knowledge, beliefs, practices, and experiences before helping them develop and change without resistance.

GTA Learning in Liminal Spaces

Learning, growth, and professionalization are closely connected to identity development, especially for graduate students (Baker & Lattuca, 2010; Barnacle & Mewburn, 2010). For many

GTAs, the difficult, ongoing processes of pedagogical development mirrors identity development that simultaneously occurs. Given that the journey through graduate school "is as much about identity transitions as it is about becoming an expert in a field of study" (Foot et al., 2014, p. 103), GTA identity is always interwoven with experiences and challenges. The development of pedagogical knowledge and the training of GTAs offers unique challenges for WPAs and educators who teach composition pedagogy courses. As both students and instructors, GTAs occupy a liminal space within the university (Dryer, 2012; Thomas & Border, 2017). GTA positionality is an ever-present context that influences their engagement with their preparation. The CCCC Statement on Preparing Teachers of College Writing (2015) recognizes that GTAs "inhabit an acutely vulnerable space because they are simultaneously students and employees of a postsecondary institution," arguing that "their status as both learners and as emerging practitioners in the classroom must be protected" (para. 12). The challenges of effective and equitable writing instruction and assessment are exacerbated by institutional, social, and economic factors that circulate in and through the FYC classroom. In addition to the variability of GTA preparation, the advancement of pedagogical knowledge and the training of GTAs offers unique challenges for WPAs and educators who teach composition pedagogy courses.

Identity development, liminal spaces, and authority intersect at the experiences of graduate student instructors. GTAs struggle with gaining authority in the classroom (Dryer, 2012; Rankin, 1994). Writing assessment exacerbates these challenges:

> Not only must the instructor conduct classes and evaluate student writing from a tenuous position of authority, but as a graduate student, she must also complete requirements for a master's degree or PhD, essentially balancing the role of teacher with the role of student. Graduate teaching assistants face a fundamental conflict between the position of authority

> they possess as composition professors and the lack of authority inherent in their roles as students in a graduate program. (Bly, 2000, p. 2)

The developing identities of graduate student instructors impact their teaching experiences (Cervantes & Inlow, 2022; Foot et al., 2014). Scholars have rightfully called attention to the experiences of international GTAs who experience microaggressions (Gomez et al., 2011), doctoral students who are women of color and experience racism and sexism (Ramos & Yi, 2020), and first-generation PhD students who experience economic and social class marginalization (Van Galen & Sablan, 2021). As such, "the challenges [GTAs] face are multifaceted and point to their precarious positionality within the hierarchy of academia" (Cervantes & Inlow, 2022, p. 4). GTAs live out the paradox of being overburdened and underpaid with identities "betwixt and between" institutional classifications of student, instructor, and staff (Grady et al., 2014, p. 13). This positionality marginalizes GTAs who feel "role strain" given that the "social positions and concomitant roles of graduate students shape their mental health experiences" (Grady et al., 2014, p. 5). GTAs navigate "border terrain"—"at once both student and teacher, outsider and insider, novice and expert, assessed and assessor" (Latterell, 1996a, p. 1); "at once in demand and undervalued" (Osorio et al., 2021, p. 132); at once student and instructor, teaching apprentice and instructor of record, contingent yet integral to university function, teaching peripheral service courses yet integral to student success.

Many of the challenges that GTAs experience during the first year due to their liminal positionality—lack of training, confusions between theory and practice, difficulties reconciling past experiences with new knowledge—intersect with the difficulties of writing assessment. Smollin and Arluke (2013) found that GTAs struggled during their first year teaching with "feelings of unpreparedness, seemingly unrelenting time demands, a lack of confidence, issues

with students, and insufficient support" (p. 31). Another study found that first-time instructors felt twice as many negative emotions than positive emotions about teaching; the most common emotions were "*fear*, followed by *nervousness*, *worry*, *frustration*, *anxiety*, *concern*, *stress*, and feelings of *difficulty* or *concern*" (Meanwell & Kleiner, 2014, p. 21). These also include struggles with the development of teacher identity (Wisniewski, 2018). These challenges and demanding workload are not just personal problems that GTAs experience but indicative of a broader lack of training and absence of respect for the enterprise of FYC and those who teach it.

Labor Demands

As I have argued, GTAs who teach FYC courses experience an amalgam of difficulties, many of which stem from the "confusing and overlapping classifications" that GTAs experience as both students and instructors (Brown, 2023, p. 3). Liminality not only challenges GTAs' identity and literacy development but also positions them and their labor to be exploited by departments and institutions (Brown, 2023). GTAs comprise a substantial cheap temporary labor force (Carter, 2008; Johnson, 2003; Miller, 1991), and the demands of the workload extend across physical, mental, and emotional labor. It is an "unassailable truth of graduate student work that graduate study is a full-time job paid at half-time wages" (Brown, 2023, p. 6). The institutional and economic context that surrounds many GTAs' experiences in the U.S. positions graduate student instructors as overburdened and underpaid workers, which puts graduate students in a state of precarity and uncertain professional and financial futures (MLA Task Force on Ethical Conduct in Graduate Education, 2021; Vossen, 2017). Graduate students "produce surplus value for their institutions—whether through their labor as underpaid workers replacing higher-paid staff positions, or through their tuition, which has been rising for the past five

decades as state divestment from education has pushed costs onto students, often financed through loans" (Brown, 2023, p. 3). It is not a new problem:

> from its inception, composition's tenuous place in higher education has highlighted tensions between the relative value of research and teaching; the social constructions of access and excellence; and the costs of teaching and labor and its real value to the university bosses. (Brown, 2023, p. 8)

GTAs occupy a precarious position in the university; their low wages and benefits position them as expendable by the university, while at the same time, the institution could not function without their labor. In the composition classroom, the overwhelming burden of writing assessment (Restaino, 2012) makes up a significant amount of labor exertion. Many FYC instructors "feel overwhelmed by the grading burden and students' focus on the grade, but any efforts to disrupt this situation are overshadowed by their potential dislocation from evaluation criteria and theorized approaches to writing instruction" (Restaino, 2012, p. 59). Intimidating labor demands impact how instructors assess writing by driving decision-making; rather than choose assessment practices based on pedagogical beliefs and best practices, GTAs may default to practices that help them alleviate workload demands. Labor demands may impact GTAs' assessment literacy development by limiting the amount of time GTAs spend on writing assessment, shaping feedback practices to alleviate workload burdens, and restricting engagement with formal writing pedagogy education.

The "dire labor conditions" of GTAs were recently reported by Osorio and colleagues (2021), members of the WPA-GO Labor Census Task Force, who conducted a survey of 344 graduate student instructors in Fall 2017. GTAs, often framed as "students first, apprentices second, and workers rarely," contribute a significant amount of essential labor to composition

programs (p. 131). However, GTAs experience “low pay, inconsistent access to healthcare, and little support for health and family life” (p. 131). GTAs face multiple layers of exploitation as their labor is taken advantage of and perpetually extracted. In the study, “the overwhelming majority (71.6%) reported that their stipends were inadequate” for “covering their living needs” (p. 138). Significantly, GTAs “noted that their pay did not correspond with the amount of labor they contributed to the writing program” (p. 139). Alarmingly, “65.4% of GSIs overall reported working more hours than contracted” (p. 139), revealing that graduate student instructors often do more work than they are paid and contracted to do. As Osorio and colleagues (2021) illustrate, “there is a clear disconnect between how many hours GSI employers think it takes to properly and ethically deliver quality instruction and how many hours GSIs feel obligated to work in order to do that work properly” (p. 140). In their criticism of the neoliberal gig academy, Kezar et al. (2019) argue that GTAs “have task-based rather than truly time-based accountability structures, which quietly extract the maximum amount of time and effort possible from each individual without the need to make any explicit demand for it” (pp. 61–62). GTAs experience these disparities on a national level. The unionization of graduate student laborers across the country evidences the existence of poor wages and poor working conditions (Bousquet, 2008; Kroeger et al., 2018).

Uneven working conditions, economic exploitation, and invisible labor—these are the contexts in which GTAs attempt to teach and *learn* to teach. GTAs function as economic inputs and outputs of universities, participating in the dual production processes of the education of undergraduates and the development of graduate students themselves” and producing excess value for their institutions with little in return (Bettinger et al., 2016, p. 64). Complex political, economic, and sociocultural contexts exacerbate the challenges GTAs experience in the writing

classroom. A focus on the development of writing assessment literacy provides needed insight into the laborious experiences of GTAs.

Studying Writing Assessment Literacy Narratively Through Work and Labor

In this section, I propose *work* and *labor* as complementary theoretical frameworks to investigate graduate student instructors' development of writing assessment literacy. First, I introduce the phenomenon at the heart of this research study, writing assessment literacy, which refers broadly to the skills, knowledge, and aptitudes instructors need to assess writing effectively (Crusan, 2021). To expand on my operationalized definition of writing assessment literacy presented in Chapter 1, I synthesize research and scholarship from applied linguistics/L2 writing, educational psychology, and rhetoric and composition. Then, I frame the phenomenon with theories of *work* and *labor* to contextualize and materialize the experience of writing assessment literacy development and provide a comprehensive framework for the study.

Conceptualizing Writing Assessment Literacy

Writing assessment literacy refers to what teachers know about assessment and how they engage that knowledge in their teaching practices (Crusan, 2010; Crusan et al., 2016). The term *assessment literacy* first emerged from the work of Richard Stiggins (1991) to call attention to the need for "assessment literate" instructors, administrators, and policymakers who "have a basic understanding of the meaning of high- and low-quality assessment and are able to apply that knowledge to various measures of student achievement" (p. 535). Assessment literacy "empowers teachers" by increasing the effectiveness of their assessment (Stabler-Havener, 2018, p. 1). The construct *writing assessment literacy* developed from more recent research in applied linguistics, second language writing, and language education to focus on assessment practices in the composition classroom (Crusan, 2010; Crusan et al., 2016; Lee, 2017; Weigle, 2007).

This study uses *writing assessment literacy* as a core theoretical construct because the focus on practices of *writing* assessment best aligns with the pedagogical work of the FYC classroom. However, various terminologies have emerged from the scholarship that highlight different facets of the complex phenomenon, including *assessment literacy*, which refers to an overall aptitude to understand and engage in assessment (Stiggins, 1991); *teacher assessment literacy*, which emphasizes classroom-based assessment (Looney et al., 2018); *language assessment literacy*, which underscores the skills and knowledge of second language teachers (Hidri, 2021); and *assessment meta-knowledge*, which concentrates on teachers' conceptions of writing and textual knowledge (Matre & Solheim, 2016). Based on a systematic review of 100 studies on teacher assessment literacy, Xu and Brown (2016) forwarded the framework of teacher assessment literacy in practice (TALiP) as an encompassing conceptual model that accounts for the multiple dimensions that make up assessment literacy.[3] The framework includes six interrelated components: knowledge base, conceptions of assessment, institutional and sociocultural contexts, assessment literacy in practice, teacher learning, and teacher identity (re)construction (p. 155). The knowledge base, which forms the foundation for all other components, includes disciplinary and pedagogical content knowledge; knowledge of assessment purposes, content, and methods; knowledge of grading; knowledge of feedback, knowledge of assessment interpretation and communication; and knowledge of student involvement in assessment (p. 156). The knowledge base informs teachers' cognitive and affective conceptions

[3] The scoping review of the literature used "a combination of the search terms: 'teacher,' 'assessment literacy,' 'assessment competence,' 'professional development in assessment,' and 'assessment expertise'" (Xu & Brown, 2016, p. 150)—but not the term *writing assessment literacy*. However, the broad review captures much of the theoretical and practical foundations around assessment literacy scholarship subsumed in the literature on writing assessment literacy, indicating its relevance for the present study.

of assessment, which serve as interpretive lenses through which teachers integrate their theoretical and practical assessment knowledge.

Assessment knowledge and beliefs are shaped and constrained by micro- and macro-contexts, such as local conditions, institutional norms, and broader social, political, and cultural contexts. Writing assessment literacy articulates an active, "functional" (Coombe et al., 2020, p. 1) process of negotiation as teachers develop and use assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices in the classroom. Teacher learning, particularly through reflective practice and participation in local communities, necessarily drives assessment literacy. Instructors' desire to engage in and learn about assessment impacts their ability and willingness to further develop and potentially change their knowledge, beliefs, and practices. Finally, with all these conditions met, instructors can dynamically develop their identities as assessors, refiguring their understanding of the role of assessment in teaching and learning (Xu & Brown, 2016). TALiP emphasizes the interconnected nature of writing assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices in the context of instructors' identity development. Assessment literacy is not a threshold that instructors reach but rather a continuous process of reflexive learning interconnected to pedagogical development.

Writing assessment literacy has been defined in numerous ways. Many definitions include a repertoire of theoretical and practical assessment knowledge, skills, and abilities. For instance, "training for assessment literacy entails an appropriate balance of technical know-how, practical skills, theoretical knowledge, and an understanding of principles, but all firmly contextualized with a sound understanding of the role and function of assessment within education and society" (Taylor, 2009, p. 27). Another working definition of assessment literacy broadly includes the aptitudes to "place knowledge, skills, processes, principles and concepts within wider historical, social, political and philosophical frameworks in order understand why

practices have arisen as they have, and to evaluate the role and impact of testing on society, institutions, and individuals" (Fulcher, 2012, p. 125). The skills and competencies referred to as *assessment literacy* may include aptitudes such as the ability to choose and develop appropriate assessment methods, interpret and communicate the results of these assessment methods, and use assessment results when making pedagogical decisions (Brown & Bailey, 2008; Crusan, 2021). Kang and Lam (2024) use *assessment literacy* to refer to instructors' "knowledge, base, conceptions, and practices," in which conceptions "mediate knowledge base and practices" (p. 2). Crusan and colleagues (2016) argue that "assessment literacy is not just about content or delivery but how this content is enmeshed with teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and practices" (p. 45). Writing assessment knowledge and beliefs shape assessment practices (Crusan et al., 2016).

While teachers' assessment literacy guides their assessment decisions and practices, instructors still face many theoretical and practical challenges when they select, design, and use methods of assessment for their writing classrooms (Matre & Solheim, 2016). The CCCC "Writing Assessment: A Position Statement" (2022) upholds that "it is crucial that assessment practices be guided by sound principles that are fair and just and specific to the people for whom and the context and purposes for which they are designed" (para. 1). Although *sound principles* can and do originate from theory and research, I argue that the central principles that guide most instructors' assessment practices begin with their assessment beliefs, knowledge, and experiences. Since teachers' assessment literacy reflect how they make decisions about the design and use of assessment in their writing classrooms, assessment literacy impacts whether they accomplish their pedagogical and curricular goals through assessment. In Kang and Lam's (2024) study of Chinese university English instructors, teachers' "assessment practices usually could not meet their expectations owing to insufficient knowledge and strategies," indicating the

importance of writing assessment literacy in helping instructors achieve their goals (p. 18). New teachers rarely enter the classroom "prepared to face the challenges of classroom assessment because they have not been given the opportunity to learn to do so" (Stiggins, 2002, p. 762). GTAs do not often receive enough support, training, or guidance to adequately develop their writing assessment literacy. GTAs typically need more time to develop their teaching identities and assessment practices (Cervantes & Inlow, 2022; Looney et al., 2018).

The writing assessment literacy construct includes assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices (Crusan et al., 2016), along with the aptitude to enact these principles "within wider historical, social, political and philosophical frameworks in order understand why practices have arisen as they have, and to evaluate the role and impact of testing on society, institutions, and individuals" (Fulcher, 2012, p. 125). Consequently, assessment literacy provides insights into why teachers make the decisions they do, providing a generative lens to begin to understand how assessment takes place within larger ecologies of identities, ideologies, and institutions. This research deepens the construct of writing assessment literacy to better account for the complexities of literacy development, leading to more productive training for educators.

Theoretical Frameworks: Work and Labor

"The fundamental unit of . . . graduate-employee consciousness regarding the structure of academic labor can be contained in two words: We Work." — Michael Bousquet (2008)

I propose that conceptualizing writing assessment literacy with the theoretical frameworks of *work* (LaFrance, 2019; Smith, 2005) and *labor* (Harvie, 2007; Restaino, 2012) offers new pathways for understanding the liminal experiences and working conditions of graduate student instructors. *Work* is a long-disputed term in English Departments and the field of rhetoric and composition; scholars have continuously debated what constitutes the work—or

the work of value—of the discipline (Dryer, 2015; Horner, 2000). The word carries contradictions and multiple meanings; work includes "paid employment" and the "conditions of teachers' work," the published work of "written texts," and "the actual concrete activities of teaching, as in the 'work' of teaching" (Horner, 2000, p. 1). Mirroring the disciplinary divide between English studies and writing studies, GTAs often experience divisions between their work as students, scholars, and instructors. University work has often been conceptually divided between intellectual work (research and scholarship) and physical work (teaching) (Dryer, 2015). Teaching and teacher training are often presented as "preparatory work" that "serves the needs of the university" rather than meaningful professional development (Stenberg, 2000, p. 7). As such,

> graduate students learn that teaching may be important to subsidize their 'real' work, but that it is not central to their development as professors. Of course, this lesson begins upon admittance to Graduate school: graduate students teaching first-year writing courses are almost exclusively admitted for doctoral study based not on their potential as teachers, but their potential as scholars. (Stenberg, 2000, p. 7)

For new composition instructors, however, the work of teaching is also literacy work—the ongoing effort of their professionalization, learning, and growth. Graduate student instructors make writing programs work; however, GTAs still must attest that they are university employees who should receive fair compensation and workers' rights (Bousquet, 2008). The definitional point about work bears emphasizing because, as the historical account at the beginning of this chapter showed, it was long-disputed whether the *work* of teaching first-year composition was serious and worthwhile. Here, the theoretical framework of work makes visible the ongoing learning of GTAs *as work*. The work at the heart of teacher development is literacy work for the graduate student instructors who constitute the working class of composition studies.

My use of theories of academic work and labor is inspired, in part, by Restaino's (2012) study of four new GTAs during their first semester teaching composition courses, which applied theorist Hannah Arendt's division between *labor* and *work* to the experiences of graduate student instructors. For Arendt, labor is "simple reproduction; that is, all the tasks associated with meeting the body's needs of clothing, food, and shelter" (Brennan, 2009, p. 402). Labor represents toil, struggle, and the mechanical grind of everyday existence. Restaino (2012) understands this construct to prompt questions such as, "what does 'staying alive' look like for the new writing teacher?" "What is the work of sustenance in a new teacher's first writing classroom?" "Might grading operate as labor, a kind of sustenance, the new teacher's only means of maintaining [a] shaky authority?" (Restaino, 2012, p. 15). In contrast, work, for Arendt, is "artistic, referring to craftsmanship and the making of objects" (Brennan, 2009, p. 402). Work becomes "the product, or proof, of human ingenuity, rebellion, and resistance" (Restaino, 2012, p. 16). In Arendt's construction, therefore, *labor* identifies fundamental human effort exerted to generate material *work* products.

While I find Restaino's (2012) application of these theories instructive for my own approach, I instead theorize *work* from a feminist sociological lens (Smith, 2005). To account for the in/visible labor of writing assessment literacy development, this study draws on the sociological construct of *work* (Smith, 2005). Dorothy Smith (2005) articulated *work knowledge* and *work* as key constructs for the study of human experience. Smith (2005) defined *work knowledge* in two ways: "one is a person's experience of and in their own work, what they do, how they do it, including what they think and feel; a second is the implicit or explicit coordination of his or her work with the work of others" (p. 151). She further understands "work in a 'generous' sense" as "anything done by people that takes time and effort, that they mean to

do, that is done under defined conditions and with whatever means and tools, and that they may have to think about" (pp. 151–152). Institutional ethnographer Michelle LaFrance (2019) articulates, "when people negotiate institutional processes, putting time and energy into the activities of a local setting, institutional ethnographers refer to this as 'work'" (p. 51). People get paid for their work, but work can also include what people do that circulates below dominant conceptions of their roles within institutions. Smith's (2005) conceptions lend insight that *work* can include material and immaterial outcomes, including—highly relevant to this research study—experience, knowledge, belief, practice, affect, community, and context. Smith (2005) suggests, "the merit of this kind of a conception of work is that it keeps you in touch with what people need to do their work as well as with what they are doing" (p. 154). A central heuristic in institutional ethnography, *work* directs the researcher's analysis to the interfaces between individuals and institutions (McCoy, 2006). As both constitutive and reflective of material conditions, *work* reveals how "institutions coordinate the experiences and practices of individuals" (LaFrance, 2019, p. 4). In this research study, *work* attends to the lived experiences that occur in the channels between individuals and institutional systems of value and meaning.

In relation to theories of *work*, the lens of *labor* draws attention to physical, material, and emotional effort that graduate student instructors extend not only in their teaching but in their ongoing learning and professional development. I use Harvie's (2007) assertion that "teachers' labor" is "productive of value and surplus-value for capital" (p. 231). He theorizes that "teachers (re)produce the capital relation and value, that is, exist within capital, and the ways in which their already existing practices rupture this (re)production and thus produce struggle" (p. 232). Labor and divisions of labor constitute forces that coordinates work (LaFrance, 2019)—the work of individuals, the work of writing programs, and the work of institutions. Like *work*, defining,

theorizing, and organizing labor in English studies has also been a site of struggle (Cox et al., 2016; Downing, 2009; Kahn et al., 2017; Marshall, 2004); like *work*, labor has been generally devalued in writing studies (LaFrance, 2019; Harris, 2000). In the distinction between *intellectual* or *physical* labor, the concrete labor of the teaching of FYC is often perceived as less worthwhile than the abstract labor of English (literary) studies.

In this study, I call attention to the Marxist binary distinction between physical (concrete) and intellectual (abstract) labor (Gregory & Winn, 2016) often obscured in academic contexts. The division inherently posits concrete labor as physical effort and abstract labor as more intellectual pursuit, but both are foundational to human experience. As this literature review has demonstrated, labor is a significant part of the story of graduate student instructors. The labor of GTAs is indispensable to higher education institutions (Osorio et al., 2021; Wright, 2017). The use of GTAs emerged due to labor demands created by the need for remedial writing courses. Structural inequity for GTAs maintains that "such labor is generally justified as being part of the education of graduate students, as part of an apprenticeship in the academy, which already serves to devalue much of the labor of graduate students within the institutional narrative" (Wright, 2017, p. 275). For GTAs, the use of assessment and low-wage labor intersect.

This research study, in seeking a theoretical grounding to make visible the work of writing assessment literacy development, applies theories of *work* and *labor* to discern the experiences of graduate student instructors who teach FYC courses. The constructs provide a complementary lens through which to trace the labor of writing assessment literacy development, understand GTAs' experiences, and interpret the significance of the data. This research study uses these constructs expand the "theoretical, conceptual, and organizational" (Stoller, 2023) understanding of GTAs' experiences. Experience is a material site and temporal space where

work and labor occur. Writing assessment literacy development requires labor; it involves a significant contribution of time, energy, effort, and emotion. Yet, literacy development also constitutes the work of new writing instructors. This research documents and theorizes the work of GTAs, complicating and revisioning the teaching and assessing of writing in postsecondary education. These theories draw attention to the work that GTAs do in writing programs, the work that *matters* in writing programs, and the labor invested to make work happen amidst shifting systems of economy, value, and meaning.

Key Insights

The discipline of rhetoric and composition, in advancing FYC as its central mission, has by default taken responsibility for the teaching and training of graduate student instructors who teach the course. Although GTA preparation began to serve the educational needs of undergraduate students rather than to professionalize and support graduate students, the sub-field of writing pedagogy education emerged to resist the legacy of indifference and promote the training of GTAs. Taken altogether, the historical and empirical research examined in the literature review investigates the experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of GTAs toward their teaching, training, and preparation to reveal several imperative insights. First, graduate student instructors are not taught enough about writing assessment. Graduate student instructors are undertrained in general, but scholars from education, composition studies, and L2 writing have voiced that teachers do not receive enough training on writing assessment. Writing assessment theory and practice is often understood as an implicit aspect of pedagogical training, so they do not often receive enough time and attention.

Second, GTAs struggle in numerous ways as they learn to become writing instructors, including with identity development, labor demands, and writing assessment. Writing assessment

challenges GTAs across dimensions such as time management, ethical considerations, giving feedback, writing prompts, and creating and using rubrics. Writing assessment is perhaps the site where the challenges GTAs experience become most visible and exacerbated. Third, GTAs' prior beliefs, knowledge, and experiences effect the extent to which they engage in their teacher preparation and acquire new knowledge, skills, and beliefs, particularly around writing assessment. Meta-knowledge about writing assessment is often tacit and can shape GTA investment and motivation in their teacher training, and its impact on GTAs can lead to frustration among graduate student instructors and their educators. The most comprehensive and effective preparation programs may fail to impact GTAs if they experience dissonance between existing and new knowledge or if their attitudes or dispositions inhibit their uptake. Importantly, the conflicting and contradictory nature of serving as both student and instructor reveals challenges of labor demands and institutional exploitation.

Yet, the question of how GTAs develop their writing assessment literacy through the teaching of FYC courses has been largely unanswered; "there is still relatively little research devoted to understanding the assessment literacy of classroom teachers" (Volante & Fazio, 2007, p. 750). As such, there needs to be more understanding of how GTAs assess writing in FYC courses—what assessment methods and tools they use, how they apply those methods and for what purposes, and how their approaches reflect their beliefs, values, and ideologies about writing assessment. Although writing assessment literacy has been established as a theoretical construct (e.g., Crusan et al., 2016), the experience of its development has not been considered at length. Given that my literature review found that scholarship primarily emerges from the fields of L2 writing/applied linguistics and education/teacher education, the construct of writing

assessment literacy has been separated from the specific context of FYC, despite the significant amount of assessment that takes place in FYC courses.

In response to recent movements toward equitable and antiracist writing assessment, movements toward which graduate student instructors have led the discipline, WPAs and educators need to better understand how to support the development of GTAs. In writing studies, "much more time and intellectual energy is spent on discovering how undergraduates write and learn to write than on how graduate students teach and learn to teach . . . that very scarcity places the burden on us" to improve teacher training; "our impact is exponential, affecting the teachers and all of their students" (Taggart & Lowry, 2011, p. 91). Deepening the concept of writing assessment literacy can better account for the complexities of literacy development and writing assessment in teacher training. The present study fills this gap by examining how graduate student instructors develop their writing assessment literacy through the teaching of FYC courses—the primary training ground for novice composition instructors.

Chapter 3

Methodology and Methods

The primary research question for this qualitative research study is: *How do GTAs develop their writing assessment literacy?* With the conceptual framework of writing assessment literacy, this study investigates the experiences of graduate student instructors as they teach and assess writing in FYC courses. This qualitative study seeks to document and learn from the stories GTAs tell about their experiences with writing assessment through the research methodology of narrative inquiry, an approach guided by "thinking narratively about the phenomenon" under investigation (Clandinin, 2013, p. 38). In this case, writing assessment literacy development is the phenomenon under consideration, and *thinking narratively* guided the research design, data collection, and data analysis of the study. This chapter explains the approach to the qualitative research study, providing detailed descriptions of the narrative inquiry methodology that guided the design of the project, the interview and focus group methods used to collect data, and the coding and thematic analysis procedures employed to analyze data.

The first section defines the research questions for the study. The second section establishes the rationale for using narrative inquiry methodology to investigate the research questions. It illustrates the relational research paradigm (Wilson, 2008) at the heart of the project, describes the standards selected to ensure the integrity of the study (O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015), and considers the impact of my positionality. The next section clarifies the institutional context and procedures for the selection of participants. The fourth section documents the sources of data in the research study and details the qualitative methods used to collect data narratively. Primarily, I used the structures of the three-interview series (Seidman, 2019) and discourse-based

interview (Odell et al., 1983) to format the interviews to guide participants to tell stories. Subsequent sections review the methods of data collection and data analysis procedures.

Research Questions

The core research question in this study is:

1. How do GTAs develop their writing assessment literacy?

To address the key research question, additional sub-questions include:

2. What prior writing assessment literacy do GTAs bring to the FYC classroom?
3. What conditions affect the development of writing assessment literacy?
4. How and to what extent do GTAs' writing assessment knowledge and beliefs shape their writing assessment practices?

Qualitative Research Design

This empirical qualitative research study uses narrative inquiry as a methodology to document, explore, and learn from the experiences of GTAs (Casanave, 2005; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Qualitative research seeks to understand people's lived experiences amidst their particular social, cultural, and institutional contexts. The multiple outcomes of qualitative research can include "documentation of cultural observations, new insights and understandings about individual and social complexity, evaluation of the effectiveness of programs or policies . . . and/or the critique of existing social orders and the initiation of social justice" (Saldaña, 2011, p. 4). Such studies often generate richly descriptive and holistic findings. Guided by narrative inquiry methodology, this study documents GTAs' lived experiences, investigates the intricacies of writing assessment literacy development, and begins to understand how and to what extent teacher preparation programs and other conditions shape the development of writing assessment literacy. The methods of qualitative research

methodology align with the constructionist frameworks of narrative inquiry methodology to address the research study's goal to explore the writing assessment literacy development of graduate student instructors.

Narrative Inquiry as a Methodology

A qualitative approach accounts for the constructionist view of reality and knowledge (Crotty, 1998) in this study, while narrative inquiry methodology centers even more closely around how people understand their experiences. Using narrative inquiry, this study traces the complexity of writing assessment literacy development, uncovers the impact of teacher preparation on writing assessment literacy development, and identifies opportunities to better support graduate student instructors. This study is primarily about GTAs' experiences, and narrative inquiry is "the best way we believe to think about experience" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 80). Teacher education researchers D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly developed the narrative inquiry method to study people's experiences in educational contexts. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) drew from the philosophies of education of John Dewey (Caine et al., 2022; Hutchinson, 2015), the construct of embodied metaphor from George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980), and the concept of narrative unity from Alasdair MacIntyre (1981). Situated in the social sciences' turn toward valuing individuals' experiences in the 1980s and 1990s, narrative inquiry began as an approach to learn from teachers' experiential knowledge (Clandinin, 2023). In narrative inquiry, "participants tell stories of their lived experiences, and then, in relational ways, researchers inquire into and about the experiences . . . through narrative threads, narrative tensions, plotlines, narrative coherences, and/or silences" (Johnson & Christensen, 2016, p. 135). Narrative inquiry draws the researcher's eye toward the intersections between individual experience and the social, cultural, and institutional ecologies that construct

and constrict those experiences (Johnson & Christensen, 2016). This approach highlights the narratives participants re/create about their lives and how they interpret the meaning of their experiences (Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Clandinin et al., 2014). In this study, narrative inquiry guides the composition of GTAs' narratives of writing assessment literacy development that reconstruct chronologies of how GTAs learned to assess writing. Then, those narratives are situated in relation to others' experiences and contextualized within local institutional contexts and broader social and political structures. This approach crafted the narratives that answer the research questions in this study.

All narrative inquirers use the terms *story* and *narrative*, and most researchers apply these terms interchangeably (Riessman, 2008). In this research study, I use these terms to differentiate between the roles of the participants and the researcher. A *story* refers to anything that participants say to themselves or others about their lived experiences. A story is a description of an experience told with a discrete beginning and end. A *narrative* refers to what I, as the researcher, constructed—longer sequences of description composed of multiple stories. Participants told me stories; I composed narratives that connected those multiple stories. In narrative inquiry, which traces the "shifting, changing, personal, and social nature of the phenomenon under study" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 38), a narrative is not only an object or artifact of study but a *mode* and *method* of study to explore experience, identity, and meaning making (Schaafsma & Vinz, 2011, p. 24). This study distinguishes between *story* and *narrative* as units of description that capture the telling and retelling of participants' experiences.

Within the narrative inquiry framework, there are multiple key terms, approaches, and tensions for researchers to consider. In addition to *narrative* and *story*, scholars need to attune to the four key terms of living, telling, retelling, and reliving. Clandinin (2013) writes:

> People *live* out stories and *tell* stories of their living. Narrative inquirers come alongside participants . . . and begin to engage in narrative inquiry into our lived and told stories. We call this process of coming alongside participants and then inquiring into the lived and told stories *retelling* stories. Because we see that we are changed as we retell our lived and told stories, we may begin to relive our stories . . . *reliving* stories." (p. 34)

Living, telling, retelling, and reliving describe what the participants and the researcher do in a narrative inquiry. People live and tell their stories; researchers and participants retell and relive those stories together. These conceptual orientations toward experience are crucial to narrative inquiry studies in which researchers are "thinking narratively about a phenomenon" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 38). As I stated, the embodied stance of "thinking narratively" served as a guiding framework for this study. Thinking narratively "about a phenomenon challenges the dominant story of phenomenon as fixed and unchanging throughout an inquiry" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 38). The stance of narrative inquiry positioned this qualitative research study to trace writing assessment literacy development as unfixed, unsettled, and dynamic.

A Relational Research Paradigm

Narrative inquiry is always relational (Caine et al., 2022; Clandinin, 2023); it is about relationships and experiences, and the research takes place amidst multitudes of relationships. Shawn Wilson (2008) advises that "relationships do not merely shape reality, they are reality" (p. 7) and Vera Caine and colleagues (2022) affirm that "narrative inquiry works from a relational ontology" (p. 192). The relationality of this narrative inquiry study requires closer attention. In *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, Wilson (2008) carefully presents one perspective of an Indigenous research paradigm. As Wilson (2008) defines it,

> a research paradigm is the beliefs that guide our actions as researchers. These beliefs include the way that we view reality (ontology), how we think about or know this reality (epistemology), our ethics and morals (axiology) and how we go about gaining more knowledge about reality (methodology). (p. 13)

With his attention to describing an Indigenous research paradigm, Wilson (2008) set a high standard of ethical transparency, conceptual clarity, and thorough research design. I aspire to meet these standards of integrity to best serve the participants in this study. The following paragraphs describe the ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology of my narrative inquiry. I introduce each of the dimensions with the questions that Wilson (2008) asks, followed by my own descriptions developed over the course of this study through critical self-reflection.

Ontology characterizes the nature of reality, identifying, "what is real?" (Wilson, 2008, p. 33). Researchers have established that the foundations of narrative inquiry stand on a "transactional" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 16) and "relational ontology" (Caine et al., 2022, p. 193). In narrative inquiry, the view of experience is always interpersonal and interactive; it is always composed and conceived in relation to other persons, places, and beings. In this research study, "experience itself is viewed narratively," and "experiences are continuously interactive, resulting in changes in both people and the context in which they interact" (Caine et al., 2022, p. 193). Ontology draws attention to what is real or true; in this research study, subjective *truth* is found within participants' experiences and how those experiences relate to those of others.

Epistemology identifies what counts as knowledge, framing the possibilities for *how* researchers can come to know something about the subject of the research study, asking, "how do I know what is real?" (Wilson, 2008, p. 33). Epistemology and ontology are closely intertwined; ontology defines what is real, and epistemology names specific ways of knowing

what is real. Narrative inquirers can hold a range of epistemological perspectives in their studies, namely constructivist or critical (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007). This study maintains a constructionist view (Crotty, 1998) that knowledge is made mutually through social interactions among members of a community. In a constructionist stance, "all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). Knowledge is not stable, fixed, or measurable; instead, knowledge is dynamic, personal, and subjective. In this research study, knowledge is co-constructed through social interactions; graduate students make sense of their teaching and learning experiences in relation to the surrounding social, cultural, and institutional contexts. Truth and reality are located in people's experiences and within the narratives of their knowledge, beliefs, and practices, as told and retold in conversations across time.

Axiology draws attention to the values and ethical systems embedded in the research study, contemplating, "what part of this reality is worth finding out more about? What is it ethical to do in order to gain this knowledge, and what will this knowledge be used for?" (Wilson, 2008, p. 34). Axiology guides choices about what kinds of knowledge are worth seeking and the ethics by which that knowledge is obtained. It describes the nature of the inquiries developed in the research study, including research questions, interview questions, and the questions asked of the data during analysis. The questions asked in the study identify what the researcher values or what is considered important, meaningful, or worthy of study. With its core research question, this study implicitly argues that writing assessment literacy development is a phenomenon worthy of empirical study. Most of the research questions, designed to help surface participants' writing assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices, inherently reflect a

valuation of certain aspects of people's experiences, necessarily limited to the scope of this research study. These values intertwine with the ethical practices in the study, those that go far beyond IRB requirements too formulaic to capture the relational needs of writing studies research. This study aimed to prioritize participants' whole beings above the particular stories and narratives obtained, working to protect privacy, confidentiality, and identity.

Methodology describes the particular ways of gaining knowledge and developing theory in a research study, determining, "how do I find out more about this reality?" (Wilson, 2008, p. 34). A chosen methodology always accounts for the researcher's perspectives on reality (ontology) and knowledge (epistemology). The study maintains that the phenomenon under investigation, writing assessment literacy, can be understood best through the stories people tell about their perspectives and experiences. This research study seeks to document people's experiences and then interpret the significance of those experiences, and such richly descriptive research emerges from a qualitative research paradigm.

Evaluating the Quality of Qualitative Research

"It is not enough to do good. It must be done well." — St. Vincent de Paul

Narrative inquirers must take care to justify the effectiveness of their research methods and establish the truthfulness of the conclusions they draw. I understand that, absent of quantitative measures like validity and reliability (Mertova & Webster, 2019), I still must "persuade audiences about the trustworthiness" of the study's "data and interpretations," showing that I "followed a methodical path, guided by ethical considerations and theory, to story [my] findings" (Reissman, 2008, p. 186). To do so, I follow O'Reilly and Kiyimba's (2015) guidance for how to "assess the quality of qualitative research" (p. 27); the criteria apply to all qualitative research studies, including the narrative inquiry used in this study. Synthesizing qualitative

research theory and practice, the authors propose five "guiding principles" to judge the quality of qualitative work:

- Transparency (including auditability, trustworthiness, rigor, credibility);
- Reflexivity (being aware of the constructed nature of findings and impact of the researcher);
- Transferability (degree of relating to other contexts);
- Ethicality (risk and benefit assessment, significance of contribution, worthiness of topic);
- Integrity (epistemological congruence, authenticity, sampling adequacy). (p. 40)

These principles guided the design and procedures of this research study.

A "comprehensive degree of transparency regarding the research process" ensures that "interpretations of the data are clearly grounded" (O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015, p. 32). The thoroughness of the literature review and the extensive descriptions of methodology and methods support the transparency and trustworthiness of this research study. I achieve transparency and auditability in the ways that I have gathered, analyzed, and shared data in this study, providing a straightforward record of my research and decision-making processes for readers to follow. For example, later in this chapter, I provide specific timelines for interviews with participants and the overall structure of data collection to clearly document when and how information came into the research study. Transparency is also gained through the credibility of the researcher, expressed throughout the framing of the research study and the discussion of positionality in this chapter. Reflexivity enhances the researcher's credibility as I reflect on my "own role in the research process" and "consider the ways in which they have impacted on a project from inception to dissemination" (p. 37). The presence of reflexivity characterizes the presentation of the findings and my positionality statement. The principle of transferability is suitable for this research study

given that "generalization is not possible in qualitative work because evaluation is context-specific and meaning is not context-free" (O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015, p. 32). By providing "a detailed description of the research context" (O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015, p. 32) across multiple chapters, I establish the highly local and contextual nature of this study as one of its strengths. The depth of inquiry into one local context not only enables immediate programmatic impact from the findings but also explicates the experiences of GTAs understood across writing pedagogy education programs. Ethicality suggests a justification of the exigence and worthwhileness of the study, established through a well-defined exploration of the problem in the study's introduction and the significance of the findings in its conclusion. The principle of integrity expresses rigor throughout the research design and data analysis. I understand integrity as reflective of Tracy's (2010) construct of "meaningful coherence"—that the study "achieves what it purports to be about, uses methods and procedures that fit its stated goals, [and] meaningfully interconnects literature, research questions/foci, findings, and interpretations with each other" (p. 840). This qualitative research study aspires to transparency, reflexivity, transferability, ethicality, and integrity as criteria for quality. This chapter makes clear the epistemological stance of this research project and its alignment with narrative inquiry.

Positionality

"Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain"—The Wizard, *The Wizard of Oz*

Some research studies seem to conceal the role of the researcher, minimizing their part in the study to focus on the objective presentation of results. The researcher remains behind the curtain. Such is not the case in narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is an "empirical research approach that focuses on the stories of the lived experiences and personal practical knowledge of participants (*including researchers themselves*) [emphasis added]" (Casanave, 2005, p. 21). The

researcher, a storyteller alongside participants, composes the narratives at the heart of the narrative inquiry collaboratively; “at one level, participants tell and retell stories over time to researchers; at another level, researchers construct a story of the participants’ stories for the final research text” (Casanave, 2005, p. 21). It is an important methodological commitment for me to share my positionality and my own connections to this research and its participants, a consideration on which I have critically reflected throughout the writing of this dissertation.

As I shared in Chapter 1, I conducted this research study as a fourth-year PhD Candidate and the Assistant Director of First-Year Composition. Since I already shared how my standpoint informed my desire to conduct the present study and my openness to learning with and from my participants, here I consider how my positionality may have impacted participants during the research study. My role as an administrator had the potential to influence how participants responded to me during interviews. At worst, participants could have withheld information, concealed the realities of their experiences, or provided deceptive or inaccurate accounts of their writing assessment. Participants, perceiving me as an administrator rather than a peer, may have felt intimidated or insecure when telling stories about moments of insecurity or struggle, or they perhaps occluded or withheld those stories from our conversation. There were moments that heightened these concerns, like when I chaired the committee to decide the Hodges Award for Excellence in Teaching (MA/MFAs), and the three finalists for the award included two participants in this study. In this case, I put aside what I had learned about the participants from our interviews—certainly much more than an outside reviewer would know—and focused only on the materials they submitted for the award application. These trepidations emerged again when three of the MA/MFA participants asked me to write letters of recommendation as a reference for the job market or graduate programs. I believe that these reference requests reflect

the mutual trust established through the research study, showing that participants felt understood and supported rather than compromised or vulnerable by what they had disclosed. Participants separately perceived my roles as AD, researcher, and fellow GTA.

During data collection, too, I felt that participants answered every question I asked them with honesty. I tried to encourage open conversation by discussing my positionality with participants, reminding them, for example, *I'm asking this question as a researcher, not as an administrator*. I hoped to reinforce their confidence by ensuring anonymity and confidentiality, which I felt added a sense of security for participants to share their experiences. Perhaps then, at best, participants might have learned more about writing assessment and themselves as writing instructors through participation in the study. Camden, Lainey, Rose, Sage, and Theresa all commented that they enjoyed the interviews or that the interview process helped them reflect. Lainey shared during the second interview, "I think having these interviews and talking in the focus group has really helped me contextualize and articulate my teaching practices and assessment practices . . . it's been really nice to think about how I am as a teacher." Camden similarly remarked at the end of the third interview, "I honestly enjoyed this. I think it's been a really great way to reflect over this semester and see the differences between things I was saying a year ago and now." Several participants felt more supported as new instructors through the conversations we had and closeness we developed. By simultaneously conducting this study and helping run the FYC program, I reinforced the collaborative, reflexive, and cyclical nature of research conducted *by, with,* and *for* GTAs. I hope that my participants, my readers, and future GTAs who may find this dissertation see no curtains but instead a rich tapestry of detail and an honest account of experience that makes clear the roles and identities of participants and myself.

Institutional Context

This research study took place in the Department of English at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK), a large southeastern flagship state university. Situated within the College of Arts and Sciences, the Department of English consists of three divisions (in order of size): Literature, Criticism, and Textual Studies; Creative Writing; and Rhetoric, Writing, and Linguistics (RWL). During the time that this study was conducted, there were 83 graduate students (26 MA, 9 MFA, 48 PhD students). 23 of these graduate students taught FYC courses for the first time at UTK during the academic year, forming the population of the study.

GTAs teach one or two courses each semester depending on their year in the program, funding agreements, and available departmental or institutional support such as research assistantships, editorial roles, or writing center positions. First-year MA/MFA students (those excluded from this study) do not teach their own courses—instead, they serve as teaching assistants (TAs) to shadow experienced instructors and work as consultants in the writing center. The teaching assistantship provided to first-year MA/MFAs is one component of the Department's quadripartite teacher training program (further explained below). Second-year MA/MFA students teach their own courses with a 2-2 teaching load; MFAs may also teach ENGL 263 (Introduction to Creative Writing) alongside the mainstream ENGL 101 and ENGL 102 courses. PhD students begin teaching in their first year, often with a 1-1 teaching load. Advanced PhD students have access to course releases in the third, fourth, and fifth years along with fellowships, writing center positions, and research assistantships that impact teaching load.

To prepare GTAs to teach FYC courses, the Department of English offers a teacher preparation program with four dimensions: writing center tutoring/tutor training, one

composition practicum course, teaching assistantship, and Composition Office workshops.[4] Several units in the Department, including the Composition Office and the Graduate Studies office, work collaboratively with the Judith Anderson Herbert Writing Center (JAHWC) to operate these four dimensions, though responsibility for each component is largely isolated to individual units. The JAHWC delivers tutor training, while the RWL faculty who teach the composition pedagogy course control its content. The Department and its Graduate Studies division share responsibility with the Composition Office to arrange the teaching assistantships, while the Comp Office is solely responsible for its August and Winter Workshops, teaching materials, and resources.

GTAs at different levels engage with the trainings in highly variable ways. All funded first-year MA/MFA students tutor in the writing center and participate in year-long tutor training. They also take English 505: Composition Pedagogy. The course, offered each Spring semester, is designed to increase GTAs' familiarity with the mainstream FYC curriculum. While most first-year MA/MFAs take the course, some GTAs come into the program with course credit that waives the ENGL 505 requirement, which means that not all GTAs enroll in the course. All first-year MA/MFAs also serve as teaching mentees in one English 101 course in the Fall and one English 102 course in the spring. This provides teaching assistant (TA) experience before GTAs become the instructor of record in their second year of the program. PhD students, even those without formal teaching experience, do not participate in TAships. The Composition Office hosts August Workshops and Winter Workshops, annual trainings that provide a series of workshops designed to help FYC instructors learn the curriculum and create their syllabus, course calendar, and course Canvas pages. New GTAs (first- and second-year MA/MFAs and first-year PhD

[4] The use of these four components formalized in UTK's English Department in the late 1990s–early 2000s due to the work of compositionists such as Linda Bensel-Meyers, Mary Jo Reiff, Jenn Fishman, and Kirsten Benson.

students) must attend all workshop sessions, while GTAs with teaching experience can choose which (if any) sessions they attend. Participants in the study have a wide range of teaching experience and coursework, both from UTK and from previous universities.

UTK's award-winning FYC curriculum has been recognized with a Certificate of Excellence Award from the Conference on College Composition and Communication (Rose & Benson, 2017). Most students take the mainstream FYC sequence that consists of English 101 and English 102.[5] At the time of the research study, English 101: English Composition I, focused on academic argument and rhetorical analysis. Students composed four major projects: a comparative rhetorical analysis (CRA), debate analysis annotated bibliography (DAAB), academic position paper (APP), and multimodal public argument (MPA), almost always in that order. Key learning outcomes included "strategies for reading critically, analyzing texts from diverse perspectives, developing substantive arguments through systematic revision, addressing specific audiences, integrating sources, and expressing ideas with clarity and correctness" (Department of English, n.d.). English 102, English Composition II, focused on academic inquiry and research with an emphasis on "strategies for formulating and investigating questions, locating and evaluating information, using varied sources and research methods, developing positions on intercultural and interdisciplinary issues from diverse texts (print, digital, and multimedia), and presenting research using appropriate rhetorical conventions" (Department of English, n.d.). Students composed three major projects that the instructor could order according to their preferences: a secondary source research paper (SSRP), virtual museum exhibit (VME), and qualitative research paper (QRP). Each 102 course also features an inquiry topic—a theme around which instructor select readings and guidelines for the major projects. Common topics

[5] The ESL Program, part of the Composition Program, offers an L2 FYC track that consists of English 121, English 131, and English 132. There is also a cross-listed cross-cultural composition course option (ENGL 102/132).

include “Inquiry into Myths and Monsters,” “Inquiry into the South,” and “Inquiry into Food.” Inquiry topics were wide-ranging; at the time of the research study, there were approximately 40 unique topics listed on the Department’s website.

The 2023–2024 academic year offered a particularly unique context and exigent circumstances for the research study due to the upcoming changes in the FYC curriculum, the end of the equitable assessment pilot, and the Department’s 10-year Annual Performance Review. Beginning in Fall 2023, all English 101 courses adopted a new textbook, *The Evolving Essay.* The textbook was adapted from the previous iteration, *Rhetorical Choices,* and expanded by the Director of FYC, Dr. Sean Morey (who held this role for four years from 2021–2025). As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the 2023–2024 academic year was transitional for the Composition Office and the FYC curriculum; during that year, instructors piloted a revised English 101 curriculum that, among other changes, features two units instead of four (MPA and APP), reorders those units to begin with the MPA project, and emphasizes how writers always write in rhetorical contexts that engage their communities through the rhetorical concept of civic engagement. Two instructors piloted the curriculum in Fall 2023 and five instructors piloted the curriculum in Spring 2024, including Lainey, a participant in this research study. Based on the pilot instructors’ and their students’ feedback and experiences, the curriculum was fully implemented across the FYC program in Fall 2024.

Further, the study took place in the midst of an ongoing equitable assessment (EA) program started in 2021 by Megan Von Bergen, prior AD of First-Year Composition. With a $60,000 Student Success Grant through UTK’s Teaching & Learning Innovation (TLI), the department made a significant turn toward supporting the use of equitable and ethical assessment practices in FYC courses (see Von Bergen, 2024). As a result of the study, more than one-third of

all FYC instructors (39.2%) used some form of equitable assessment in their FYC courses. It is also important to mention that the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, at its height from 2020–2022, continue to reverberate through the Department, impacting teaching modalities and pedagogical and programmatic considerations. Writing programs are always in flux, and these changing programmatic contexts framed GTAs' teaching experiences at the time of the study.

As the site of this research study, UTK was selected for ease of access and in accordance with my goal as a researcher, administrator, and GTA that my dissertation research makes an immediate impact in my local institutional contexts for my community of graduate students. Despite the hyperlocal nature of this research study, the issues of labor and work that surfaced in this study are relevant for all graduate student instructors in the U.S. (Brown, 2023; Osorio et al., 2021). Further, the circumstances of GTA training at UTK share similarities with the training programs offered at other large doctoral-granting English departments in public universities in the U.S. (Cicchino, 2020; Estrem & Reid, 2012; Macauley et al., 2023). As such, the experiences of graduate student instructors at UTK can shed light on those of GTAs at other institutions and at the experiences of teachers learning to assess writing more broadly.

Selection of Participants

Participants invited to participate in the study were second-year MA/MFA and first-year PhD students who (a) served as GTAs in the Department of English, (b) taught FYC courses as an instructor of record, and (c) taught at UTK for the first time during the 2023–2024 academic year. Participants were enrolled in graduate degree programs for Literature, Criticism, and Textual Studies; Creative Writing; or Rhetoric, Writing, and Linguistics. Those excluded from the study include first-year MA/MFA students and PhD students after the first year. First-year MA/MFA students have been excluded from the study because they are not instructors of record;

rather, they work as teaching assistants and writing tutors in their first year before they teach their own courses as the instructor of record in their second year. PhD students in their second year and above have also been excluded because the study aimed to recruit relatively new instructors with less teaching experience. The study included participants with a wide range of positionalities and experiences during their first year teaching at UTK.

I sent the first recruitment email on July 24, 2023 to the 23 graduate student instructors teaching in the Fall 2023 semester.[6] The email described the purpose of the research study, an explanation of participation, and the consent form. The email also shared that participants would be compensated $20 for each interview, in the form of a Starbucks or Wild Love Bakehouse gift card, for a total amount of compensation of $60 through the course of the study. Five participants volunteered after the first recruitment email. I sent a follow-up recruitment email on August 1, 2023, and three more participants joined the study.

The Eight Participants

Eight GTAs agreed to participate in this study—34.8% of the total population of GTA instructors of record at the time of the study. **Table 1** highlights selected demographic information collected from the preliminary demographic and scheduling survey in Fall 2023. [7] The academic year of data collection (Fall 2023–Spring 2024) was each GTAs' first year as an instructor of record at UTK. [8]

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[6] While approximately 40 GTAs taught FYC courses as instructors of record in the Spring 2024 semester, course releases meant that fewer GTAs taught for the entire academic year. At the time of recruitment for the research study, 23 GTAs were eligible to participate in the study.

[7] Although I collected demographic information such as age, gender, ethnicity, home state, and languages spoken, I choose to only present those characteristics collectively in order to preserve participant anonymity and confidentiality. For the same reason, I do not incorporate identifiable demographic characteristics in the participant narratives in Chapter 4 and I use they/them/their pronouns refer to each participant.

[8] All participant names used in the study are pseudonyms. All participants had the option to select their pseudonym. Rose, Scarlet, and Theresa self-selected their pseudonyms; all other names were selected by the researcher who chose a gender neutral name from a list of popular baby names in the approximate year the participant was born.

Table 1: Participants

Participant	Degree Program	Home Region
Camden	MA, Literature	Southeastern U.S.
Grey	PhD, RWL	Northeastern U.S.
Keegan	PhD, RWL	Southeastern U.S.
Lainey	MFA, Creative Writing (Poetry)	Northeastern U.S.
Rose	MA, Literature	Southeastern U.S.
Sage	MFA, Creative Writing (Poetry)	South Asia
Scarlet	PhD, Literature	Southeastern U.S.
Theresa	MA, Literature	Southeastern U.S.

The participants included three MA students, two MFA students, and three PhD students. Participant ages ranged from 22 to 36. The eight participants included two multilingual students, two students from Tennessee, and one international student.

Table 2 details the course assignments and ENGL 102 themes for each instructor. Notably, seven of the eight participants identified as using some form of labor-based grading in their classes in both the Fall 2023 and Spring 2024 semesters. One participant, Theresa, used conventional grading in the Fall and then used labor-based grading in the Spring.

Participants in the study represent the department's three graduate degree programs (MA, MFA, PhD), three concentrations, and domestic and international status. I do not have access to data on the gender and racial identifications of all graduate students in the Department of English, but the larger population consists of majority white and majority female students.

Data Sources

In narrative inquiry, the records and materials typically called data are referred to as "field texts" because "they are created, neither found nor discovered, by participants and researchers in order to represent aspects of field experience" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 92). The term refigures what counts as data, emphasizing the subjectivity, interpretation, and collaboration in narrative inquiry methodology. The landscape of this study consists of five key sets of field texts: (a) three separate interviews with each GTA participant, (b) collection of GTAs' assessment materials, (c) two focus group discussion sessions, (d) interviews with ENGL 505 instructors, and (e) FYC August and Winter Workshops materials and field notes. The resulting field texts consisted of 32 hours and 45 minutes of audio recordings, 54 GTA assessment materials, and assorted resources from ENGL 505 and the Composition Office.

Table 2: Participant course assignments

Participant	Fall 2023	Spring 2024	ENGL 102 Theme
Camden	English 101 English 101	English 102 English 102	Inquiry into Myths & Monsters
Grey	English 101 English 101	English 102 English 102	Inquiry into Pop Culture: Social Media
Keegan	English 101 English 101	English 102 English 102	Inquiry into the South
Lainey	English 101 English 101	English 101[+] English 263*	Inquiry into Myths & Monsters
Rose	English 101 English 101	English 102 English 102	Inquiry into Myths & Monsters
Sage	English 101 English 263*	English 102 English 102	Inquiry into Memoir
Scarlet	English 101 English 101	English 102 English 102	Inquiry into Myths & Monsters
Theresa	English 101 English 101	English 102 English 102	Inquiry into Food

* Lainey and Sage, the creative writing MFAs, taught English 263: Intro to Creative Writing.
[+] Lainey taught the new English 101 pilot curriculum in Spring 2024.

Interviews with GTAs

Narrative inquiry often begins with "listening to individuals tell their stories," and the "methods most commonly used are conversations, or interviews as conversations" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 45). Following narrative inquiry, interviews served as the main source of data for this study. In order to conduct interviews in a narrative way that encouraged participants to tell stories about their experiences, I designed a three-interview series protocol (Seidman, 2019) that consisted of three open-ended, semi-structured interviews (see Appendix B for the full interview protocol). The first interview collected background information and focused on participants' prior educational experiences and existing assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices. The second interview focused on GTAs' teaching and assessment experiences during the Fall 2023 semester. The third interview focused on their teaching and assessment experiences during the Spring 2024 semester and final reflections on their development over the academic year.

The three-interview series aligned well with the methodological commitments of narrative inquiry because it allowed each interview to reveal insight into participants' experiences, thoughts, feelings, and beliefs as they changed over time. Seidman (2019) summarizes the approach as one in which "interviewers use, primarily, open-ended questions" to "build upon and explore their participants' responses to those questions" with the goal to "have the participant reconstruct his or her experience within the topic under study" (p. 15). The timespan between each interview and the in-depth scope of the questions both served to help capture people's experiences and interpret their meaning in context. As Seidman (2019) writes, "people's behavior becomes meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of their lives and the lives of those around them. Without context, there is little possibility of exploring

the meaning of an experience" (p. 17). The sequence of three interviews created space for participants to tell stories and offered the necessary time to reflect on those stories.

I interviewed participants three times over the course of the 2023–2024 academic year: before August Workshops in Fall 2023, toward the end of the Fall 2023 semester, and toward the end of the Spring 2024 semester (see **Table 3**). Before the first interview, participants responded to a brief demographic and scheduling survey. The multiple interviews enable me to understand how participants' assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices develop and change over time. Each interview lasted 60–80 minutes, and all interviews were conducted on Zoom. This resulted in 24 interviews total with approximately 28 hours and 24 minutes of audio.

Assessment Materials

The second and third interviews with GTAs used qualitative approaches from discourse-based interviews (DBIs) (Crozier & Workman, 2022; Odell et al., 1983) with participants' assessment materials to help GTAs tell stories of their assessment practices. Odell and colleagues (1983) developed DBIs as an ethnographic research method for studying workplace writing and "understand[ing] the tacit personal knowledge that writers bring to bear on their writing tasks" (p. 222). During the interviews, I requested that participants bring at least three assessment materials that they felt represented their approach to assessment. **Table 4** introduces the materials brought by each participant for each interview (see Appendix C for a detailed description). I defined an *assessment material* as an individual document (usually a piece of student work) with all associated feedback. Assessment materials included rubrics, grading contracts, drafts, final papers, summary comments, and other anonymized feedback on student work.

Table 3: Interview timeline and focus

	Interview #1	Interview #2	Interview #3
Time Frame	Pre-Fall 2023 Semester (July 31-August 21, 2023)*	End of Fall 2023 semester (December 6-15, 2023)	End of Spring 2024 semester (April 25-May 15, May 2024
Focus	Background information; prior educational and teaching experiences	Fall semester teaching and assessment experiences	Spring semester teaching and assessment experiences and final reflections on development

*Interviews were conducted with six participants July 31-August 3 before August Workshops. The remaining two interviews were conducted on August 15 and August 21.

Table 4: Number of assessment materials provided by each GTA

Participant	Interview #2 Materials	Interview #3 Materials	Total
Camden	3	3	6
Grey	3	3	6
Keegan	3	3	6
Lainey	3	3	6
Rose	3	4	7
Sage	4	4	8
Scarlet	4	4	8
Theresa	4	3	7
Total Assessment Materials			
	28	27	54

The materials included both rough drafts and final drafts of student work with instructors' written feedback. We used these materials as the basis for our discussions about writing assessment. I used open-ended prompting questions to elicit participants' thoughts, feelings, processes, and attitudes around the assessment materials with the goal to elicit prior and tacit knowledge that may inform writing assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices.

Focus Group Sessions

Using qualitative research methods, I held two optional focus group sessions during the academic year. Although scheduling made it impossible for everyone in the research study to meet, I prioritized my commitment to enable participants to meet with each other, ask each other questions, and discuss their teaching and assessment. As a fellow GTA and the AD of FYC, I hoped to cultivate community and mentorship among participants in this study and collaborate to share resources and strategies. At the same time, I recognized that these discussions, along with participation in the study, may have had an influence GTAs' responses and the development of their writing assessment literacies (as explored in the "Positionality" section above). The Fall semester focus group met on October 23, 2023 with five participants: Grey, Keegan, Scarlet, Theresa and Lainey. The Spring semester focus group met on April 11, 2024 with four participants: Keegan, Scarlet, Theresa, and Camden, with a fifth participant, Grey, joining for the last five minutes. Each session lasted approximately one hour and took place in person in a reserved room on the second floor of the Hodges Library.

ENGL 505 Instructor Interviews

English 505: Composition Pedagogy is a required course that first-year MA/MFAs take in the English Department in the Spring semester of their first year. The MA/MFA participants in this research study took English 505 in the Spring 2023 semester prior to the study. To help

understand the role of writing assessment in the ENGL 505 course, I interviewed the two English Department faculty who teach the course regularly. I interviewed Kevin, the ENGL 505 instructor who taught the Spring 2023 course that enrolled the participants in the study, on September 26, 2023. I interviewed Amy, who has alternately and simultaneously taught ENGL 505 with Kevin, on September 12, 2023.[9] Each interview lasted approximately one hour. In addition to questions about the faculty member's educational background, the questions inquired about the purpose of ENGL 505 and the role of writing assessment theory and practice in the course. These interviews provided insight to the formal pedagogical training received by the MA/MFA participants in the study. Kevin also shared with me the syllabus from the Spring 2023 ENGL 505 course and several previous iterations of the syllabus to see how the course changed over time. None of the PhD participants in this study took ENGL 505 during the first year of the study; all entered the program with previous coursework that fulfilled the course requirement.

Composition Office Materials

As the AD of FYC during the time of the study, I had a significant role in the Composition Office's August and Winter Workshops. I attended the same workshops about writing assessment that new graduate student instructors were asked to attend. I also facilitated some of the workshops. For the purposes of this research study, I collected the workshop presentations to gain more insight into the assessment training that the Composition Office provides to new instructors. Some of the presentations I had designed, while others had been created by prior members of the Composition Office. Additionally, I collected writing assessment materials—any documents used to discuss grading and assessment with FYC instructors—from the Composition Office's "First-Year Composition" Canvas. Considered alongside the ENGL

[9] These names are pseudonyms self-selected by each faculty member.

505 instructor interviews and syllabi, these resources provide background information and historical context for the teacher training program at UTK.

Data Collection

Data collection took place over three semesters—Summer 2023, Fall 2023, and Spring 2024 (see **Table 5**). In Summer 2023, I recruited the eight participants and requested that they fill out a brief demographic and scheduling survey. I collected resources and presentations from the Composition Office's August Workshops. I conducted the first interview with GTA participants before the start of the Fall 2023 semester. In Fall 2023, I started by interviewing the two English 505 instructors and collecting English 505 materials from the Spring 2023 course.

Fall semester interviews took place in September 2023. In the middle of the semester, I held the first optional focus group session, which took place on October 23. During this time, I also reviewed the Composition Office's FYC Canvas site to review any resources or materials related to assessment. At the second interview, which took place at the end of the Fall semester (December 6–15, 2023), I collected at least three samples of teaching and assessment materials from each participant. In the Spring 2024 semester, I collected resources from Winter Workshops and the Composition Office. I held the second optional focus group session, which took place on April 11. I conducted the third and final interview with each GTA participant, during which I collected three samples of teaching and assessment materials from the semester.

Data Analysis Procedures

To transcribe all audio-recorded interviews and focus groups, I uploaded the audio files to Microsoft Word Online and used the transcription feature to auto-generate preliminary transcripts. Then, I used the auto-generated transcript as a baseline, listening through the interview at normal speed to refine the transcript for accuracy, replace participant names with

Table 5: Data collection timeline

	Summer 2023	Fall 2023	Spring 2024
Interviews with GTAs	Demographic survey Interview #1	Interview #2	Interview #3
Assessment Materials		Collection of participant assessment materials	Collection of participant assessment materials
Focus Group Sessions		Session #1	Session #2
ENGL 505 Instructor Interviews		Interview Amy Interview Kevin	
Comp Office Materials	August Workshops	FYC Canvas site	Winter Workshops

pseudonyms, and redact the names of any other persons mentioned. Polished interview transcripts and all assessment materials were uploaded to NVivo 14 for analysis. The interviews were analyzed individually to construct narratives of experiences (see Chapter 4) as well as holistically to identify themes and patterns (see Chapter 5). Formal analysis used inductive coding (Saldaña, 2021), categorical-content analysis (Lieblich et al., 1998), and thematic analysis (Riessman, 2005, 2008) to analyze the data immersively and interpretively. Specifically, I used descriptive coding to uncover themes and patterns across the narratives, while I used categorical-content analysis and thematic analysis to construct the participant narratives and locate narrative coherences and divergences across the narratives. Data analysis was a recursive, iterative process that continued through the process of writing this dissertation.

Coding GTA Interviews

With the analysis of the interview transcripts, my goal was to trace GTAs' writing assessment literacy development over the course of one academic year. The inductive, descriptive coding of interview transcripts followed Saldaña's (2021) approach of first cycle and second cycle coding to ensure repeated and close reading of the interview transcripts. As Saldaña (2021) defines the terms, "first cycle coding is *analysis*—taking things apart. Second cycle coding is *synthesis*—putting things together into new assemblages of meaning" (p. 6). Despite this terminology, the data analysis did not consist of two separate cycles; rather, the broader purpose of coding shifted back and forth, from analysis to synthesis, over the course of the data analysis process through multiple rounds of reading and analyzing transcripts. The first cycle coding was descriptive and inductive to see how GTAs make sense of their experiences. Description is necessary for all qualitative research, and descriptive coding summarizes the topic of passages of qualitative data. Descriptive coding works to "assist the reader to see what you

saw and to hear what you heard, rather than scrutinize the nuances of people in social action" (Saldaña, 2021, p. 134). As such, it offered a starting place to begin analyzing the data. I followed the initial descriptive coding with second-cycle deductive coding that brought the research questions into focus and identified moments of writing assessment literacy development and evidence of writing assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices. From first cycle to second cycle coding, the purpose shifted from studying individuals' three-series interviews with a focus on each participant over time to considering the collective experiences of all participants together. **Table 6** displays themes, categories, and example codes derived through the multiple rounds and cycles of coding. In the table, *example codes* display patterned phrases that reflect attributes of interview transcripts; *categories* synthesize and classify codes into coherent interpretations; *themes* express the conceptual and thematic constructs that resulted from the coding process (e.g., Saldaña, 2021).

This study places coding alongside categorical-content analysis (Lieblich et al., 1998) to keep participant narratives at the center of the research study. I used categorical-content analysis to contour the coding process and develop the participant narratives. The "categorical" perspective articulated by Lieblich et al. (1998) aligns well with the descriptive coding expressed by Saldaña (2021) because working from the process means that "sections . . . belonging to a defined category are collected from the entire story . . . the categorical approach may be adopted when the researcher is primarily interested in a problem or a phenomenon shared by a group of people" (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 13). Informed by categorical-content analysis (Lieblich et al., 1998), the approach to coding in this study did not seek to segment, isolate, or decontextualize participants' words. Instead, coding was used to identify a storyline within participants' individual and collective experiences, develop themes, and interpret the meaning of

Table 6: Codes, Categories, and themes across the data

Theme	Category	Example Codes
The nature and impact of prior experience	Early educational experiences	elementary, childhood, home school, high school-age
	College-level educational experiences	Undergraduate education, MA education, feedback received, positive experience, negative experience
Prior writing assessment literacy	Identity as a student	Conceptions of writing, identification as writer, writing experiences
	Knowledge, beliefs, and practices brought to UTK	Prior beliefs, prior knowledge, prior teaching experiences
Writing assessment literacy development	Evolution of assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices	Literacy development, learning, experience, change
Conditions that impact writing assessment literacy development	Writing pedagogy education and teacher training	Coursework, mentorship, TAship, peer influence, writing center, comp office
Impact of assessment knowledge and beliefs on assessment practices	Writing assessment knowledge	Student needs, pedagogical knowledge, disciplinary knowledge, institutional knowledge, assessment knowledge
	Writing assessment beliefs	Definition of assessment, assessment beliefs, empowerment, agency, voice
	Writing assessment practices	Verbal feedback, rubric, written feedback, assessment practice, grading
Literacy development as labor	GTA Positionality	Workload, labor, stress, liminality, teaching persona
	Needed support	Challenge, unprepared, time management, balance
	Emotional response	Anxious, nervous, afraid, hopes, excited

stories (Riessman, 2008) with a focus on the phenomenon of writing assessment literacy development. Categorical-content analysis keeps the broader view on themes within and across the content of the narratives rather than quantifying words or creating lists of codes.

Thematically Analyzing GTA Interviews & Focus Groups

Analysis of interviews culminated with thematic analysis, which looks for similarities, differences, patterns, and themes across participants (Riessman, 2005, 2008). Thematic analysis focuses on what participants say and what stories they choose to tell (Riessman, 2005). In thematic analysis, data analysis "preserve[s] sequences" and stories "rather than thematically coding segments" (Riessman, 2008, p. 74). Although narrative analysis ultimately makes a "case-centered commitment" without the need to "stabil[ize] concepts," thematic analysis guided the inquiry into commonalities across new instructors' experiences (Reissman, 2008, p. 74). The approach analyzes stories holistically while focusing on individual cases (in this study, individual participants and the collective group). The focus group transcripts were used to complement analysis and provide more detail and description to the individual accounts in the interviews.

Analyzing 505 Instructor Interviews

The two interviews with ENGL 505 instructors were analyzed similarly with different goals. These interviews were provided background information and in-depth insight into the teaching of the Composition Pedagogy course—historical circumstances that informed my understanding of institutional context, departmental history, and the nature of the teacher training program and its changes over time. I used these interviews to gain insight and context to inform my understanding of people's experiences as graduate student instructors at UTK.

Analyzing Assessment Materials

In the discourse-based portion of the interviews, the assessment materials provided a concrete context for instructors to describe their writing assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices. In each interview, we discussed the assessment materials that participants brought to provide concrete contexts for GTAs to articulate how they provide feedback on student work. For the purpose of this study, I counted each individual document shared with me as one assessment material. Throughout the course of the study, participants shared 54 assessment materials—32 projects with feedback, eight rubrics, two grading contracts, two commentaries on multimodal projects, one reflection prompt, and a range of scaffolding assignments that included seven research plans, one research question, and one summary paragraph, all with written commentary.

The assessment materials submitted by each participant were analyzed alongside their interview transcripts to illustrate and triangulate participants' stories across the interviews (what they say) and the physical materials (what they do). Then, collectively, all the assessment materials were analyzed holistically and thematically. The assessment materials were understood as pieces of discourse circulated amidst social, cultural, and political formations that shape/are shaped by instructors within institutions. I understand people's experiences, actions, and beliefs as both reflective and constructive of institutional discourses, particularly within highly institutionalized settings such as universities. The assessment materials were studied to understand how institutional discourses and disciplinary ideals shape GTAs' experiences and possibilities for being in the composition classroom. I explored the content, design, and meaning of the assessment materials to understand how the language reflects and connects to institutional and social structures and how such language shapes social/cultural norms in our institutional

context. The participant narratives in Chapter 4 include excerpts from assessment materials to provide real, material representations of participants' stories.

From Field Texts to Research Texts: The Role of Analytic Memos

Analytic memos facilitated the data analysis process by supporting the transition from "field texts" (raw data) to "research texts" (written analysis) through "repeated asking of questions concerning meaning and significance" of the data (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 132). I made handwritten notes during each interview and focus group to help follow the conversation, identify salient moments, and pursue follow-up questions. In addition to these handwritten notes, I began typing analytic memos at the end of data collection in May 2024 and continued to do so throughout the data analysis process. I used memos to assist in data analysis by creating a space for ongoing ideas, notes, and "patterns, narrative threads, tensions, and themes either within or across an individual's experience and in the social setting" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 132). Recursively throughout the data analysis process, I re-read notes from the analytic memos to inform my understanding of the meanings of peoples' experiences.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a multifaceted, detailed description of the qualitative and narrative inquiry methodologies, interview and focus group methods, sources of data, and data analysis procedures of this study. I demonstrated conceptual and methodological alignment of narrative inquiry to establish a high degree of integrity and ethicality in the study. I do so to express my commitment to treat GTAs' narratives with the utmost level of care and reverence. The carefully constructed research design built the foundation from which I document and construct narratives of GTAs' experiences to think narratively about the development of writing assessment literacy. With these standards firmly established, I now turn to these narratives.

Chapter 4

The Writing Assessment Knowledge, Beliefs, and Practices of GTAs

In this study, eight graduate student instructors at UTK shared their experiences of writing assessment literacy development. Through participant narratives and thematic analysis, this and the following chapter present and analyze narratives that identify GTAs' writing assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices; reflect beliefs, hopes, and anxieties; reveal tensions, challenges, and successes; and locate experiences of writing assessment literacy development within GTAs' first year teaching as instructors of record at UTK. The narratives, derived from the stories participants shared through the three-interview series, provide insight into the richly complex, complicated, and sometimes conflicting experiences of GTAs.

In preserving this space for participant narratives, I reimagine my purpose from *collecting data* to *leaving evidence* (e.g., Yoshizaki-Gibbons, 2023). *Collecting* can connote *taking*, while *leaving* signifies *giving*. Disability justice activist Mia Mingus (n.d.) writes, "we must leave evidence. Evidence that we were here, that we existed, that we survived . . . Evidence for each other that there are other ways to live—past survival; past isolation." In what follows, I leave evidence *of* and *for* the eight graduate student instructors who participated in this study and the many GTAs—past, present, and future—who have labored to assess writing in FYC courses.

Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 present the results and discussion of this research study with complementary purposes. Chapter 4 provides the results from narratives, while Chapter 5 presents the results from thematic analysis. The narratives introduce readers to the participants and their experiences more broadly, which are closely analyzed in the next chapter. I constructed participant narratives based on analysis of the three-interview series (Seidman, 2006) as well as participants' assessment materials. The narratives thus depict each GTA's writing assessment

knowledge, beliefs, and practices during the 2023–2024 academic year using examples of written feedback. The detailed participant narratives begin to provide answers to the study's first two research questions: How do GTAs develop their writing assessment literacy? What prior writing assessment literacy do GTAs bring to the FYC classroom? These stories of experience give life to the construct of writing assessment literacy, which I further explore in Chapter 5.

First, I briefly summarize participants' characteristics. Then, I present eight narratives in alphabetical order by pseudonym. The narratives portray each participant's development of writing assessment literacy. The selected assessment materials illustrate the connections between participants' assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices. Following the eight participant narratives, the chapter concludes with key takeaways. In this chapter, I invite readers to come alongside me to bear witness to the experiences of graduate student instructors; I assert that those who are willing to listen can learn something valuable from the experiences of GTAs (e.g., Clem, 2022; Macauley et al., 2023). Now is the time to attend to those experiences and hear from the participants—Camden, Grey, Keegan, Lainey, Rose, Sage, Scarlet, and Theresa.

The Participants

Eight graduate student instructors participated in this study: three MA students, two MFA students, and three PhD students, all in their first year as instructors of record at UTK. The participants in this study share experiences in terms of training and teaching experiences. The MA/MFA students—Camden, Lainey, Rose, Sage, Theresa—received the same year of training before their second year of the program and their teaching of FYC courses. The four main pillars of their preparation included tutoring and tutor training, teaching assistantship, composition

pedagogy coursework, and the Composition Office's workshops and resources.[10] The PhD students—Scarlet, Keegan, Grey—had variable levels of experience from previous institutions. All three had prior composition pedagogy coursework and tutoring experience. Scarlet and Keegan had multiple years of teaching experience at other universities and community colleges (with variable levels of preparation) while Grey had cursory classroom teaching experience.

Participant Narratives

The rest of the chapter retells in-depth narratives from each participant in the research study to shed light on the phenomenon of writing assessment literacy development. Each narrative, ordered alphabetically by participant pseudonym and recounted chronologically, draws from the stories participants shared across the three-interview series. Each narrative is divided into three sub-sections: (a) Origin Story & Educational Background, which accounts for participants' educational and personal backgrounds before coming to UTK; (b) Writing Pedagogy Education, which describes the formal teacher training participants received; and (c) Assessment Literacy, which focuses on GTAs' experiences with assessment during their first year as instructors of record at UTK. The origin stories primarily derive from Interview #1 and participants' reflections on their training and preparation that emerged across all three interviews, while the second and third part of each narrative primarily derive from Interviews #2 and #3 to document GTAs' experiences with writing assessment during their first year teaching. Each narrative begins with a quotation indicative of the graduate student's writing assessment literacy development. The detailed narratives allow participants to speak for themselves by relying on direct quotations of people's words, phrases, and stories.

[10] In the context of this study, *teaching assistantship* refers to a form of apprenticeship in which graduate students work as teaching assistants (TAs—not instructors of record) in FYC courses. The MA/MFAs in this study worked as TAs in English 101 and 102 course during their first year in the program. Two PhD participants had prior teaching assistantship experience from their MA programs at previous institutions, while one did not.

As a researcher, I approached the composition of these narratives as a narrative inquirer, an insider, and a peer who has shared similar experiences to many participants in the study. I hope that readers feel that they can truly get to know each participant. Due to the space and modality constraints of a conventionally formatted dissertation, it would be impossible to capture every detail of the experiences, thoughts, emotions, and insights shared during the interviews. Still, these narratives endeavor to accomplish a significant part of what I set out to do with my dissertation—document the stories and experiences of GTAs.

Camden

"There's nothing that really prepares you until you do it."

Origin Story & Educational Background

Camden is a graduate student from the Southeastern U.S. pursuing an MA in English Literature with a research focus on Medieval Literature. Growing up, their Nana, an elementary school principal, "sparked" their "engagement and excitement with reading" and writing. "I was really lucky to have her in my life where I could go visit her during the summers," Camden said, because they lacked the same level of engagement from their parents, which made it difficult to read at home during childhood. Camden identified as a strong reader and a "competent" writer through middle and high school, and these traits were noticed and rewarded by their educators. In high school, Camden's middle school librarian invited them to join the library's after-school programs to "work with young readers." Driven by their love for reading, Camden attended a small private four-year college in West Tennessee to study English Literature and Creative Writing. "All types of writing were really challenging to me when I first started at undergrad." Camden did not have to take a required FYC course due to AP credit from high school. Since they "never actually took a very specific 'this-is-how-you-write-academically' or 'this-is-how-

you-write-for-a-college-course' class at all," Camden learned to write at the college level by "receiving instructor feedback per different instructor guidelines and hoping that I could match the instructors' concerns or needs with whatever paper." As an undergraduate student, Camden "got lost in the 'I-just-want-to-write-to-get-an-A' mentality,'" gearing their writing toward each professor's standards; "it wasn't very fulfilling." Camden generally felt "embarrassed" and "really anxious" about writing and submitting papers during the early years of college. They were "too intimidated" to go to the writing center, believing at the time that "asking for help was a bad thing." Instead, they relied on instructor feedback and grades to inform their writing development. Camden completed their undergraduate education in 2022 and immediately began the MA program at UTK. In Summer 2023, Camden was "unsure" about their career plans. After they began teaching FYC courses, however, Camden realized a passion for composition instruction. Due to their developing interest in composition pedagogy, Camden shared, "if I were to do any more higher education, I would do RWL." After graduation in Spring 2024, Camden began teaching at a local private high school.

Writing Pedagogy Education

During their apprenticeship year at UTK, Camden learned how to assess writing from tutoring, teaching assistantship, English 505, and the Composition Office workshops, in that order of influence. Camden applied their tutoring experience directly to teaching, reporting that working at the writing center honed their ability to "think through assignments from a student-based approach before an instructor-based approach." Tutoring deepened Camden's understanding of the FYC curriculum more than any other aspect of their preparation. It also informed their approach to giving "intentional" feedback. The writing center fundamentally changed the perceptions of "bad writing" established in their undergraduate education:

> I really loved working in the writing center, especially with students who left feeling excited and ready to go on their papers after our meetings. I would say overall what I really liked about the writing center was seeing firsthand that working with students to develop their writing is not them being bad at writing or bad writers. It's never anything about asking for help being a bad thing. I thought it was always really inspiring that they were brave and confident enough to come into the writing center and share their writing.

Alongside tutoring, Camden's teaching assistantship strongly influenced their approach to assessment. Camden had positive experiences with their English 101 and 102 mentors. During English 101, they felt "so nervous and did not at all feel very confident engaging with or even sharing information with students because I've never taken a writing class, so I truly don't know if I know what I'm talking about." That semester, Camden graded five students' work each week and led two or three class sessions on topics like citations and plagiarism. These experiences built their confidence for English 102 in the Spring semester, during which they taught five class sessions and graded six students' work each week. The decision to use ungrading came primarily from observing their mentor's use of labor-based grading in English 102.

English 505 helped Camden develop some lesson plans that they went on to teach in their English 102 course. They learned time management skills and "the importance of giving relevant feedback" in a "relevant time period." Camden didn't feel they took away many "practical skills" from the Composition Office's August Workshops compared to "some of the other training opportunities that we had," but did learn from the antiracist pedagogy workshop since "we didn't really talk about it a lot in my mentorship or my 505." Camden also made use of the equitable assessment resources, course calendar, and sample activities on the FYC Canvas site.

Assessment Literacy: Building a Classroom Community Through Assessment

After deciding to use ungrading based on their experiences as a TA in English 102, Camden used labor-based assessment in all courses they taught over the academic year. With a complete/incomplete approach to assessment, Camden prioritized removing value judgments from students and their writing and focusing instead on student growth. Specific assessment practices included collaborative rubric development, grading contracts for each major project in English 102, opportunities to revise major projects, and not grading some work, such as in-class writing or lower-stakes assignments. Camden adapted their assessment practices based on their teaching experience and student feedback. For example, in English 101, Camden "very much focused on giving feedback on the final draft," while in English 102, Camden "gave a lot more feedback on rough drafts than the final drafts." They were motivated to make this change by "talk[ing] to a few other instructors who give a lot of feedback on the rough drafts" and by reading student "self-reflection assignments" in which students expressed wanting "more feedback" or wanting to "know a little bit more in the rough draft than the final draft." Camden reflected in the Spring semester, "that switch has been so helpful, and I think the final drafts have been a lot stronger and a lot more confident than the ones that were submitted in 101."

In the first interview, Camden felt "so nervous" and "afraid" when they thought about teaching their first class. "When I started last semester, I was like, I'm not prepared for this. I don't know what I'm doing. I'm not ready to go into teaching." However, teaching for one year transformed how they felt about their teaching identity. Camden's confidence developed significantly over the course of the year. "By the end of the semester, I was like, oh, actually, I did have all the skills that I needed, I think, and I had the relationships and the foundations to develop and work on whatever things that I didn't already know how to do." As Camden gained

experience, they gained more self-assurance in their teaching. “I think I was not very confident going in. But then as soon as we were teaching and doing the things I was like, I'm familiar with this lesson. I have a lot of resources to teach it and instruct it.” Camden concluded, “actually, I felt very prepared as going this semester with all the resources that we had beforehand . . . I honestly think it was a product of being the teacher for the first time.” Over time, they developed into a reflective instructor who adapted their assessment practices based on student feedback provided in class discussions and written reflections.

Camden’s pedagogical goals to build classroom community and develop writer confidence drove their teaching and assessment practices. Their approaches to assessment centered around “building up confidence” for students:

> I think that assessment especially has such a negative connotation to it and such an anxiety attached to it, because I think that especially coming from high school where grades are kind of attributed to value, I think coming into your first year at college, you still kind of have that mentality. So kind of separating like value from assessment is really important to me. And so building up confidence and building up a positive engagement with feedback rather than a negative engagement.

Parallel to their own experiences as an undergraduate student, Camden aimed to provide to their own students the encouragement and reassurance that Camden wanted when they first came to college. Camden worked to replicate the effective feedback they received on their own writing while avoiding the kind of feedback that was harmful to them as a student. As an example, Camden’s belief that concise feedback is most helpful traces to the feedback they received in a first-year humanities course. Camden appreciated comments on their own writing as an undergraduate student that were not “overwhelming” or “nitpicking.” “It was very much like two

or three very straightforward, guided ways that I could improve my writing for next time and then like examples in the text where you could see that this was something that I could work on. That was really helpful." Camden attributed their approach to commentary to these prior experiences, integrating the assessment knowledge gained in the writing center with their preexisting beliefs. Since "I would say for me, because I experienced writing feedback to be really helpful when it was like three-to-five localized things," they focused on "thinking about the really big things that need to be like considered or thought about when writing, especially when it came to students who had more writing experience or seemed to be getting those larger more present needs already down." For these reasons, experience is hugely influential in the development of writing assessment literacy. Derived from the feedback they received as an undergraduate writer, Camden characterized their approach to providing commentary on student work as giving "more specific" feedback with "three-to-five instances where you could have very specific revisions and explaining why that would be important."

Camden's approach to writing assessment separated value judgments of quality from students' writing products. "I really like to use the word *successful* because I think it's not good or bad. It's not like you did a bad job or you didn't do a good job. I feel like it's not really assigning like a quality to something." Rather, in Camden's view, "it's just whether or not this idea that you had was successfully communicated to this audience that you had. And really that's just kind of about understanding." As a result of these beliefs, their assessment was guided by questions like "did I understand the point you were trying to get across?" and "did I understand this idea that you're trying to communicate?" They made many changes to their assessment practices between the Fall and Spring semesters based on "feedback" from students. Further,

Camden used self-reflection to attend to the emotional and affective dimensions of students' writing through feedback. They learned to use self-reflection to inform commentary:

> The first time I graded, I did their projects and then their self-reflections and then I was reading their self-reflections, and I was like oh, man. I said a lot of, 'this needs to grow' or 'this is a place where you can grow' on some things that they didn't feel very confident about. And then I was like, that's probably not a great way to approach something that they have a specific sore spot about. Having their self-reflections guide my feedback is really useful in just making sure that I am giving an individualized approach to what they want to get better at or how they want to improve. But then also it allows me to see—what were they not feeling great about? Or what were they feeling especially like nervous about?—so I can be even more sensitive to their concerns or anxieties.

Camden's feedback to students aimed to be "constructive" and "instructive," which they primarily learned from English 505, seeing their mentor instructors' feedback on student writing, and reflecting on the feedback they received from their own instructors as an undergraduate student. Camden pointed to the second comment in **Figure 1** ("although it may feel a bit redundant") as one piece of commentary that felt representative of their approach to giving feedback. Of the nine comments on the comparative rhetorical analysis rough draft, five offered specific praise, two identified key rhetorical terms, one specified intended audience in the conclusion, and one mentioned block quote formatting. The commentary expresses how Camden aligns their beliefs about assessment with student needs. Considering first-year students at UTK, "I think a lot of them have these expectations in their minds about why they do or don't do certain things." As a result, "I really like to address, especially when giving them feedback, some of the misconceptions or already perceived notions that they have about writing and then

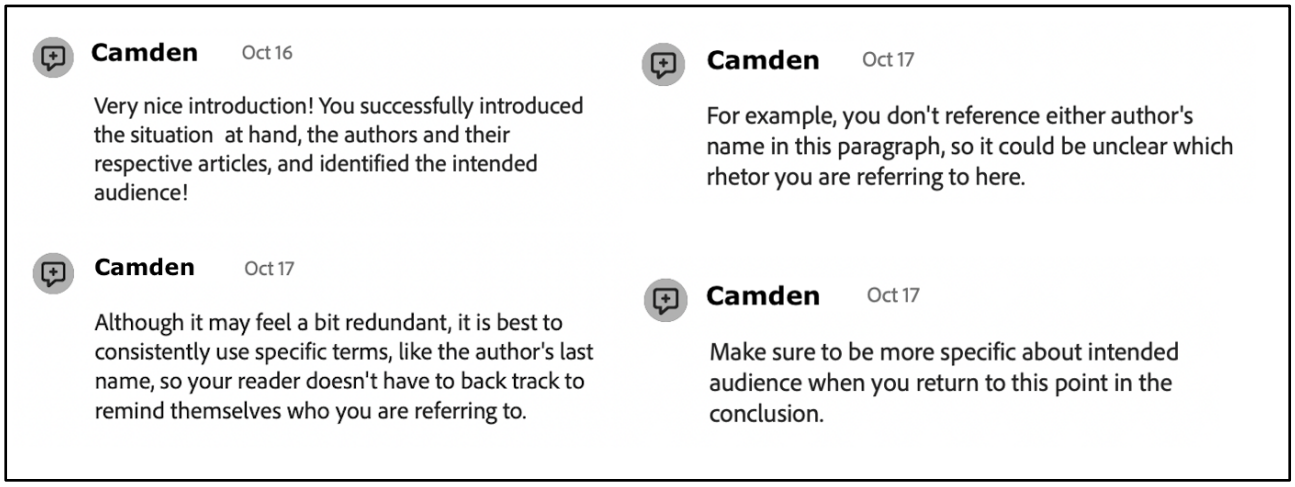


Figure 1. Marginal comments, comparative rhetorical analysis (ENGL 101), Camden.

rephrase it in a way to think about it again as an audience perspective." The marginal comment in **Figure 1** "was especially one of the ones that I like to include in all of my feedback . . . I like to give examples of like why it's important." Camden reflected, "this is kind of the type of constructive feedback that I like to give them in terms of thinking through the audience's perspective." Camden describes their feedback in relation to the individual student, indicating that their assessment practices are generally contextual and dependent on student needs. This student stood out in their mind as someone who is "very talented" and a "strong writer," but "not a very confident writer." The feedback connects to their goal that, "I think more than anything, I just wanted to build up their confidence in their writing skills this semester." Camden kept in mind the student's confidence level, specific feedback requests they had made, and their previous interactions with the student in class and during office hours. "My main purpose in the feedback for this paper is to identify what they were saying in their writing to show that I understood what they were saying in their writing and then really build up their confidence as writers."

Important to their approach is giving feedback that is "really heavy on the initial stages" and "very little feedback on the final draft." They provide the most assessment through "the thesis day, the developing a research question, and the rough drafts and conferences, those are the times where I feel like the most feedback is offered because it seems like they feel more confident submitting a final draft after they've looked at the feedback and thought about the feedback and incorporated what feedback they felt was positive." Camden wrote 21 marginal comments and the summary comment shown in **Figure 2** on one qualitative research paper rough draft in English 102. The figure shows the first paragraph of the essay, which had four marginal comments, as well as the marginal comment posted on Canvas with the feedback.

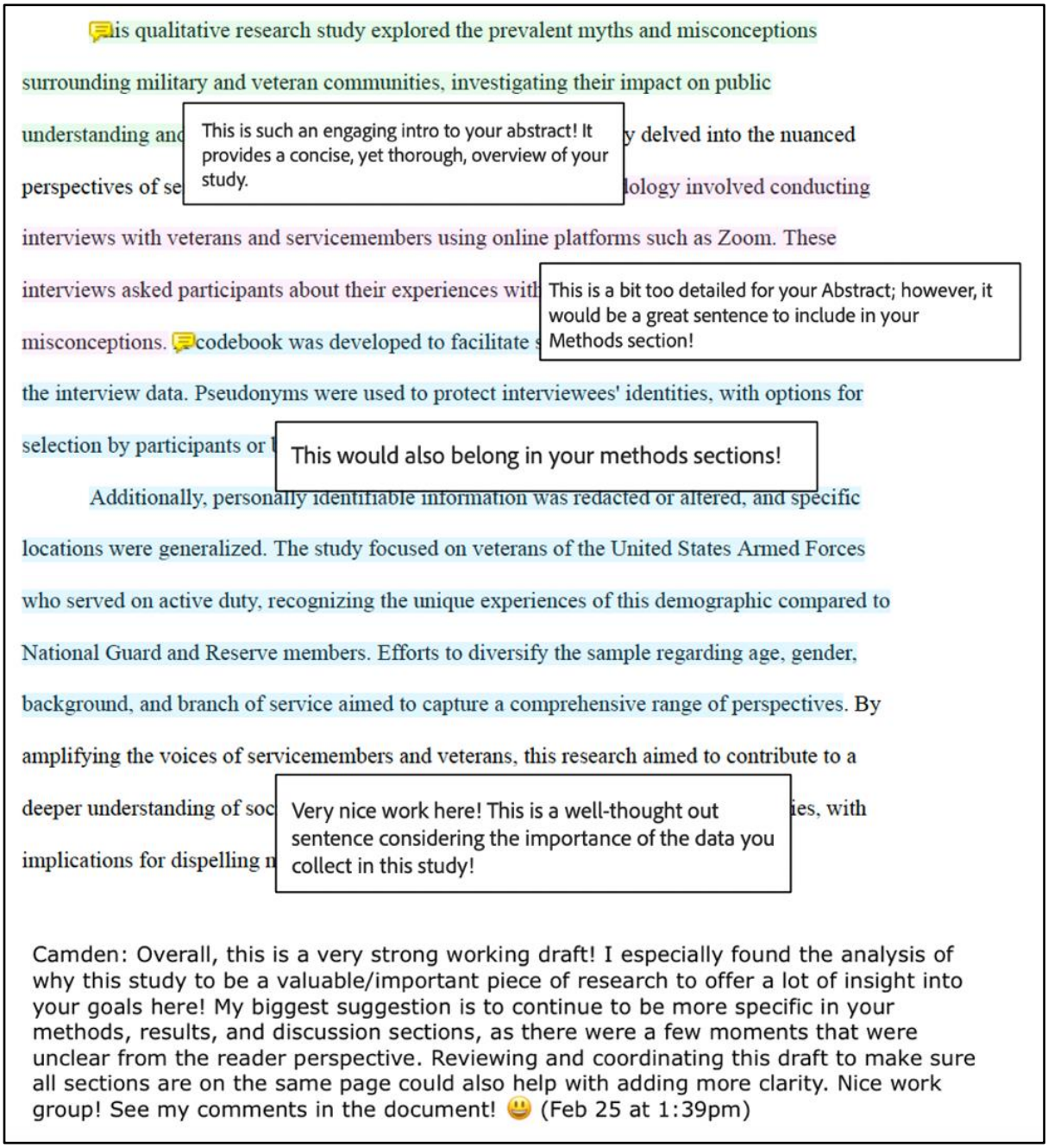


Figure 2. Commentary on a qualitative research paper (ENGL 102), Camden.

Some of the changes that Camden made in their assessment practices by the end of the Spring semester included providing more feedback on rough drafts than final drafts and beginning their feedback process with self-reflections. They also experienced development in their understanding of the function of feedback on student writing:

> As a student, I've always just kind of been like, 'okay, well, instructors have to give feedback. Whatever.' I never really thought too much about it. But now, on the instructor side, I care so much about the feedback that I give them that I've really seen the ways that you give feedback is important. There's a clear power and balance between teacher and student, but I never realized to what extent. I mean, you can really like harm someone's confidence in their writing by one missaid or misplaced phrase. 'cause I know. I had a professor do that me once. I think this semester, I really became aware of how much some students look to you as a guidance and authority figure, which was really odd to me. But I realized how that's conveyed through feedback and grading.

As a GTA, Camden began teaching with a strong base of assessment knowledge and beliefs gained through the apprenticeship year. Though this foundation informed the assessment practices they developed through teaching FYC courses, the experience of teaching ultimately developed their confidence and pedagogical approaches. Camden individualized their assessment practices to specific students while remaining aware of the goals of the FYC curriculum.

Grey

"My approach to assessment is that I devote time and energy to it."

Origin Story & Educational Background

Grey is a graduate student from the Northeastern U.S. pursuing a PhD in Rhetoric, Writing, and Linguistics. As a polyglot, Grey discovered a love for language in high school,

when they took Spanish classes and grew their identity as a multilingual speaker. “I have different personalities depending on what languages I’m speaking in. When I switch to my main second language, I feel like I’m a little bit different of a person . . . you can change who you are through language.” The study of languages enhanced their connection to the experiences of their grandparents, who immigrated to the United States. Despite their positive experiences with language learning, Grey developed negative perceptions around writing. In high school, they heard from some friends and teachers who said, “literature isn’t your thing,” or “you’re not a literature person,” which established deeply rooted ideas that they weren’t good at writing. It led to feeling “like a horrible writer as an undergrad,” a self-perception that manifested in never visiting a writing center or office hours. “I felt like I didn’t know what I was doing.” Struggling with writing through the early college years, they continued to study languages with the goal to work for the federal government. In college, Grey took a literature-based FYC course, which didn’t seem “normal” or “standard,” but enhanced their “investment” in writing. In upper-division courses, Grey wrote papers about political science and literary analysis in multiple languages. Grey earned a BA in Foreign Languages and Literature and Linguistics from a private four-year university in 2009. They worked in “corporate private sector jobs” for several years, including “IT and banking” and working “as a translator for a medical company.” Seeking a career expansion, Grey pursued an MA in English from a small private Catholic university. Grey began the MA program with the study of literature, but soon switched to Writing and Composition. Upon graduation, Grey moved to Knoxville to pursue a PhD in RWL at UTK.

Writing Pedagogy Education

Grey came to UTK without formal teaching experience, but some coursework, practical classroom experience, and tutoring gained over the prior two years. As an MA student, they took

coursework in “Topics in Composition” and “Methods of Teaching ESL” that provided exposure to different facets of the teaching of writing, such as antiracist pedagogy, pandemic pedagogy, and writing assessment. The coursework provided opportunities to read scholarship on writing pedagogy, practice leading classroom activities, and develop classroom materials like a syllabus and lesson plan. Despite not teaching any courses of their own, Grey gained the experience of leading some “teaching activities” to develop their classroom experience. “What I would do is I would take time off from work to go on this specific day to implement this specific activity or to help the instructor do something else.” Grey said, “my in-classroom experience was limited because I couldn't be there during the day, and they didn't offer classes at night. It was a small Catholic college, so there wasn't a lot of opportunity after 5:00.” During this time, they had another job as a writing center tutor at a large community college at which “95% of students were either immigrant students or first-generation. And probably a good 80% were L2 learners.” Grey saw how the community college students struggled with “study skills” and college readiness; “a lot of the time, they just needed someone to chat with them.”

Grey’s approach to assessment combined the knowledge learned from their MA program with the practices learned from UTK. Before the Fall 2023 semester began, they planned to take a very student-centered approach. “I was once one of them, right? We were all in that seat before. So how would I have wanted to have received assessment? And tweaking it according to the student.” They integrated existing pedagogical knowledge with their previous educational experiences as an undergraduate student to reinforce their student-centered approach to teaching, one centered around the “whole mentality that we're equals.” “I want to have this mindset of equality and that people in your class may be at different writing levels, but that doesn't change what you can accomplish and what can I do to help facilitate that.”

As an instructor, Grey used a complete/incomplete approach to assessment to reflect their "thought process" of asking, "did you get your point across? Did I understand it? Did you make a good argument? Then you completed the task." Because of the view of writing development as a "constant process," "I could never think about assigning a numerical value to something that's not finite." Grey incorporated approaches such as collaborative rubrics, emphasis on revision, and verbal and written feedback.

Due perhaps to their professional experience, Grey felt "fully prepared" and confident as a first-year instructor. They still experienced the "nervousness" of "it being my first year" (like every graduate student instructor in this study). But "in terms of the pedagogical approach and theoretical approach, between the workshops, my writing center experience, and my pedagogy experience in my MA program, I felt fully prepared." The preparation Grey received, including their knowledge of UTK's FYC curriculum, supported their confidence and agency as a novice instructor even in difficult moments, such as their experience teaching stasis theory in English 101. Most, if not all, GTAs who teach English 101 for the first time feel concerned about teaching stasis theory. While MA/MFA students learn about it through their apprenticeship year, incoming PhD instructors only begin to learn it during August Workshops. PhD students are exposed to the concept for the first time within months of teaching it, so they have to learn it alongside their students, which, as Grey explains, led to feeling of uncertainty and anxiety:

> I did my best to articulate and it got mixed responses . . . When it came for the APP and students were struggling to relate stasis theory to their argument, I just decided, as the proposals were coming in, I just made an announcement to the class. Like, if the stasis theory is throwing you off from being able to write an argumentative paper, just completely drop it. Just forget about it. Don't use the S word. Keep doing what you're

> doing. Because I think it was stopping them from being able to make an argument. And I didn't want that to be what stops them. So probably little things of the curriculum that like if you don't have experience with, it's hard to just dive in and start teaching.

While this moment may feel like one of misunderstanding of curricular goals and the ability to communicate those goals to students, perhaps for graduate student instructors, it reflects a moment of expressing agency as an instructor. For Grey, it was a memorable instance of regaining control in the classroom to serve the immediate needs of their students.

Assessment Literacy: Preparing Students for Writing in the Workplace Through Assessment

Grey's approaches to writing assessment reflect the influence of their career and time as a professional in the workforce. Their use of ungrading ties directly to their perception of how writing and communication are assessed in the real world, in which writers must learn how to communicate effectively without the presence of grades. Grey's assessment practices included ungrading, complete/incomplete assessment, collaborative rubric development, and ample opportunity for revision. A "meetings with the editor mentality" they learned in their MA program directly carried forward into their teaching. "It was this whole idea of bouncing things off each other. And it was this two-way street . . . demystifying the instructor-student relationship with writing because it's taking that pressure off of the assessment part." Grey continued:

> Assessment is always pressure. I think a lot of students, when they see comments on their paper, when they see their grade, when they see anything, that immediately goes to the negative. That's why I try to frame my assessment with the sandwich method with, like, good, needs improvement, good. Positive reinforcement. I will flat out say to them, you know, when they're signed up for conferences, this is not that big of a deal. This is just us talking. I really try to disconnect their previous negative experiences with high school

> English or writing research papers. I think there's a stigma around those things, so when I'm giving that feedback, I try to keep that in mind.

Grey began teaching with a strong set of assessment knowledge and beliefs developed through their MA program, tutoring experiences, and the resources provided by the Composition Office. With the influence of their teaching experience and interactions with peers through venues like the Pedagogy People group, Grey felt that their approach to ungrading "evolved" over time. When asked whether their approach to assessment had changed between semesters, Grey responded, "I don't know if it definitely changed, but probably evolved is a better word for it just because I didn't take away anything from assessment, I added to it." By the end of English 101, Grey wanted to "rethink how I'm going to include deadlines and timelines into my assessment practices," because the "flexibility" of some deadlines seemed to disadvantage students who left themselves without enough time to revise their writing in between drafts. As Grey gained experience and practiced the "meetings with the editor" mentality, they added "the real me" into their formative feedback. At the end of the Fall semester, they also felt they had "got[ten] more personable" in their feedback, which led to providing more oral feedback in the second semester. They had a clear purpose behind providing personable feedback:

> I just want them to see what my first thoughts are, not some formulated thing that I insert from a rubric. As I'm going through, in addition to the regular feedback, I would comment like my personal reactions . . . things that aren't assessment necessarily for their writing, but it's assessment on their thinking and their choices, and I want them to know that when they do certain things and I'm grading it, I've noticed those things, and I respond to them that way. I want them to know that assessment is not just a grade. It's not just a thing that they have a target that they have to meet to move on to the next thing. It's

> kind of pointing out the different things and their thought processes and their writing that have an impact on other people. I want them to know that there's value in that.

In written and verbal feedback, Grey wanted to provide a stream-of-consciousness commentary with ample praise. In the secondary source research paper we discussed, excerpted in **Figure 3**, Grey wrote 18 marginal comments, 10 of which offered specific praise to the writer. Striving to be "relatable" to their students," Grey felt that "it's my personality coming through on their paper." **Figure 4**, a summary comment on an APP in English 101, expresses this approach. Not captured on the page is Grey's use of verbal feedback, which increased from English 101 to 102. With oral feedback in the classroom and writing conferences, "it's like a conversation."

Grey's use of labor-based assessment, efforts to provide personable and "positive" feedback, and attempts to run their classroom more professionally all worked to destigmatize writing and writing assessment. Because they know that assessment "can be received with fear," Grey worked to reframe it as "a tool to improve things" rather than a "roadblock." They ultimately perceived that students worked harder in their classes because of ungrading. "They're not writing to pass a class. They're writing to work on their own writing for the sake of it. And explore the different things that come along with it." From ENGL 101 to ENGL 102, they developed their assessment practice by being "more strict" about deadlines while maintaining a "democratic and collaborative process" in which the instructor's "voice is not the end-all be-all." Looking ahead, Grey plans to take the ungrading approach "one step further" and grow as an instructor while maintaining their goals. "If a student like me who came into college thinking 'I can't write' because of my assessment that I give them, they're like, 'oh, I can write. I can do this.' To change their mindset, to me that would be like the biggest win I could possibly have."

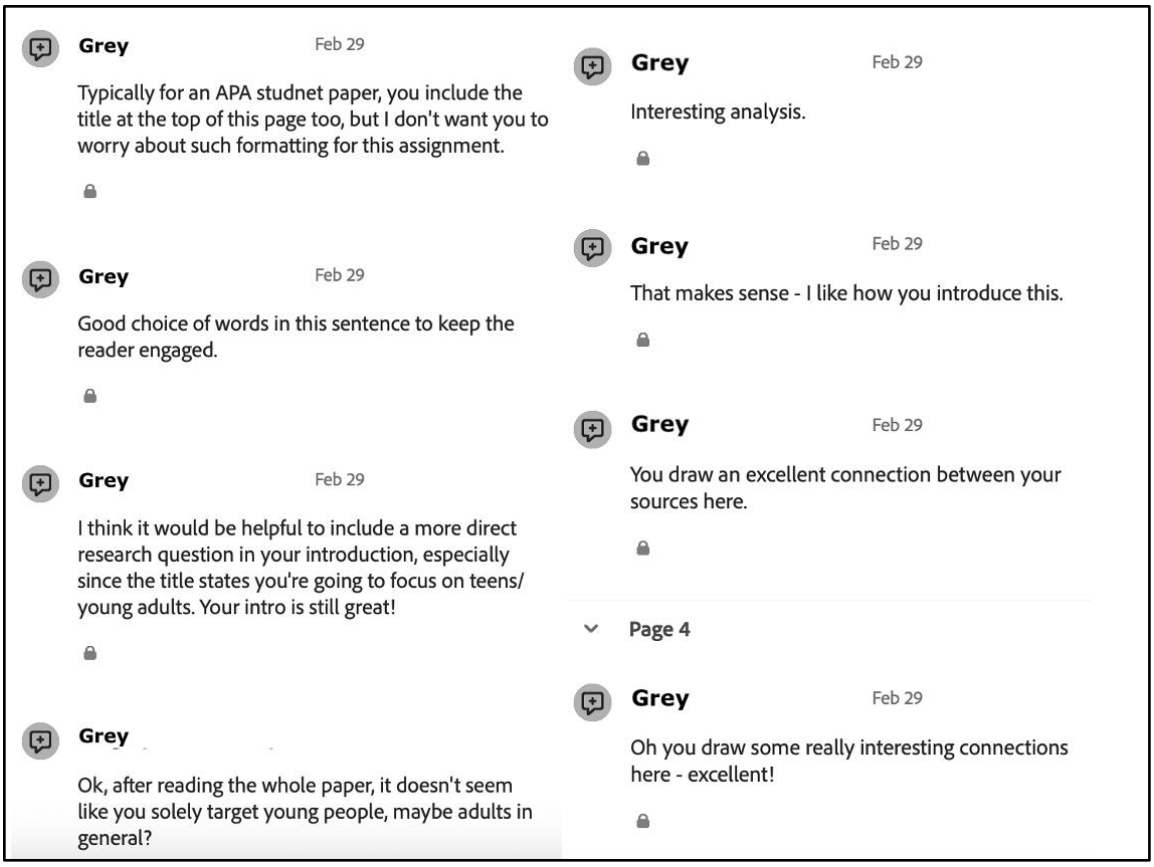


Figure 3. Marginal comments, secondary source research paper (ENGL 102), Grey.

Grey Hi [student],

You did an excellent job writing your APP. Your introduction was appealing to the reader. I think you did a good job with connecting the ideas of argument to your textual evidence, which isn't always an easy thing to do. I think you are a strong writer with your use of language - it is effective which improves how your argument is received by the audience. You may want to take note of mechanical things, such as having periods in your article titles and how to incorporate block quotes. This doesn't take away from the effectiveness of your paper, I just want you to be aware because your ENGL 102 professor may be more strict when it comes to these things. According to the collaborative rubric we created for the APP, yours meets all the "Effective - Passes" categories. Let me know if you have any questions!

Thanks,
Grey Nov 24 at 9:33am)

Figure 4. Summary comment, academic position paper (ENGL 101), Grey.

Keegan

"The axe forgets, but the tree remembers."

Origin Story & Educational Background

Keegan is a graduate student from the Southeastern U.S. pursuing a PhD in Rhetoric, Writing, and Linguistics. Homeschooled through their childhood and adolescence in a conservative religious family, Keegan identified their parents and their mom specifically as the ones who "instill[ed] a love of reading" in them and their two siblings. At the same time, however, "there were still a lot of literary doors and ideological doors that were kept shut and locked away from me." Keegan grew up enjoying reading, creative writing, and journaling "since I was probably nine or ten years old." They never "really had a plan for an academic career" but always knew that they wanted to pursue higher education. "It wasn't the thought of going to college and being in a public environment that really intimidated me, because that's always the misconception that I'm met with when I tell people I was homeschooled," instead, "it was just feeling like I wouldn't make the cut academically." Keegan began their college career at a local open-admission private community college where they were first introduced to FYC through a literature-based FYC course. Keegan graduated with an Associate's degree and transferred to a small private four-year college to pursue a Bachelor's degree, sharing, "that's really where I think I really cut my teeth as a scholarly writer." Their undergraduate coursework in literature and linguistics, and the supportive experiences they had with their English instructors, inspired their career goals to become a scholar and professor at the postsecondary level. The words of Keegan's favorite English professor fostered their love for writing: "he was looking for us to think, not be brilliant. That really took some pressure off of my shoulders and introduced me to writing as a way not just of saying something, but of working through my own

thought process." They earned a BA in English (2020) and then pursued an MA in English (2022) from public R2 university, where they taught their first course as a graduate assistant. After graduation, they taught for one year as an adjunct faculty at two of their previous institutions, teaching both in-person and asynchronous online FYC courses.

Writing Pedagogy Education

As a Master's student, Keegan had a graduate assistantship during which they worked 20 hours per week in the writing center during their first year and worked in the writing center and taught one course per semester during their second year. They took coursework in composition pedagogy where "our discussion of assessment really revolved around rubrics." Although the composition pedagogy course gave them exposure to different theories and practices, it felt less useful for preparation to teach. "The classroom is an organic thing with so many variables." Ultimately, Keegan's tutoring experience most impacted their approach to teaching as a master' student and into their PhD program. "Tutoring other writers, especially writers whose native language is not English . . . taught me that whether you're tutoring someone one-on-one or you're teaching a class full of first-year students that you have to be explicit in your instruction." Keegan relied mostly on these past experiences to support their teaching at UTK. Keegan also continued teaching writing courses as an adjunct instructor at two different universities during their first year of the PhD. Keegan came in with a strong foundation of knowledge, beliefs, and practices derived from teaching, tutoring, and coursework. However, before the start of their first year teaching at UTK, Keegan felt unsure about how assessment fit into their teaching:

> Assessment—honestly, it's been one of the biggest challenges for me as an instructor because I feel like assessment and the assessment practices that I have experimented with so far don't necessarily reflect that philosophy. I mean, assessment is important and

> necessary, but I feel like so often, even though I've tried so hard not to veer in that direction, I feel like in the end it ultimately just becomes about the numbers and about the grade rather than really trying to measure or determine whether the student has mastered those concepts that I mentioned earlier. And that's why the equitable assessment and the ungrading and labor-based grading is something that I'm really eager to learn more about because I feel like that would help assessment to play a role in my teaching philosophy that is much more aligned with my own values as an instructor and as a writer. I don't think I have a clear-cut answer at this point in my teaching career.

The discussion of "the equitable assessment and the ungrading and the labor-based grading" approaches that took place during August Workshops introduced and affirmed their decision to use a complete/incomplete approach in their courses at UTK. The workshop on equitable assessment and the corresponding materials on the FYC Canvas site were the most influential on developing their assessment practice. However, "if I'm being honest, despite all the workshops, I still felt really unprepared." As a new PhD student, Keegan found conversations with fellow GTAs in Pedagogy People and other small groups to be the most useful support to their teaching.

Assessment Literacy: Promoting Linguistic Justice Through Assessment

Keegan came to UTK with experience adjunct teaching at two institutions, but the transition to teaching at UTK marked a significant development in their teaching experience. Despite previous training and teaching experience, the transition to UTK "was a lot harder than I thought it would be. With the exception of teaching basic universal things, I felt like I wasn't able to really tap fully into my experience and knowledge from teaching at other institutions." The year saw plenty of development to their teaching and assessment practices. Even though Keegan felt that they had always "leaned toward labor-based grading at my previous

institutions," they had never "graded on a scale of complete or incomplete" for an entire term. They started this practice at UTK, finding that the equitable assessment practices promoted by the Composition Office aligned with their beliefs about teaching composition:

> If I could sum my teaching philosophy up in one statement or one phrase, it would be demystification because that's my biggest goal as a composition writing instructor is to really demystify this concept of writing or concept of academic writing for students who come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences and levels of experience with writing. That's just my biggest goal is to make writing something that all students realize that they are capable of doing and seeing it not just as something that you have to do to get a grade and pass a class, but to see writing as a way of communicating and operating in the world and contributing to these societal conversations and a way of generating knowledge and discovering things about the world and about yourself.

Moving away from conventional grading, Keegan shared, "I feel like the traditional way of grading on the 100-point scale just reinforces those divides and it rewards to students who are strong writers and strong students while penalizing the students who actually need the class, and they need the knowledge the most." The ungrading approach Keegan adopted at UTK included grading all student work as complete or incomplete, based on whether students put in a "good-faith effort;" single-point rubrics based on completion; emphasizing revision; feedback as a "conversation" with students; and a strong belief in the value of narrative and reflective writing. Keegan believed that "assessment should ultimately be empowering." "Even if the feedback is challenging, the goal of challenging students should be to empower them to become more confident writers, and not just writers, but communicators.

Figure 5 excerpts comments Keegan made on a comparative rhetorical analysis rough draft that reflect their "goal with students . . . to really make them think about the choices that they make and why they do that, and how to think about things in new ways." Connecting belief to practice, they specifically try to provide "explicit and clear" feedback that promotes positivity and that "giv[es] students practical steps" to help them learn how to write academically (see **Figure 6**). Describing their approach to providing written commentary on student work, Keegan further described how their goals to empower and inspire confidence in students connect to their self-image as an instructor:

> I want students to read my feedback and see me as someone who wants them to be better, but not better writers, not just that. Someone who isn't afraid to challenge them when I think they need it, but also someone who does it in a way that's empowering to them. I really think that assessment should challenge students, but it should also challenge them in a way that is empowering to them rather than discouraging or detrimental. I also want my assessment to show students, and sometimes I will talk about this explicitly in my feedback to them. I wanted to show them that I'm human, too. I have anxiety around writing and language and communication and that even though I have a lot more experience in it than they do, I can still relate to them and relate to the stresses and anxieties that they experience. Which kind of ties into like my ethos as an instructor. I want to command authority and respect, whether that's through assessment or feedback or in-class instruction. But I never want to be like an authority figure. If that makes sense. I mean, those are very different things. I want them to see my feedback and assessment and see me as more of a mentor or a guide on their journey.

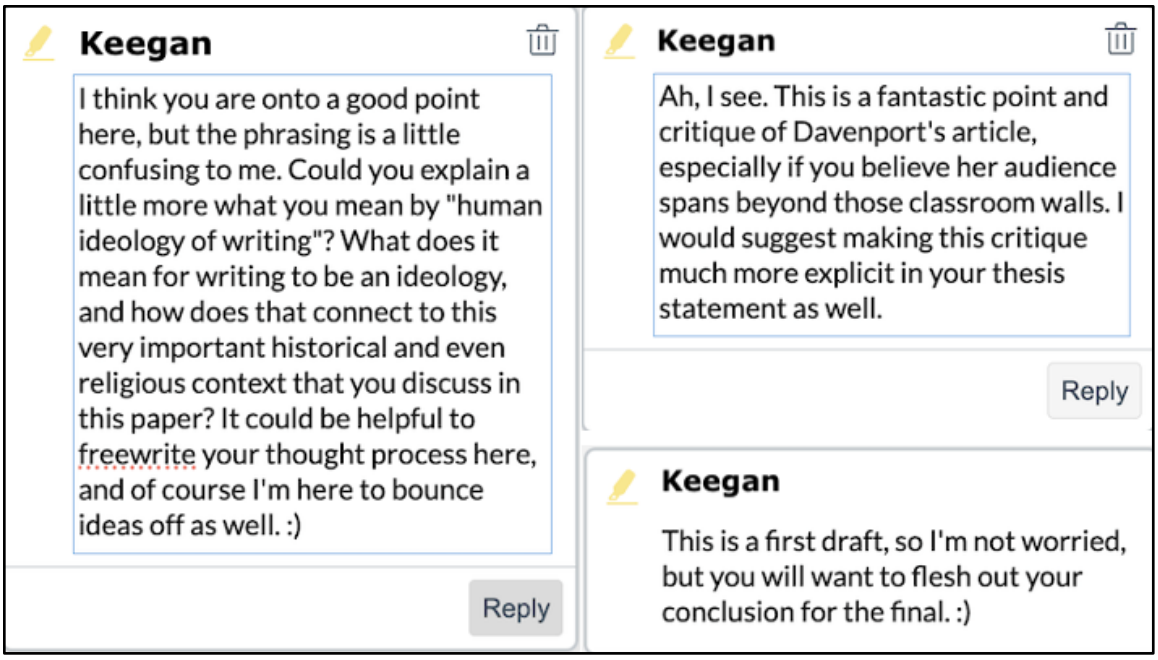


Figure 5. Marginal comments, comparative rhetorical analysis (ENGL 101), Keegan.

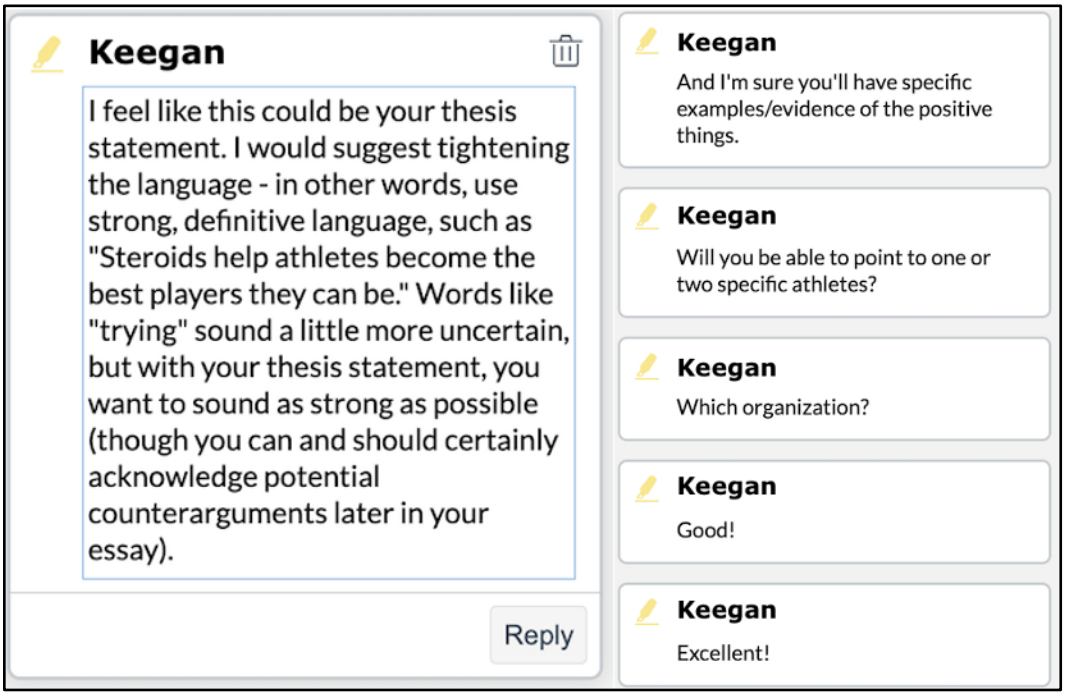


Figure 6. Marginal comments, academic position paper proposal (ENGL 101), Keegan.

For this reason, Keegan incorporated ample opportunities for “low-stakes writing” in the classroom, including ungraded writing, freewriting, and self-reflection. For Keegan, “labor-based grading really does create a more just and fair environment for your students to learn in, but also kind of take some of the weight off of your shoulders of like trying to like arbitrarily assign like this specific numerical value or the specific grade.” Like all of the instructors in this study who used ungrading, students’ final grades in the course were determined by a grading matrix that correlated their effort and labor into the course with a final course grade. Keegan continued to develop their approach. While they began teaching with complete/incomplete rubrics, they also considered revising these rubrics “in the future is to differentiate good-faith effort from minimal effort,” perhaps moving to a three-point scale of “passing, passing with honors, and not passing.” Keegan was inspired by another GTA’s approach and planned to ask more questions about it before making their own decisions about how to adjust their assessment practices.

Most centrally, their commitment to linguistic justice drove their decision to use equitable assessment and facilitated their use of this approach. “I've always been committed to linguistic justice as an instructor. And I've encountered a lot of linguistic injustice myself, as somebody who comes from a very stigmatized discourse community.” The commitment to linguistic justice comes from Keegan’s own background experiences, their interests in studying the English language and how language functions socially and culturally in society, and their firsthand experiences teaching marginalized students. “I would just say that's another thing that influences my assessment. Just that awareness that my words as an instructor do have power.” Keegan described at the end of the Fall 2023 semester, “I see now more than ever before how important it is to humanize my students and to make myself human to them as well. That's always been important to me, but it is so much more important to me than ever before.”

Keegan occupied a unique positionality during the course of this study as both a first-time instructor of record at UTK and an adjunct teaching online FYC courses at a community college. Due to institutional constraints, however, Keegan assessed writing differently in the online writing courses: “I do grade those pretty much on a good-faith effort too, although I don't do complete/incomplete. Everything is assigned different points values.” Because the curriculum was inherited from another instructor, they would have to invest ample time and effort to revise the course to fully complete/incomplete. Keegan’s also aware of the vastly different student populations. “There's definitely a lot more discrepancy in students’ proficiency and the grade distribution at [community college] than there is at UTK . . . there's just a huge gap of knowledge and learning and education there, and that is not their fault at all.” But teaching one course with labor-based grading and two online courses with conventional grading put Keegan in a difficult position. “It is very intensive and demanding work, especially when it's all asynchronous.”

Keegan wrestled with their assessment decisions often throughout the semester. “If I were to do a complete/incomplete scale, it's very binary. I'm not sure for those research papers if that would be the best option. Grading on percentages allows me to be a little bit more lenient, maybe more than I should.” In the community college, Keegan shared, “I don't want to pass students who clearly are not ready to exit the course. But at the same time, if the student is putting in the effort, and is showing some improvement, then I think that definitely deserves to be recognized as well. It's really hard.” They reflected, “I think that's what's so stressful about this position. It's a lot of ethical decisions that I have to make and it's very mentally and emotionally demanding for me.” Although Keegan came to UTK as one of the more experienced instructors in this research study and the larger population of graduate student instructors, they still experienced ample growth and development during their first year teaching at UTK.

Lainey

"I just didn't have time or money to be the instructor that they may have wanted."

Origin Story & Educational Background

Lainey is a graduate student from the Northeastern U.S. pursuing an MFA in Creative Writing (Poetry). They attended a small private liberal arts institution where they began as an English (Secondary Education) major. For the FYC requirement, Lainey took an English 100 "Writing and Thinking" course. The class "didn't have an agreed upon set of standards or projects that they had to have us do" across sections, so Lainey enjoyed the freedom and flexibility of the unconventional FYC course. As an undergrad, Lainey wrote many works of creative writing across poetry, fiction, and nonfiction and long-form academic essays. Most of their writing happened in creative writing classes and writing workshops. In a "Forms of Writing Poetry" class, Lainey experienced a pivotal change in their perception of writing and writing processes when they realized that "in-progress writing" is "view[ed] differently than we view" published writing. The experience helped Lainey learn to "be more gentle with my expectations" of novice writers' work and "meet other writers where they're at." They reported having "a little bit of TA experience" with "creative writing," and "I helped my friends a lot, but I didn't have any real work at a tutoring center experience." Lainey graduated with a BA in English Literature and Creative Writing in 2022 immediately before coming to UTK. At the start of the Fall 2023 semester, they didn't "know for sure yet" what they wanted to do after graduation—maybe, as they wrote in the demographic survey, "work in higher ed??" Lainey taught two sections of English 101 in the Fall 2023 semester; in the Spring 2024 semester, Lainey taught one section of English 101, a pilot course with a revised curriculum, and English 263: Intro to Creative Writing.

Writing Pedagogy Education

For Lainey, tutoring and teaching assistantship were the most beneficial teaching preparation experiences, while English 505 and the Composition Office supported their growth to a lesser extent. “Tutoring was the most useful part of like learning how to assess and how to give feedback on writing assignments.” At the same time, however, they felt that “the tutor training wasn’t always the most useful.” Through tutoring, Lainey “learned so much about the curriculum that I would not have been able to understand had I not been able to see the work in process and in progress and help the students understand things.” They also learned to “prioritize things” in feedback and “see the patterns” in student works-in-progress. Tutoring taught them which “readings” and “tools” other instructors, especially creative writers, assigned to their students in FYC courses, which informed Lainey’s approach because “I want to incorporate a lot of creativity in my classes.” From tutoring, “I learned a lot about how to use the FYC curriculum that we’re given to help unlock some things for students in a way that interests me, too.”

From teaching assistantship, Lainey “took most” approaches to “get your students to care about what they’re writing about more maybe than how they're writing” and “trying to get them to understand the implications of the genres that they’re writing in and why that will be helpful to them.” Their teaching assistantship experience in English 101 was “really bad because the students were super unmotivated.” Lainey felt that the instructor did not inspire the students to “care a lot” about the class or find it “very important to them.” “I just feel like I definitely know how I’m not going to teach it because I know what definitely didn’t work.” The course used ungrading, and Lainey assessed the work of five students for each project. “Because it was ungrading, it was very heavily feedback-based.” “I would send my feedback to my mentor and then they would be like, ‘this is a little harsh.’ And I'm like, ‘Shit, I didn't think it was harsh, but I

guess it is.' My expectations were pretty high, I guess, for first-year writing." Lainey also had a very negative mentorship experience. Lainey gloomily recounted one moment when they taught their first lesson to the class that limited their agency and diminished their confidence:

> My mentor did completely cut into my lesson and just start doing her own thing based on how she felt that I was moving too quickly. But instead of being like, 'hey, do you think we could spend a little more time on this?' She just started taking over my lesson and then she later apologized for that because she was like, 'I didn't even realize I was doing it in the moment. So sorry.' And I was like, 'yeah, now I don't know how to teach this.' I also didn't think I was going very quickly. I didn't think I was skipping over things that were super important, but she felt like I was . . . I just didn't have any idea of the behind-the-scenes stuff. I didn't know how long to spend on things in 101 because it's my first time going through it. Now I know more about how to pace it. I think what she was trying to get at was my pacing and that's helpful. But I think it was a pretty negative experience for me because the students aren't dumb. They saw her just bulldoze me and I just stood there. And then she'd like occasionally look at me like, 'right?' And I was like, 'yeah, you're right. I guess I don't know what to say.'

Fortunately, "the spring was so much better." The English 102 course was "a traditional grading class" but the instructor was lenient in their assessment. "She made it important to them," and Lainey believes that "102 is easier to make people care about it because you have a lot more freedom to write about things." Lainey taught "two-and-a-half" class sessions during the term, but they did not grade any work in English 102 because the mentor only taught one class and could handle the workload. "She told me I could like look at it and I could grade if I wanted to. I

was really, really busy in the spring, so it fell a little bit to the side for me, which I'm a little sad about, but I did take a look at a lot of the student work, so I know what it looks like."

Lainey found the Composition Office's workshop sessions on equitable assessment most useful for their assessment practice. "I think that's where I found most of my kind of inspiration for how I grade and what things that I feel are useful to my students, which was partly like, don't grade what you don't teach. I just thought that was really useful from the workshop and from watching the videos and stuff and talking to people about them. But I think that the ungrading and labor-based stuff is most helpful absolutely." They were able to reference the FYC Canvas site materials on labor-based grading "almost weekly through the semester." Reflecting at the end of the Fall semester, Lainey felt that English 505 did not impact their assessment "very much at all." "We did not really talk enough about assessment in 505." The most useful aspect of the class was the community of GTAs and the opportunity to hear "other students' perspectives." "It was nice to have those perspectives, especially with assessment because we would each talk about what type of assessment we wanted to do." Lainey encountered multiple perspectives in ENGL 505, but they tended to seek feedback and support mainly from MFA peers.

Assessment Literacy: Responding to Individual Student Needs Through Assessment

The sense of freedom that Lainey felt in the FYC class they took as an undergraduate student shaped their expectations for maintaining a high level of agency in the teaching and design of their FYC courses. So, too, did their strongly held beliefs as an MFA student about creative writing and FYC. Their own undergraduate experience seemed to implicitly inform the freedom they took in their classes. Yet, Lainey struggled moving from Fall to Spring semester because of the increased workload with their MFA thesis in the Spring semester. When it comes to assessment in particular, "it's all complicated by my thesis. If I hadn't been so busy with that, I

think that I would have liked to spend more time with their work so that I would have been able maybe to cater more to the areas that I felt like they needed more time spent on." They struggled with finding a balance between "working on my own thesis . . . while also trying to be an effective and successful teacher for students." The stress of the thesis was "really the biggest reason I couldn't give them as much assessment, especially in the middle of this semester, this time around." Lainey summarized:

> I had a smaller bandwidth for assessment [Spring] semester with my 101 and my creative writers because of the very tense situation I had with my thesis defense with my committee and just the work that I had to present for it and not feeling like fully confident in the work that I was going to be presenting for my thesis defense and my thesis draft. The bandwidth was shorter this semester, unfortunately.

Before the Fall semester began, they were ultimately "hoping assessment can be kind of engaging, fun, and reflective" for students and for them as an instructor. Even at the end of the Fall, however, they felt, "to be completely honest, I had a lot more energy and time in the beginning of the semester, and now I simply don't." The smaller bandwidth that comes with the workload of a GTA is reflected in the sample assessment tools they shared, in which Lainey provided more written feedback to students in the Fall compared to the Spring. Lainey developed new assessment strategies to deal with the increased workload while attending to the needs of their students. It was during the second semester Lainey came to rely on "verbal assessment." One-on-one conversations in class, during writing conferences, and during Zoom office hours helped engage students but it also saved time for Lainey. "It's effective for me because I think I communicate and articulate things a little bit better in person when I can ask them questions:"

> That kind of engagement and rapport, I can't really have that over comments online or on a paper. I feel like it offers opportunities for examples and for them to ask questions as well as me asking them. I think that's why I prefer a verbal assessment. I just think it's easier and faster, to be honest. And I'm thinking about it in the moment, and I can just ask them questions and they can ask me.

Figure 7 demonstrates sample marginal comments on a final comparative rhetorical analysis essay in a Fall English 101 course and **Figure 8** shows sample marginal comments on an annotation assignment in a Spring English 101 course. Lainey described their process for approaching the comparative rhetorical analysis essay feedback:

> I was thinking about the rubrics as I was going through. Both in the rubric and in just the guidelines. I would ask them—instead of being like, 'you didn't identify your audience.' I would say like, 'who is the audience?' I thought it was like a little bit easier to see a question rather than be like, 'why didn't you include this?' Or like, 'where is it?' That's kind of where I was coming from that. And then I was thinking about, what would they be most curious about or insecure about in their papers? My feedback got like a little bit more blunt as the semester went on just because I think that that's more what they were looking for. This student—he turned this in late, so I was a little bit rushed for feedback. I think he was sick, so I was trying to give him things that were quickly useful to him. My feedback kind of depends on the student and their needs, but this one in particular, I knew in general, he was a pretty strong writer, so I was just like, here. Let me give you like things that you're going to be able to get through in your revision.

Lainey ultimately felt that "advocacy" and "effort" were central to "what I believe assessment for writing should look like rather than valuing whatever the product was." They wanted to see

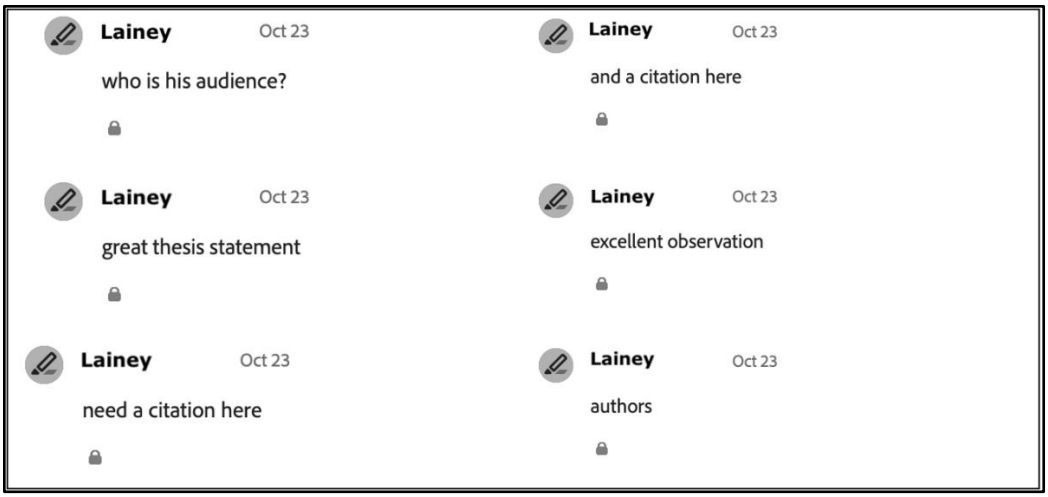


Figure 7. Marginal comments, comparative rhetorical analysis (ENGL 101), Lainey.

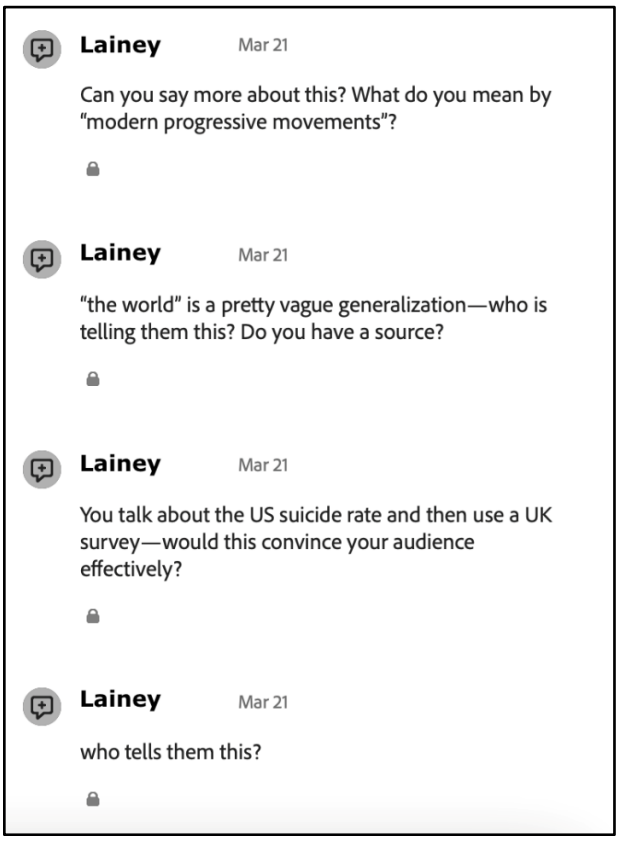


Figure 8. Marginal comments, annotation paragraph (ENGL 101), Lainey.

evidence where “students were trying their hardest and advocating for their needs” by pursuing arguments students were “interested” in, asking questions when they needed it, and putting in the effort in the course. They were driven to support students to know that “I’m genuinely interested in what they have to say and I value what they have there and what they could continue on, even if they think that this is just an essay for an English class, I want them to know that what they’ve done is worthwhile and not just a means to an end to get a grade in my class.” Lainey grew as an instructor through teaching; “I think that I’m less concerned with the small conventions [that] I didn’t have time to teach.” By the end of the Spring semester, when “between 60% and 70%” of their feedback was “verbal,” they felt they had arrived at an approach that was centered around student needs. “My Fall students could have used more time for me to just come around and take a look at what they were doing,” so they used that reflection to guide their focus on “more formative” and spoken assessment. However, Lainey still maintained strict judgments of student work and a high personal value on creativity and self-expression in student writing.

Rose

“It’s just all a big blob of questions and tensions, but it’s also kind of interesting and rewarding.”

Origin Story & Educational Background

Rose is a graduate student from the Southeastern U.S. pursuing an MA in English Literature with a focus on contemporary American poetry and post-1945 English studies. Rose was homeschooled—“unschooled,” they prefer to say—until they went to college. “My mom wouldn’t call it that, but that’s what it was.” “I just really, really wanted an education.” Rose had never written “a formal essay that somebody was going to grade” before their undergraduate education, so they felt like “I had no idea what I was walking into.” Without prior formal educational experiences, “I just remember feeling like I had to pretend that I knew all of those

things already." An FYC course was among the first places where they wrote at the college level. "The first couple of papers I wrote, I expected to basically fail and have to claw my way out of there. And they weren't very good papers. But I learned from them a lot because my instructor just found the good things about them." They learned how to write from "really helpful" feedback from their instructors and their self-motivation to "Google everything" and use "Purdue [OWL]." By the second semester of the FYC sequence they took, "I really started to find my own voice and opinions in writing . . . my personality came into what I was doing." Academic writing became their "opening into the world." Toward the end of college, Rose worked for one semester as the one writing tutor in the English Department. "It did turn into basically just checking people's commas." They graduated with a BA in English from a private Catholic liberal arts college in 2020. In addition to their tutoring experience, they brought teaching experience from working in libraries and summer camps. Their career interests changed over the course of the study. In August, before the academic year, Rose said they wanted to "go to culinary school while building a freelance proofreading client base" after graduation. By the end of the year, Rose asked me to write a letter of recommendation to apply for the university's MS in Information Sciences program and also sought instructional positions on the job market.

Writing Pedagogy Education

Among the four dimensions of preparation Rose received—tutoring, teaching assistantship, English 505, and the Composition Office—Rose reported that "definitely the Comp Office" had the most impact on the development of their writing assessment practices. They used the "assessment materials" and resources with multiple "perspectives" because "having things that I can go back to and re-read is pretty helpful." At times, Rose's writing center training and 505 coursework felt "very detached from the role" of teaching. Rose struggled to

bridge the apprenticeship year with their second year in the program. “I think I didn’t make the kinds of connections in my head between my learning and jumping forward to my doing now.” They shared, “I don’t remember enough from what I was doing to feel super prepared.” Their biggest takeaway from English 505 was the “camaraderie” felt with fellow GTAs and the instructor. Before they began teaching, though, Rose “felt like the class had a lot of busy work.” At the end of the Fall semester, Rose’s recollection of 505 had changed to focus on the ways that the course proved useful, such as guiding their “thinking about assessment and the kind of instructor I want to be.” Across English 505 and the Composition Office, “I'm so grateful to have that kind of expertise and generosity in this community that I can draw from.” Rose transferred some tutoring skills directly into teaching; they attributed learning how to “find things that were going well and things that I wanted to comment on without making anybody feel like they were terrible” to their writing center training.

Rose had disparate mentorship experiences that contributed to their sense of “detachment” from the preparation. English 101 was a positive learning experience, although difficult, while English 102 was very negative. In English 101, Rose graded five students’ work each week. The instructor used conventional grading, which “was the hard part” because “it’s not the same kind of grading that I’m going to do.” Even when Rose used a rubric to grade student work, “I kept having to email her” because “this does not seem like a fair grade.” But it did allow Rose to see another perspective and shadow an instructor of record. “My mentor would grade a couple sand that way I could look at the way they did it” before grading five students on their own. Rose and their mentor would discuss the feedback so they could improve. “It started off I was giving them too much feedback. I spent a lot of time on it because I was very emotionally invested in not making them feel disheartened.” “I would have the assignment sheet on one side

and the rubric on the other, and I'd have the paper in the middle and I would try to compare and contrast and type in those rubric grades at the very end, and then I would write an overarching comment at the very end when I submitted their grade." "I learned a lot about feedback because I gave so much feedback in that class. That taught me the value of giving feedback and devoting some time to that." In English 102, oppositely, "my experience was just wild. It was not very good. I don't think that the professor was really teaching 102." "I would ask when I would assess something, but I never saw any work that any of the students did, and I didn't actually teach more than one session" because "we did not really have that kind of mentor/mentee relationship." The course lacked mentorship and professional support, and "I didn't do any assessment in 102. I never even saw anything that any of the students wrote."

At the end of the Spring semester, looking back on their year of teaching, Rose reflected on the difficulty of finding their footing. They began and ended teaching at UTK still somewhat unsure about what they believed about writing assessment. "I know that writing assessment was the thing that made me most worried about teaching. It feels like I still don't know very much about it." They had developed a stronger foundation of assessment practices and knowledge rather than beliefs, which were hard to articulate.

Assessment Literacy: Coaching Writers Through Assessment

Rose struggled as a graduate student instructor, and through these challenging experiences, they developed their writing assessment beliefs. They came into teaching with a strong belief in self-assessment and helping students develop conceptions of themselves as writers and individualized writing practices. Rose had a driving desire to use assessment "both ways:" "I want to ask them questions and I want them to ask themselves questions." Rose's feedback asks lots of questions of students, and they use reflective self-assessment with each

major project. As their teaching progressed, they continued to evolve writing assessment practices. After teaching for one semester, they made a lot of changes heading into 102, reflecting the value of teaching experience on developing their assessment practices. Moving from 101 to 102, Rose tried to "leave more on their reflective self-assessments and connecting with them more there." "One really big shift that I've made is leaving more feedback on research questions and research proposals and a little less feedback on final drafts." However, at the end of the semester, they continued to feel like "I still haven't really struck a good balance there." Rose decided to incorporate collaborative rubrics in ENGL 102, given that they didn't really use rubrics in the Fall semester but assessed completion based on overall perception of adherence to assignment guidelines. "Having the collaborative rubric really helps me because I feel more grounded in my students' ways of learning and thinking about the projects." Rose's uncertainty meant they evolved their practices from 101 to 102 by "leaving more feedback on research questions and research proposals and a little less feedback on final drafts," "going through the textbook" more clearly with students, doing "collaborative rubrics," and adding the "practice of walking around the room to ask clumps of students if they have any questions." These practices became "grounding for me" because "I understand where they are a little bit more."

Rose used the helpful feedback they received in their undergraduate and graduate courses as a model for what to replicate as an instructor; they took a lot of the "not useful" feedback as a model for what *not* to do. Rose had one professor who would "usually say something like, 'this was very ambitious.' And I never knew if it was a good or bad thing that it was ambitious. I felt a little awkward about it." Another instructor "had a number scheme where he had this list of comments basically and their associated numbers . . . you'd get your paper back with all these

numbers all over it." That stuck with Rose for its "not usefulness." As a composition instructor, Rose strives to avoid the ambiguity that they personally experienced as a student.

From the first interview, Rose expressed their beliefs about writing assessment. "I think that writing assessment should improve writing. And I think that writing assessment should also give students a good bearing on where they are in their learning process." This belief is reflected in the marginal comments they gave students. Despite their lack of self-assurance, Rose is an instructor who connects their assessment beliefs and knowledge to specific assessment practices:

> Well, I guess I feel like I don't have a real sturdy foundation of beliefs about writing assessment. I feel like I would characterize my beliefs almost more as a mix of enthusiasm and anxiety. I guess one belief in writing assessment is that students should always walk away with something positive about their work. But I also feel complicated about that because students want to do projects that will be well-received almost more than they want to do projects that they just want to do. And I guess that's a never-ending struggle for educators . . . I feel like [these] questions do sum up a lot of my thoughts on assessment: how can assessment bring more out of the student? How can assessment move them further in their goals?

Rose selected the assessment materials they brought to the interviews because "they all kind of reflected that same tension there between the practical and the personal. And I chose them because I have mixed feelings about them." **Figure 9** features the marginal comment described in this excerpt as an example of their assessment practices. In **Figure 10**, Rose demonstrates an evolution of their approach from English 101 to 102. They did not leave any marginal comments on the student's final secondary source research paper. They made these four marginal comments on the student's reflective self-assessment that they submitted along with the

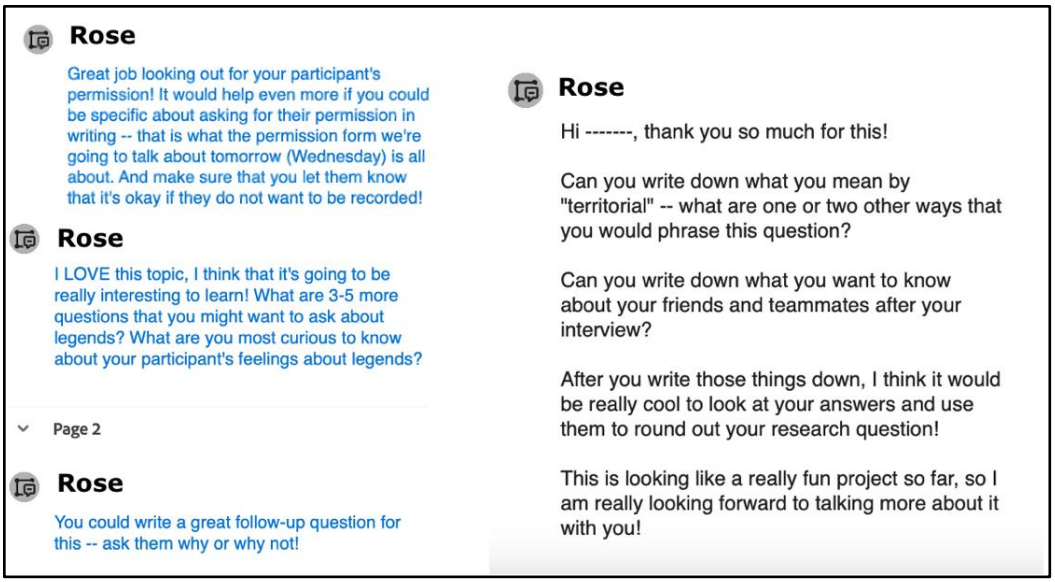


Figure 9. Marginal and summary comments, qualitative research plan (ENGL 102), Rose.

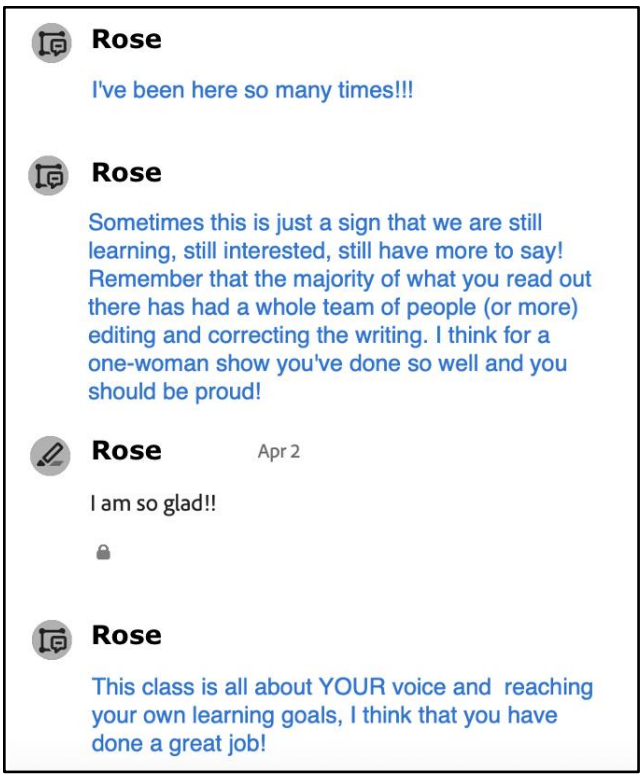


Figure 10. Marginal comments, secondary source reflection (ENGL 102), Rose.

paper, along with a summary comment on Canvas. Rose perceives their role as a "coach" in the writing classroom, and they use their feedback to encourage students and find ways to encourage their writing development. Representative of their assessment, they felt the materials were "indicative of where I've been this semester. I do give detailed feedback on a lot of the generative assignments, but then those final things, I have mostly just been giving those sort of brief end comments. Sort of a 180 from last semester. And if I kept teaching or if I go back to teaching someday, I hopefully will find something in the middle." Rose may struggle with reconciling writing assessment, but their increased self-awareness and self-reflection reflects a commitment to continue to learn and grow as they gain more teaching experience.

Sage

"You don't know what you don't know until you do."

Origin Story & Educational Background

Sage is a graduate student from India pursuing an MFA in Creative Writing (Poetry). They are the only international student in the research study, and they have fluency in five languages. As someone who navigated academia with ADHD, Sage perceives one of their greatest strengths as their ability to observe people's "body language" and "learning styles." Sage learned to take the act of writing seriously as a young child. "When I was growing up, I heard my parents or other people say it's only real if it's on paper. Whatever you see has value, obviously, but when you write, it has a different sort of weight to it." Sage feels that understanding writing in this way is "a good thing and a bad thing. Maybe that's why a lot of people are intimidated by it. But that also means that everybody can write." Sage believes strongly that "writing is something that everyone can do." As an undergraduate student, Sage did not take an FYC course, expressing that they learned most of what FYC courses tend to teach in

secondary education. Instead, Sage felt that a business writing course contributed most to their develop as a writer and understanding of the "impact" of writing "in the real world." Sage composed academic writing and analysis of literature as an undergraduate student, most enjoying "blending the critical and creative components together" through nonfiction and memoir. Sage learned the most about their identity as a writer in creative writing workshops and receiving one-on-one feedback from instructors and peers. Sage earned a BA in Economics with a minor in English in 2021 in India before moving to Knoxville. "Before grad school, I wasn't academically involved with poetry, but I have been writing since very, very long." They came to UTK with previous tutoring experience with middle and high school students and working in a support role at a school for "children with special needs and mental disabilities and speech problems," ranging in age from "4 to 24" which helped their develop "an inexplicable amount of patience," "generosity," and "empathy." At the start of the academic year, Sage wasn't sure what they wanted to do after graduation; at the end, they were searching for a faculty position to continue teaching writing at the postsecondary level.

Writing Pedagogy Education

The "most helpful experiences" from the preparation and training were Sage's "TA experiences" with two lecturers, who were "amazing." Assessment was a central component of the teaching assistantship. "I was very, very fortunate to receive two stellar mentors, both with really different teaching styles and personalities and yet wildly successful." From their English 101 mentor, Sage learned about "classroom presence" and how to "set boundaries" and give support to students while establishing authority. Sage taught two lessons during the semester and practiced giving feedback. At first, Sage provided feedback at the "line level," "just how we do it in poetry." The mentor instructor explained to Sage to instead focus on the "bigger picture" and

“wording feedback in a way where it’s helpful to students and also not taking an hour’s worth of my time on one paper.” The positive teaching assistantship experiences taught Sage how to approach writing assessment:

> I think for me the most important thing is effort always. And now, as I'm thinking about it, it's going to be different than when I was a TA. When I was a TA, I wasn't paying attention to attendance or class participation. That was my mentor's job. And I was just looking at their work in isolation. But I think as a teacher, I would have to pay more attention to that combined effort. I want to give feedback in a way that encourages revision, because I really want them to be comfortable with the idea of revision and not think of it as a punishment in a way. I think it is just like I said, imagine a new possibility of just like truly taking this draft and adding sparkles and glitter to it.

The English 101 mentor assigned Sage different students to assess and conference with in each unit. In English 102, Sage shadowed a “very emotionally invested instructor.” “It was so incredible to see their not just focus on the assignments or the readings, but making sure [students] actually talk to each other. Pay attention to what they’re saying. And that is the goal.” Sage also led peer review, which, as a creative writer, is central to their assessment practice. As a TA, Sage wanted to create “a blend of these two” approaches from their mentors within their own classroom. Sage attribute their “style of assessment” more to their English 102 mentor, driven by the idea that “I know the strengths and weaknesses of every single writer in this class. And this is why my feedback varies from person to person, which is really extra labor.”

Sage also found the tutoring experience “overall, really good.” Tutoring provided practice with how to “talk through writing anxieties” for students. Sage learned to balance directive and non-directive approaches to providing feedback and thinking through practical teaching

situations. “If a student is feeling stuck in a way, how can I help them while being present but also providing direction and giving them freedom at the same time?” Tutoring also informed Sage’s approach to “knowing how to read students’ writing” and conferencing with students. “I feel like tutoring was a good way to test the waters in that way. To meet like a lot of different students. And also, like I said, different students with lots of different learning styles.”

With English 505, Sage reflected on “both the good and the bad.” They felt the course asked grad students to do “a lot of busy work,” which was “a lot while taking two classes at the same time.” But 505 was “good in terms of us providing feedback. That was a really helpful exercise to do the whole feedback sandwich thing.” Sage enjoyed “talking to my other classmates” and learning from each other. Sage reported at the end of Fall semester that 505 “really helped” with labor-based grading. “Having other people’s approaches to that really helped me a lot.” In 505, Sage wrote every single day, a pedagogical approach applied to all of their classes. At the time of the course, however, Sage didn’t feel that the class captured many of the realities of teaching FYC. “I felt a very homogenous approach when I was in 505, and I was just like, oh, it’s actually really not. Like, all of us really approach teaching very differently.” Sage did not mention the influence of the Composition Office in their first interview since it took place before August Workshops.

Assessment Literacy: Humanizing Writers Through Writing Assessment

Before Sage became an instructor of record, they knew their approach to teaching would be shaped by “empathy” and their commitment to “always thinking about writing as a process and not an end product.” They strongly believe in “meeting the writer where they are” and “hav[ing] the flexibility to cater to the needs of my students.” Sage expressed some feelings of vulnerability in taking such a student-centered approach to teaching:

> I think my style is very student-centered and because of how close I am in age to them, I am more of a facilitator than a mentor figure. Which I also think is where a little bit of my anxieties come from. And I'm like, 'I am not the know-it-all authority on this.'

In equitable assessment, Sage emphasizes "effort or class participation or showing up for community." Revision and self-reflection are a "big part" of their practice, which also incorporates freewriting and journaling. Based on ENGL 505, Sage begins every class with journaling, "which I feel really grounds them." "It's good to know where they're coming from and what they're writing about." Sage "did not have rubrics for individual assignments" but relied instead on a grading matrix to determine students' final course grades, and Sage utilized some elements of contract grading. In the classes, students "don't have to work up to get an A, you start with an A. I don't want to give you anything below an A." However, "if you're not putting the effort, I'm not going to do that because it's just disrespectful to your classmates."

Before the Fall 2023 semester, Sage felt concerned about reducing grades in the writing classroom: "what is the incentive, then?" After receiving positive feedback about ungrading from students, Sage had a clearer sense of the goals of their assessment practices, which include to "foster more critical thinking" and "clarity of thought." "If my feedback is helping them ask more questions, I would consider that really effective." "And transferability for sure. How much are they carrying that into their everyday life or whatever discipline they're from? If I can help them understand that writing is not existing in a vacuum, but indeed it is everywhere, I feel like that's like my goal of my assessment practices."

The Fall semester felt like "trial-and-error" with writing assessment because Sage taught both English 101 and English 263. Sage tried "humanizing this whole process" and carrying approaches from creative writing to English 101. At the end of the Fall term, Sage reflected that,

in English 263, “we talk a lot as a class more” and do more “workshop” and “reading each other’s work.” “And [students] want more feedback, so I do give them longer feedback.” Sage grappled with approaching FYC in a similar way as their creative writing class and the workshops they participated in as a grad student:

> I feel [assessment] should be empowering. It should be a stepping stone and not something anxiety inducing . . . and the fact that it can always get better. It's a process and not a product. So if it's a process, it's always ongoing, then it could always be better. And that better is also subjective. My thinking about this, especially for my creative writing class, is how much of my feedback or peer feedback is about the writing itself and the technicalities of it and not about the theme of it or not about the experiences or the writer, and how do you kind of separate those two? As a creative writer, especially, it's really hard to not make your writing your whole identity. It's not. It's *part* of your identity.

As part of the “trial-and-error” approach, Sage solicited ample feedback from their students about the class. “I like to check in at the end of every unit and see how it’s working for us.” They then adjusted the class based on students’ needs. For example, when students reported they didn’t need a rubric, that validated their decision not to use rubrics. Students also shared their positive experiences with ungrading in English 101; “my students said it helped them take more risks because they were like, oh, we don't have to worry about a letter grade. And so, it took away a lot of the stress.” Sage used self-assessment and “in-depth peer reviews” as key teaching practices.

By the Spring semester, when the MFA thesis took up most of Sage’s time, they relied more on verbal assessment in English 102. Primarily, Sage’s oral feedback increased due to amplified pressures of the MFA thesis. Sage also connected this strategy to their pedagogical goals. They wanted a “back and forth” with students through feedback, finding that speaking “in

person to the students" accomplished this goal more than comments left on Canvas. Sage greatly "preferred" having a conversation about feedback that included "asking them a lot of questions." Compared to giving written feedback, verbal feedback requires "different kinds" of effort, not necessarily more or less effort. Their confidence in this approach may be influenced by conversations with their peers and "talking to other people who are teaching. Just hearing from people what seemed really successful in our opinion versus how it was received in the class, I guess, is really helpful." Sage felt that talking with peers impacted their teaching "a lot."

In contrast to verbal feedback, Sage based more directive commentary on a final project on "assignment guidelines," evidence of "audience and purpose," and "overall MLA." "And then I pay a lot of emphasis on if evidence is properly backed up or if they're explaining their quotes or is it just there to be there? How well have they understood the material they're working with?" The feedback in **Figure 11** corresponds with an incomplete paper prior to revision. "I sometimes do the incompletes like a reminder to them. I'm not reducing your final grade. This is for you to remember what entails you to getting an incomplete." For any incomplete, they and the writer "talk in class about what this means." They ask students to submit their revised work within two weeks, along with a revision memo on "their revision process." **Figure 12** shows feedback on an in-progress research plan that focuses on content and ideas rather than writing ability.



Figure 11. Marginal comments, comparative rhetorical analysis (ENGL 101), Sage.



Figure 12. Marginal comments, qualitative research plan (ENGL 102), Sage.

Scarlet

"I've always said this: a good professor learns along with their students."

Origin Story & Educational Background

Scarlet is a graduate student from the Southeastern U.S. in their first year of the PhD in Literature. They are also pursuing a certificate in the Women, Gender, and Sexuality (WGS) program. Scarlet's research interests sit at the intersection of the study of Medieval and Renaissance literature and WGS. Scarlet always enjoyed creative writing in their youth. "When I came into undergrad, I thought I wanted to be some sort of journalist. I went in with the mass communications major, took one class, realized it wasn't for me, and quickly changed my major and career path from there." During their first semester as an undergrad, Scarlet took a British Literature seminar "with an amazing professor who is now one of my mentors and my colleagues." They did not take any undergraduate coursework related to rhetoric and composition; because of dual enrollment in high school, they "got the first-year composition classes out of the way." The positive influence of Scarlet's English instructors and classes shaped their decision to become a college English professor. Before that, "I never wanted to be a teacher. I never thought I was cut out for it." Scarlet double majored in History and English (2019) and earned an MA in English (2021) from a large public R2 university.

Writing Pedagogy Education

During their Master's program, Scarlet received preparation to teach FYC courses through tutoring, observing experienced instructors, composition pedagogy coursework, and one week of formal training. They reflected overall that although "we got resources for first-year composition, we just didn't really know how to use those resources." Scarlet's engagement with the training resources was shaped by the fact that, in their cohort of grad students, "none of us

were composition people. None of us were rhetoricians by any means. We all wanted to pursue literature." During the first year of the MA program, they tutored in the university's Center for Academic Achievement, where they worked with "history writing, nursing students, and composition classes." "I tutored a few students in French, which I probably shouldn't have been doing, to be honest." Scarlet's tutoring experiences directly impact how they teach their classes: "seeing students' anxieties and seeing students' worries over their papers also formed my approach for being more lenient with them and being more of a mentor rather than a harsh authoritarian." In addition to tutoring, Scarlet "shadowed a professor teaching Comp 1 and Comp 2." Since the preparation from their MA program "doesn't seem as intensive as the mentoring program at UTK does," "it was more of a 'here's the course. You can look at it, take anything you need from it, come to the class, sit in on it as a student. Take notes, ask questions, stay after if you want to talk to the professor.' But nothing really more than that."

Scarlet also took a composition pedagogy course as an MA student before they began teaching as an instructor of record at UTK. However, difficult institutional circumstances limited the usefulness of the class. At the time they took the class, "we didn't have a Composition director" in the program, and the instructor of the course was a "Dean of one of the schools." "Because she was a Dean, she was not completely there with us." "This was also the semester where COVID happened," which meant the second half of the class post spring-break moved completely online. "I taught for the first time during the COVID pandemic." Once the class moved online, students worked completely asynchronously to develop teaching portfolios. "We were not taught how to build a rubric or how to build a grading scale, how to effectively grade something in general, how to bring out points in our syllabus besides the required course policies that our department is requiring us to put in here." Despite the lack of usefulness in the course,

Scarlet benefitted from a "Supervised Teaching" course, a one-credit class led by the Head of Graduate Studies during which "we would have a meeting maybe once a week where we would kind of talk through any issues we were having." In the Fall, new instructors also had a "week of training before we were supposed to teach." "They had a course design for us so we could just copy and paste that into our own. But if it was not for that, I don't know what we would have done that first semester because certainly the materials that I came up with [in the portfolio], I never used those. It was kind of a waste, to be honest. That's why I say I was thrown out to the wind with my resources." Grad students did get to "talk about grading and rubric-building" during the workshop, which guided Scarlet's early assessment practices.

Scarlet began their time at UTK with three years of teaching experience. Because of the pandemic, Scarlet had taught courses "over Zoom synchronously and kind of asynchronously, and I've taught them completely asynchronously online and I've taught them in person in a weird kind of hybrid era [in the] first semester after Zoom." Although their "plan originally was to just go straight through from undergrad to doctorate," "because of the pandemic, I think we were all so burned out that I just needed some time to recuperate." After graduation, Scarlet worked at the university as a lecturer and taught course in FYC, American Literature to 1986, and British Literature to 1785:

> Sometimes in the past I'd be like, oh, I have to teach two composition courses and one literature course. And I would always look forward to the literature course more. But then I would end up enjoying the composition class as well, sometimes maybe more than my literature course, just depending on the students that I would get. I've definitely reframed that to not psych myself out with a negative approach to be like, oh, you're not a comp person, so you're not going to like teaching this class. I've kind of removed that to be like,

> hey, you're teaching a class. You love teaching, you love interacting with students. Use that as an opportunity to do that. Don't necessarily think about the fact that you're teaching composition and not literature.

The transition to teaching as an instructor of record at UTK for the first time led to significant changes in Scarlet's teaching practices. From August Workshops, "I've completely revamped my writing assessment in the course of two weeks." Scarlet felt "I've learned more about teaching pedagogy with UTK's whole program than I ever have in my past." Their teaching practices developed significantly from the Composition Office. "I never heard of the term ungrading until this month." "But now that I know what ungrading is, I do plan on using it because I think it matches my teaching style a lot better with the whole mentor idea and trying to help them on their individual journeys." "I like the idea of just being like, complete/incomplete. If it's incomplete, here's what we can do. Focusing on feedback more than numbers and points and percentages. Because I've never really had a super solid system for that anyway, so I'm excited to try out ungrading and see how my students react to it and how it can make my life easier, but help both of us in the long run." The most useful parts of August Workshops were the "asynchronous videos" and "the Q&A sessions for the Zoom sessions." Scarlet also benefitted from the FYC Canvas site. "Especially on the FYC page, there's so much material that sometimes I get overwhelmed by it. But it is easily manageable once you actually read it. There's just a lot there." Overall, Scarlet felt really prepared to teach at UTK, though "it was hard to find the time to grade everything in a timely manner." It was difficult to "find better time management on top of everything, especially having to take three classes the first year, worry about attending those and doing all the assignments for them, and then grading two of the assignments a week for my students on top of lesson planning and things like that." Scarlet

ultimately found a way to balance expectations as a student and an instructor. “There usually wasn’t a day where I did both in the day. It was usually one day was dedicated to my class, one day was dedicated to the classes I was in.”

Assessment Literacy: Impacting Students Through Assessment

Scarlet, who developed their assessment beliefs and knowledge through their teaching experience, still evolved their practices significantly during their first year at UTK. Scarlet strengthened many of their beliefs about effective writing assessment. For example, embodying a “mentor/coach” approach in the classroom followed the belief that helpful feedback is “constructive criticism,” never “directive criticism.” Writing assessment, “above everything,” “should be helpful to the student. It shouldn't ever bring them down or make them feel like they're bad at writing.” Scarlet believes writers need “positive” feedback that is “nice and helpful” to grow. “I’ve always said this: a good professor learns along with their students.”

During Scarlet’s first year at UTK, they learned to ask more questions of students in written feedback. “I love the idea of framing things as questions now.” Scarlet drove their feedback with questions like, “How can we see this in a different light? How can we take it to the next level? How can we improve upon what we’ve already done?” Scarlet hopes that students do not “view me as an authority figure at all,” so they prefer *mentor*. Scarlet tells students and conveys on the syllabus, “remember that this is your class. It's not my class. However, you all want to guide this, and whatever journey you all want to take on this course, I'm here to help you through that. I'm here to help you succeed, you know, to go over questions, to go over this content with you. But ultimately, what you do with it and how you take it into the future is up to you.” Seeing their role as a mentor, “I try to make their lives easier because I know, especially from own experience, I know that there's a lot of professors that don't do that. And that seem to

cause unnecessary stress on them. I just try to be the opposite of that and be light with them, try to give them a safe space where they can come and just kind of decompress, but still learn what they need to for their future."

The persona that Scarlet embodies as a writing instructor and the feedback they give to students is informed by their own experiences as an undergraduate student. "I think compassion is a word that guides me in every class that I do." They also keep in mind their own experiences of learning to become a writer. "When I first started writing, it was always, 'hey, let's make these conclusions better.' And so I've spent a lot of time over the years developing these conclusions and for some reason I focused on that a lot with my students too, because I think it was drilled into my head that I want to kind of pass that along to my students because I do think that I have a really effective conclusion now and they can be effective conclusions in general for my students, but that was always something that would come up until I fixed it." They shared a particular story that made visible what they learned as an undergrad that continues to impact their teaching:

> I've never received a 100 on a paper, even though I felt like it was a really good paper. So, I've never given a student a 100 on a paper just because I feel like that's a very taboo thing. I've given students a 99 because I was like, this is a really excellent paper . . . but I can't give them a 100 because that's not what we do. I feel like saying that out loud is just dumb. But like so many people, so many professors, especially that don't know about ungrading, just—they think that way kind of subconsciously. Moving forward, I'm really excited to get rid of that idea because again, it is dumb and if a student does a good job, they'll see that by a simple complete and good feedback from me. And then if they don't necessarily follow everything in the assignment, especially if there's large pieces missing from the assignment that they need to do moving forward to the other assignments, then

> they'll get an incomplete with helpful feedback to help them improve that time, to revise it, and all of that. So again, I think it just aligns more with my teaching style now, but I think it's going to be really beneficial for them as well to kind of help them take risks and think about writing outside of the box.

Ungrading helped Scarlet move beyond some of their previous misconceptions. When it comes to using labor-based assessment, "this kind of goes without saying, but I think it's more fair." Scarlet sees it as especially useful for developing writers. For students who would have otherwise gotten a C on a paper "when they should have gotten an A because of the effort that they've put in," "they'll get the satisfaction from knowing, okay, [they see] the effort I put in and [they are] meeting me where I need to be met and [they are] helping me move forward. I'm not being penalized for things that I can't really help.'" Scarlet never previously used rubrics in their assessment practice "because they've not really been explained very well to me and I've kind of managed these past three years grading without one." Instead, they use an index card "that I write what I'm looking for on before I start grading anything just so that I can be fair with what I'm looking for. I guess that's like a mini rubric, but I basically just tell my students, follow what's on the assignment sheet, because this is basically what I'm grading for. And if you miss an element here, then points may be taken off for that."

Scarlet tended to focus their feedback on students' works in progress with comments to help students track their own development as writers. **Figure 13** shows their marginal comments on an APP proposal. As the third project in the semester, with their feedback, "I really stress the importance of using what we had learned with the CRA and the DAAB and then being able to assess their own writing for the same things." They focused on comments around rhetorical concepts like purpose and audience. They explained their approach to giving this particular

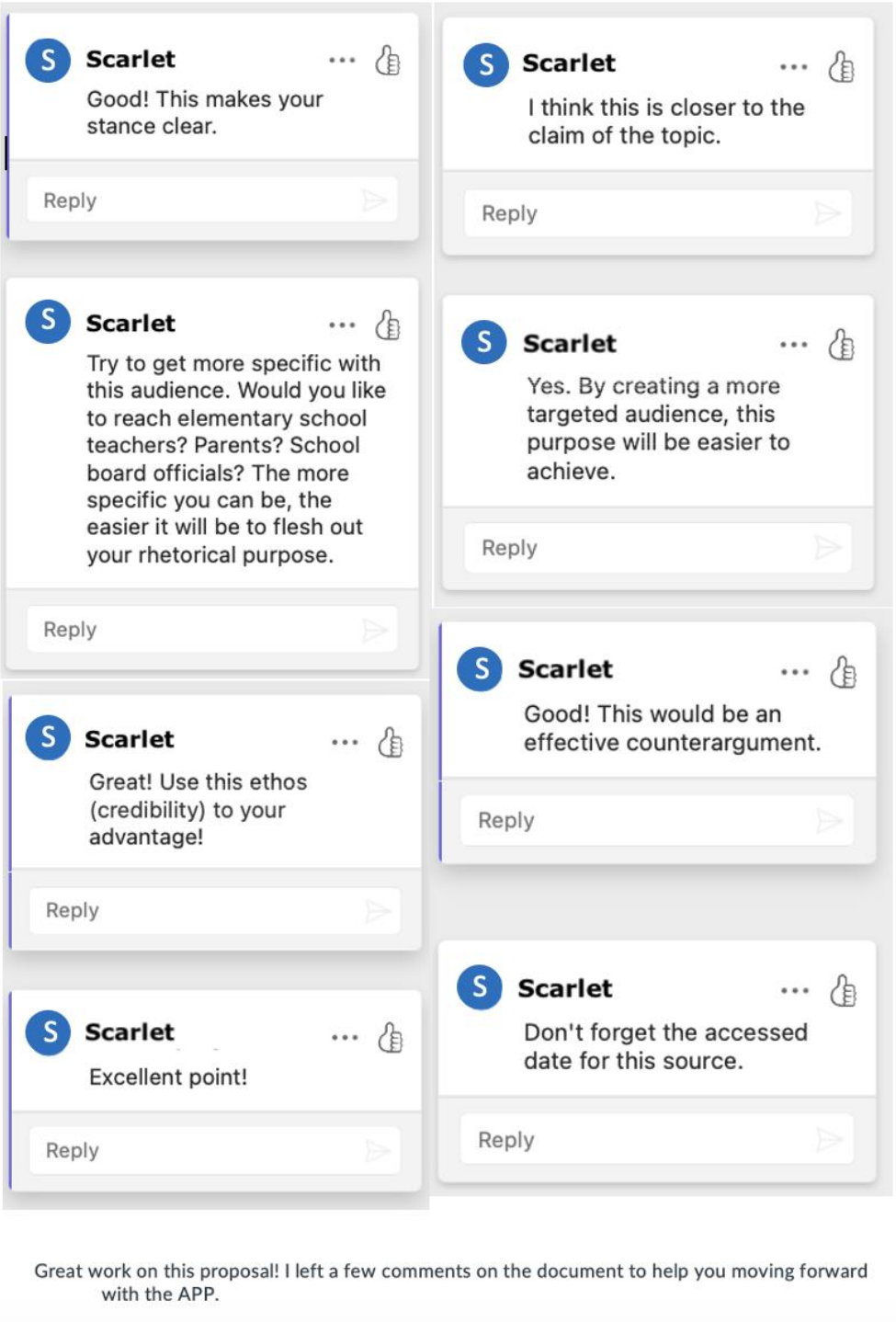


Figure 13. Marginal comments, academic position paper proposal (ENGL 101), Scarlet.

student feedback:

> The first comment, I emphasize the importance of them having a clear stance in their writing . . . The second comment deals with the audience where I gave them more of a feedback-oriented comment where I told them to get more specific with their comment or their audience. And then I asked them questions like, what would this audience look like? How can we narrow it down? And then kind of ended that piece of feedback with why it's important to narrow it down. And then I think I was asking for their claim as well, their thesis statement . . . and then the comment right under that kind of speaks back to the audience, but then also kind of ties in the purpose to that which kind of helped give a reasoning for why the previous sentence would have been a better claim . . . The last two comments are more praising sort of comments, but then I also wanted to address them including a counterargument as well. If they included a counterargument like this student did, then I'd bring attention to that and say this would be really effective . . . and in this very last comment—this would have been green for the citation. Just giving a minor correction there. And then at the very, very end, that's essentially like the final comment that I would submit on Canvas, not on the document.

Figure 14 shows a summary comment on a qualitative research paper. Scarlet posted the comment on Canvas along with 23 marginal comments that they provided throughout the draft. Ultimately, Scarlet came to UTK with three years of teaching experience, but their prior experiences as a student still greatly informed their approaches to teaching and assessing writing.

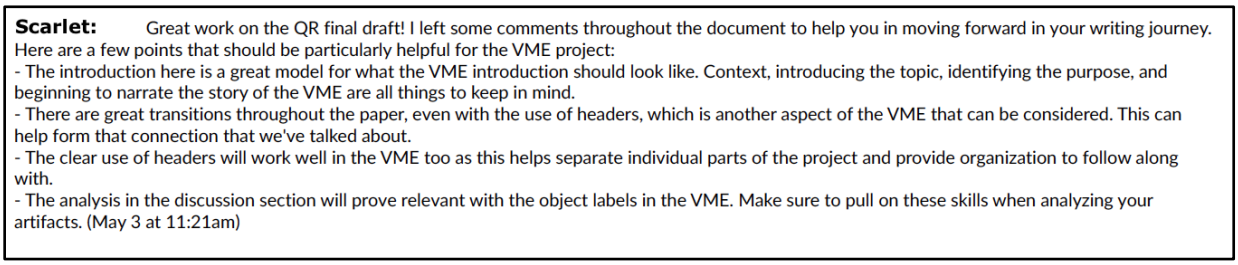


Figure 14. Summary comment, qualitative research paper (ENGL 102), Scarlet.

Theresa

"It's really important for students to feel like they own their writing. They're responsible for it. Their language matters. Their words matter."

Origin Story & Educational Background

Theresa is a graduate student from the Southeastern U.S. pursuing an MA in Literature with a focus on Victorian Literature. They have identified as a "classic literature person" since childhood; "I was just a little nerd who would read *Jane Eyre* for fun." The AP U.S. History class they took in high school was "crucial" to their "writing development." As Theresa prepared for "really intense exams where we had to do writing essays," the AP class taught them "to give a really deep analysis with very detailed answers and pulling directly from texts." As an undergraduate student, Theresa experienced "highly structured" and "pretty strict" writing assignments. Instructors had "specific rubrics and it was very laid out to begin with." While Theresa mostly wrote "analytical essays" and "history writing," they also took some courses in "creative writing," which they found challenging "because it's like a completely different skillset you draw from . . . it's hard to be vulnerable and be able to draw from that." From their "favorite English professors" throughout college, they "learned a lot more about exploring different research options." Theresa enjoyed class discussions around the study of literature. "I took a

Renaissance drama class my sophomore year. It was really exciting mainly to have discussions during class that were very fruitful and using that to help with the writing process instead of just relying on myself." They felt that professors gave their "usually very directive" and "specific" feedback on their writing. "It was always trying to push me further, trying to challenge me further instead of just staying in one place." They earned a BA in English Literature from a small public southern regional university in 2022. "I really was not introduced to much rhetoric or rhetorical thinking until I came to grad school." When the study began, they felt unsure about what to do after earning their MA degree.

Writing Pedagogy Education

Since Theresa did not have previous tutoring or teaching experience, they integrated their prior educational experienced with the training and preparation received during their first year at UTK. They had two disparate teaching assistantship experiences. "My first semester, I had a guy who's very lecture heavy. Not a whole lot of class participation. But he did do ungrading." In English 101, Theresa taught lessons on stasis theory and multimodal composition, which was "really fun, actually." However, in the Spring, "I had a teacher who is the complete opposite, where he did mainly in-class assignments, group activities. He would talk for like five minutes max and would never lecture at them" and used "normal grading." Theresa taught lessons on "interview questions" and "archival research." Upon reflection, "I feel like my role is to find some sort of balance between that." While the mentorship exposed Theresa to conventional and labor-based grading approaches, practice with assessment was limited to English 101, in which they "graded about half of the papers by the end, at least." Theresa assessed major projects, but no "minor things" like rough drafts or homework assignments. Theresa's mentor "guided" their through the process to "be very holistic" with feedback. Since the instructor used ungrading,

Theresa practiced with a complete/incomplete rubric. “It was mainly about the ideas rather than the execution.” Theresa learned from English 101, “I didn’t have to grade as hard as I thought I did.” As a TA in English 102, Theresa no longer practiced assessment. “I did look at some drafts and little things, but I never actually graded it. It was just me looking and thinking about it.”

Theresa “really enjoyed” their year in the writing center. Main benefits included the use of Bean’s hierarchy in feedback to focus on “higher-level difficulties first” and “building rapport with students.” “I just really like interacting with students, especially one-on-one.” Tutor training taught Theresa how to “present concepts.” “It’s helped to be able to know when students are getting it or not when I tell them in a tutoring session and then kind of use the same approach when I’m teaching.” “Also, the fact that tutoring was all about getting them involved in the process of writing and not feeling overwhelmed.” Tutoring also helped Theresa develop an approach to “conferencing,” “group activities,” and “walking around to groups and seeing what they’re talking about” to “be encouraging for them.”

Theresa also benefitted from taking the Composition Pedagogy course and using the resources from the Composition Office. English 505 was “good:”

> I did like where we got to share like our plans for certain days and our like ideas about what teaching is, what writing is. It was helpful to have like a community where we could talk about, like our concerns about the class or about teaching in the future and just different ideas about how we can make it more interactive and more thought-provoking.

Theresa also incorporated some of the pedagogical strategies they enjoyed as a student in the class, such as “the amount of in-class work days we had.” They also “really liked the reflection journals we did, and so I’ve incorporated that into my class.” Theresa enjoyed “the emphasis in August Workshops on doing different types of feedback or different types of assessments so you

don't get burned out on just written feedback." "I didn't really know how to integrate that when I started because I was like, how do I just tell them in class what I'm thinking about their work? But I think I shifted more towards that later in the semester with some help from peers." August Workshops also cemented best practices in giving feedback, like "the emphasis on not commenting on every single thing" and "just hitting the high points." Theresa enjoyed one workshop where "we could just chat in group about assessment practices." "I got to see a sense of how other instructors are also doing their assessment." Theresa joked that they "bombarded" fellow GTAs "with questions all the time about teaching." Theresa also "looked at the Canvas page a lot for forming my 101." Since they used traditional grading, "I found the rubrics really helpful, adapting some of the language from the rubrics."

Before the Fall 2023 semester, Theresa had the opportunity to decide whether to use conventional or labor-based assessment in their English 101 course. Theresa decided to use "more traditional" assessment because they felt "concerned about myself and my own ability to get students to participate." Theresa felt that "I don't want to be very strict about it," but "I'm not sure." At the same time, they felt conflictingly that "I hate grading in general, the idea of grading." They connected that emotion to their feeling like "I'm just a perfectionist and a people pleaser" where "I have this feeling that I have to make a good grade" so "I'll just figure out what the professor likes." With their students, though, "I don't want it to be about that." In 101, Theresa approached assessment with assigning grades on major papers, while all other work was complete or incomplete. Theresa incorporated a "reflective journal" worth 15% of students' final grades. "I did do the major assignments as A/B/C/D. I had to be kind of nitpicky. It's a pressure from students that you're going to grade hard, so you feel like you have to kind of grade hard. The complete and incomplete kind of wipes that all clean."

After teaching for one semester, Theresa felt “much more convinced” about the benefits of ungrading, and they decided to use it in English 102. Theresa reflected:

> I think I just wanted to give ungrading a try because I was curious about it. I think my first semester, I wasn't very familiar with it, and I was kind of insecure about me being a teacher in general and standing up in the classroom. I felt like I kind of had to stick with the conventional grading just because—I don't know, a letter grade makes it sound like it’s an official teacher position or something where—I don't know, it just seems more legitimate. And I know that's completely wrong, but that's the way I was feeling at the time. But then this semester, when I transitioned into ungrading, I think it helped me be a little more confident in my own abilities in myself and expressing knowledge or sharing feedback and comments in a way that didn't force me to rely a lot on the status of being a teacher or the status of giving a specific grade. In a lot of ways, I like it better because it has lowered the conventional idea of teacher status as being something that’s really official and really focused on grading to a way that’s more open to like student responses.

In English 102, Theresa continued ungrading to emphasize reflection and started to use “collaborative rubrics that we make together in class” because “it seems like if I give them a rubric that they have to use, it’s just like defeating the whole purpose of having them think about how writers would respond to something.” Theresa felt that ungrading gave their “a lot more time to spend on giving feedback that’s actually very thoughtful and specific.” It also helped Theresa feel confident that they didn’t need to rank students using a rubric. “I think that's better to like not have those direct comparisons to other students because everyone comes from a different background.” While Theresa built a strong knowledge base about grading approaches before they began teaching their own classes, they wanted to experiment in their classes before

committing to an approach that best fit their approach as an instructor. The move to ungrading was primarily motivated by their semester of teaching experience during which their work with students made their "much more convinced about" the advantages of labor-based grading.

Assessment Literacy: Mentoring Writers Through Assessment

Theresa felt that their evolution from conventional grading to labor-based assessment impacted their assessment practices and helped their achieve their goals as an instructor. It allowed them to "have a lot more focus on motivating students or trying to be inviting." Without grades, Theresa could explore "these really creative ways [students] have of expressing themselves and drawing attention to that and trying to make a connection through that." Without the pressure of ranking students, Theresa's feedback "reflects more of what I enjoy about writing or enjoy about when I get to explore a topic." **Figure 15** demonstrates their marginal comments from the Fall semester while **Figure 16** demonstrates marginal comments from the Spring semester. They explained how their feedback changed:

> I think last semester, I was more focused on the little bitty errors—I mean, some grammar errors, but not always that. But in this semester, I think I tried more to engage with what people were talking about in in the actual paper or engage with the content in a more inviting way than I did in my first semester. Because I feel like in my first semester, I approached those assignments with a lot more focus on, 'this is a practice exercise to see how your writing is.' My comments were very writing focused. Or very focused on 'this is how you structure a thesis. This is how you structure an argument. And maybe you could improve on that.' But in these comments, especially because the assignments are more open for their interests and what they want to talk about, it seems like I am inviting them to talk more about the topic itself, saying, 'I am interested in what you're saying, I

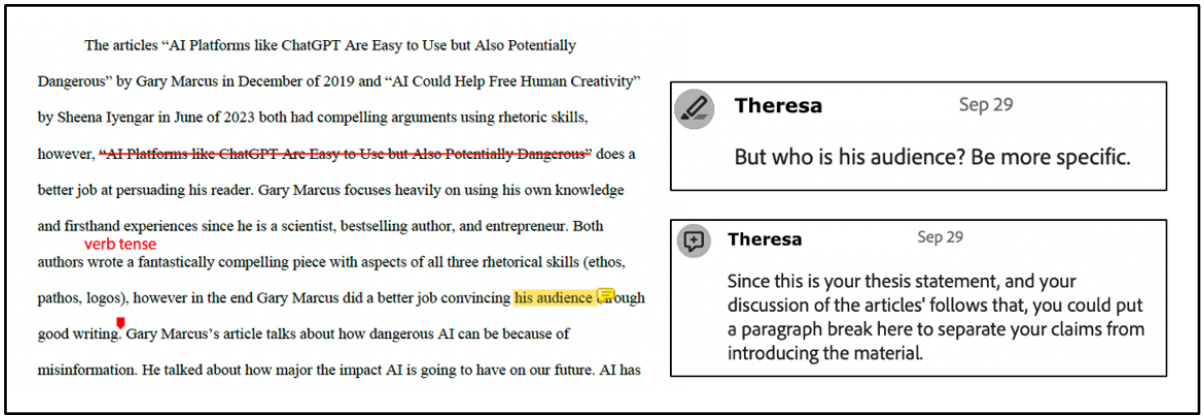


Figure 15. Marginal comments, comparative rhetorical analysis (ENGL 101), Theresa.

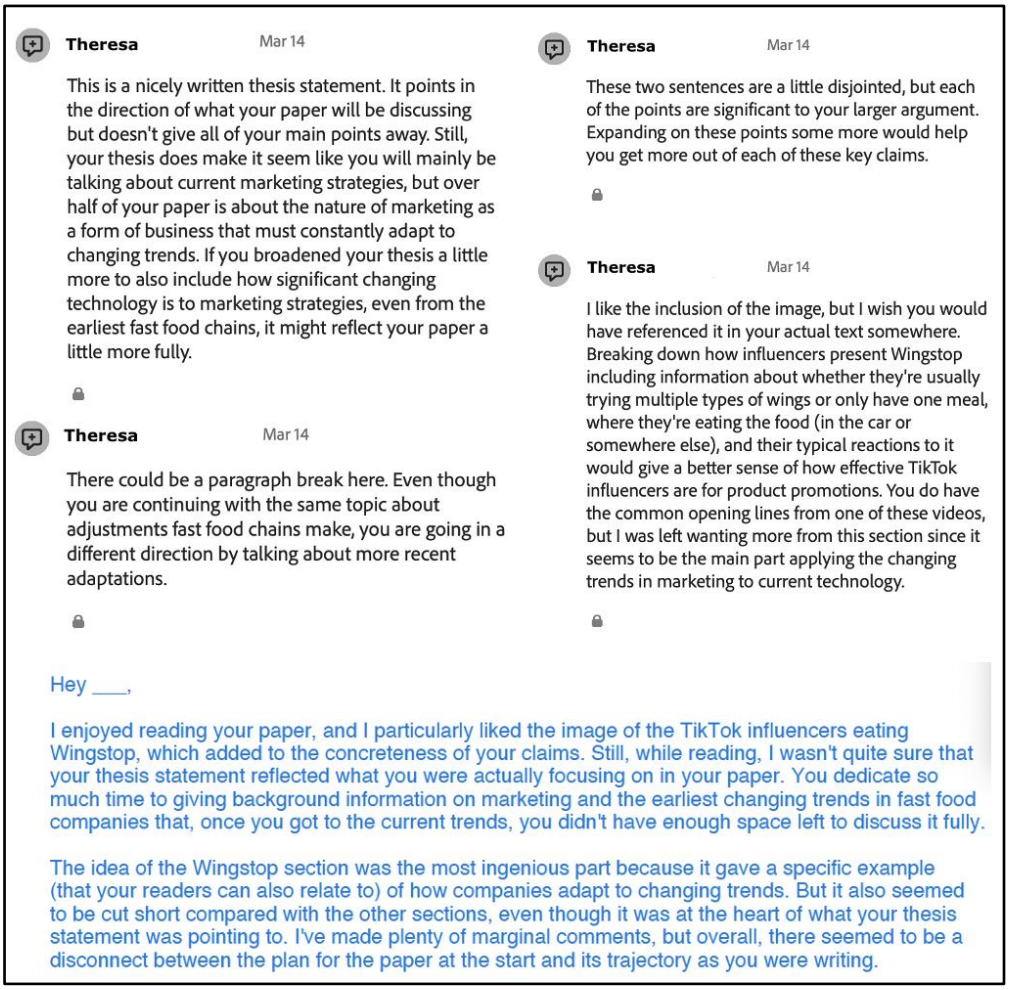


Figure 16. Marginal/summary comments, secondary source paper (ENGL 102), Theresa.

really enjoy reading about this topic. I wish you could have expanded a little more on this just because I do enjoy it, even though it also would benefit the argument.'

Theresa previously felt "iffy" about giving final grades. "I want to be a lenient grader, but I am just stuck with the old grade method." However, when they tried a semester without grades, they were better able to achieve the goals of their teaching philosophy, which is "mainly about getting students to really feel in control of their writing and not having to live up to my standards or anybody else's standards, just their own and their own goals they set."

By the end of English 102, Theresa seemed more confident in the ways their assessment practices supported their goals as an instructor and student learning. Theresa also "shifted more towards" verbal assessment and "walking around in class and checking in with people individually." Theresa felt that students "respond more to that because if they just see a lot of comments all the time, then it's like they don't really look at it." They were able to further develop some of their beliefs that started in college because they now see the purpose of assessment as "student growth as more than anything else." Yet, as GTA, "I don't think I expected how hard it would be to go one day after another, continually keeping up with grading."

Key Takeaways

What can we learn from the stories of graduate student instructors? These narratives "leave evidence" (Mingus, n. d.) of the literacy development and assessment practices of eight GTAs, including some of their successes, challenges, aspirations, and trepidations. Writing assessment literacy development, the throughline across the narratives, is key to understanding the experiences of new composition instructors. As both reflective and constitutive of teacher development, writing assessment literacy can help the field of rhetoric and composition better understand teacher learning. The following paragraphs provide a summary of the narratives

around the first two research questions—How do GTAs develop their writing assessment literacy? What prior writing assessment literacies do GTAs bring to the FYC classroom?—to set the stage for continued thematic analysis and synthesis in Chapter 5.

The stories told by Camden, Grey, Keegan, Lainey, Rose, Sage, Scarlet, and Theresa show that writing assessment literacy development is affective, experiential, institutionally shaped, laborious, liminal, material, and personal. Experience is a driving force in writing assessment literacy development. It is primarily through experience that new instructors develop their assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices. Often, new instructors fall back on their past experiences more readily than what they have heard in a lecture or read in a pedagogy book, demonstrating the influence of prior knowledge on novice teachers' practices (e.g., Grossman, 1990; Nowacek, 2021; Nyquist & Sprague, 1998). This finding is consistent with the assertion from Reid and Estrem's (2012) three-year study that found GTAs' teaching approaches are typically "influenced more strongly by prior personal experiences and beliefs and their experiences in the classroom than by their formal pedagogy education" (p. 34). Specific to writing assessment, GTAs relied on their prior experiences as novice undergraduate and graduate student writers to shape feedback and assessment practices, even when those prior experiences proved dissonant from new experiences and knowledge gained though teacher training. For Theresa, only the experience of teaching for one semester confirmed the decision to change from conventional grading methods to labor-based grading methods. Although Theresa had already gained labor-based grading knowledge from their teacher training, since they had never been a student in an ungraded class, prior experience eclipsed newer knowledge. As a novice instructor, Theresa more readily fell back on prior undergraduate experiences rather than the year of preparation they had received and their own practice with ungrading as a teaching assistant.

As new graduate student instructors, participants in this study shared in Camden's attitude that "there's nothing that really prepares you until you do it" (see also Reid & Estrem, 2012). Sage, Camden, Rose, Keegan, and Grey all remarked on the same sentiment as a driving characterization of their first year teaching at UTK. Further explored in the next chapter, writing assessment literacy development is an instance of experiential learning (e.g., Girvan et al., 2016), an extensive, recursive process of learning through doing and reflecting on that doing. However, without explicitly framing and understanding writing assessment literacy development as experiential learning, GTAs often miss out on its benefits to their learning. Increased attention to *experience* draws attention not only to the knowledge, beliefs, and practices, but also attitudes, emotions, ethics, prior and tacit knowledge, presumptions, biases, and affective dimensions of teacher learning. Experience is a key mechanism by which writing assessment literacy development occurs. GTAs in this study primarily developed their writing assessment literacy *through the teaching of FYC courses*, finding that teaching itself is one of the main ways that instructors learn to assess writing. But teaching is only one kind of experience.

Assessment knowledge refers to what instructors know about writing assessment gained through formal education, training, and preparation. The assessment knowledge that emerged in the narratives reflected deep ties to past educational experiences. Camden, Keegan, Lainey, Scarlet, and Theresa all connected their approaches to assessment to the ways they were assessed as undergraduate students. Theresa received feedback that was "very directive" and "specific," supporting their knowledge that good feedback is "straightforward" and uses "examples from the text." Theresa learned as an undergraduate that good feedback "was always like trying to push me further," a sentiment that carries forward to their assessment practices. Keegan and Camden both understood assessment as a "conversation" (Keegan) and the value of "really encouraging

feedback" (Camden). Sage and Lainey, the MFA students, secure their assessment knowledge in the ways writing and revision are discussed in creative writing workshops in which good instructors are "super, super gentle" (Lainey). Since Scarlet was regularly told to improve their conclusions when they "first started writing," they shared when they started teaching, "for some reason I focused on that a lot with my students too, because I think it was drilled into my head that I want to kind of pass that along to my students." Memories of prior experiences with feedback contribute to new instructors' knowledge of how to give feedback and how *not* to give feedback. For Grey and Rose, memorably negative feedback experiences proved influential; Grey recalled the surprise at receiving a comment that said they had "senioritis," and Rose never knew how to interpret a professor who wrote, "this was very ambitious." These experiences with ambiguous, negative, or unsupportive feedback guided GTAs to do better for their own students. What instructors know about assessment, and how they talk about what they know, also reveals their values, beliefs, and attitudes about writing, assessing, and learning (Xu & Brown, 2016).

What new instructors know about writing assessment varies widely; even those who participated in the same trainings and took the same courses gained different levels of knowledge. Overall, the formal preparation GTAs received impacted their writing assessment literacy development. The MA/MFA students experienced the same teaching apprenticeship year, but they took away disparate levels of knowledge and preparation. Camden, Lainey, and Theresa all reported learning the most from their tutor training, followed by their teaching assistantship experiences, while Sage learned the most from their exceptionally positive teaching assistantship experiences, followed by tutor training. Rose felt instead that they learned the most about assessment from August Workshops and the Composition Office resources, since they felt that tutor training and English 505 felt at times detached from the material realities of teaching. Sage

and Camden both had positive mentorship experiences, but Theresa, Rose, and Lainey each had one good and one bad TA experience—and for Lainey and Rose, particularly negative experiences that limited their learning. Camden, Lainey, and Sage felt that English 505, followed by August Workshops, were the least helpful preparation experiences. Theresa recalled 505 experiences throughout the academic year, noting the course as useful preparation to teach.

In terms of assessment knowledge, despite the variable training and preparation that each instructor received, GTAs still felt overall "uncomfortable and unprepared" to enter the classroom, much like the novice instructors in Crusan et al.'s (2016) study of writing assessment literacy development (p. 44). Among the PhD students, Keegan and Scarlet had preparation from their MA programs, including teaching, tutoring, composition pedagogy coursework, and workshops, along with multiple years of experience before coming to UTK. Grey had one year of tutoring experience and some hands-on classroom experience. While the PhD students learned about local assessment practices from August Workshops and the Composition Office, classroom practices relied heavily on what they learned from their previous training and teaching experience. Even for instructors with previous pedagogical training and teaching experience, the experiences they had as undergrads remained some of the most influential on their assessment practices. For the PhD students, who received less formal training at UTK than the MA/MFA students, peer interaction offered a significant source of learning about writing assessment.

Alongside assessment knowledge, assessment beliefs refer to what instructors believe about writing assessment, or deeply held worldviews and values that drive assessment decisions. Assessment beliefs connect to assessment knowledge, but not always assessment practice. The GTAs in this study believed primarily that assessment should be "helpful" and increase student "confidence." GTAs collectively felt that assessment should empower writers and instructors.

Sage and Keegan both had core beliefs that "assessment should ultimately be empowering" (Keegan). More specifically, some participants felt they could enact empowerment through specific grading practices. Camden defined ungrading as "empowering," Grey said that collaborative rubric development helped students feel "more empowered," and Rose felt that reflective self-assessment helped students feel "more empowered." Labor-based assessment practices enabled instructors to have more agency over their practices, which in turn created more agency for student writers. Theresa emphasized the overlap of empowerment and agency for instructors and students, connecting the value of empowerment to the FYC curriculum, explaining that "helping students figure out where their own point of view fits in is really empowering and exciting to be able to see that" for the instructor. Keegan mentioned empowerment across all three interviews, carefully articulating goals to preserve student agency. Camden asked students how they would prefer to receive feedback and changed their practice to give more feedback on rough drafts than final drafts because of it to give students "agency" in the class. Grey wanted students to have "a sense of agency" in the choices they make in their writing, and Keegan employed the pedagogical strategy of asking questions in marginal comments to materialize their values of "transparency" and "agency." Theresa felt that collaborative rubrics give students "agency." GTAs also made visible the belief of "advocacy" through assessment (Lainey). Rose believed deeply in "empathy" in assessment. Assessment beliefs always tie to assessment knowledge, but not always assessment practice. Gaps can exist between what instructors know, believe, and do (e.g., Scarino, 2013; Driscoll, 2013; Xu & Brown, 2016), creating the tensions and challenges in the classroom explored in the next chapter.

Finally, next to assessment knowledge and beliefs, assessment practice refers to what instructors do with and through assessment. What new instructors do with writing assessment

makes manifest their assessment knowledge and beliefs. Literacy development is a "situated practice" (Goggin, 2008, p. 1), and writing assessment practices closely relate to assessment knowledge and beliefs. This study found that formal pedagogy education significantly influenced GTAs' knowledge, beliefs, and practice around antiracist, labor-based, and justice-oriented assessment theory and practice. All participants in this research study used ungrading practices. Theresa began with conventional grading in the Fall and changed to labor-based grading in the Spring; while they knew about it from their English 505 course and the Composition Office, their semester of teaching experience gave them confidence and justification to switch to ungrading. Guided by the principles of labor-based assessment, the GTAs in this study all used a grading matrix to determine final grades, complete/incomplete grading, and reflective self-assessment. Most participants used collaborative rubric development, but Scarlet and Sage used holistic checklists for major projects. Instructors like Lainey, Sage, and Theresa figured peer review as a major part of their assessment practices, while conferencing also became a major feedback practice for instructors like Keegan and Scarlet.

As an example of an assessment practice, written feedback tended to guided students through the writing process; some instructors tried to give more feedback on rough drafts than final drafts. Approaches to writing marginal comments included asking questions, providing supportive encouragement, and responding as a reader. Some instructors, like Lainey, Theresa, and Sage, relied on copious verbal feedback. Practice makes the implicit explicit, the internal external. Yet, tacit and prior knowledge and beliefs have some difficulty surfacing without purposeful reflection. Only Scarlet and Keegan brought prior assessment practices. Others drew from practices they gained from tutor training, teaching assistantship, composition pedagogy, and workshops, which often left them with a handful of tools or strategies they had learned during

their training, but had not used with real student writing. As such, assessment practices primarily developed in the classroom. Novice instructors come to the classroom with beliefs and knowledge but fewer practices. At times, beliefs and knowledge felt dissonant from assessment practices. Sage, for example, believed that feedback should be "empowering" and oriented around "process," but shared marginal comments that seemed to be brief, directive, and focused on writing products, perhaps due to time constraints and labor limitations. Lainey similarly felt that writing assessment should focus on an individual writer's process," and that "every piece of writing has worth," though they expressed some frustration with works-in-progress. The practice of verbal feedback tacitly connected to the value seen in workshopping and discussing writing with others. Assessment decisions and practices are always informed by teachers' beliefs and practices (e.g., Hillocks, 1990), whether they consciously recognize it or not (Shavelson, 1973).

This chapter shared narratives of writing assessment literacy development, recounting GTAs' assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices. Yet, these are not the only important facets of writing assessment literacy development. In Chapter 5, I use thematic analysis to better understand the experience of writing assessment literacy development.

Chapter 5

The Development of Writing Assessment Literacy

The previous chapter presented narratives that recounted eight graduate student instructors' writing assessment literacy development, showcasing their assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices. Narrative inquiry guided the retelling of participants' stories, affirming GTAs as experts of their own experiences of teacher development as first-time instructors of record at UTK. The narratives deepened my understanding of the writing assessment literacy of GTAs, shedding light on an underexplored facet of teacher preparation. Each participant's story remains their own story, yet cohesions and discords among them help identify insights that can inform effective, innovative practices and approaches to writing pedagogy education.

While Chapter 4 presented the study's findings in the form of narratives, Chapter 5 offers findings in the form of thematic analysis to locate comparisons, commonalities, and disjunctions across the narratives. Chapter 4 focused on answering the study's first two research questions, while Chapter 5 answers the third and fourth research questions: What conditions affect the development of writing assessment literacy? How and to what extent do GTAs' writing assessment knowledge and beliefs shape their writing assessment practices? I further integrate the narratives with published disciplinary discourse and theoretical frameworks to provide thematic analysis that collectively answers all four research questions in the study. The overlay of multivocal narratives with the disciplinary history of FYC and GTA preparation makes visible my argument that the diminished status of first-year composition (Miller, 1991) and exploitative labor demands of writing assessment (Hairston, 1986) have led to the subordination of those who teach the course. In particular, the labor and labor struggles of graduate student instructors have been rendered invisible; it is within this uneven landscape that GTAs must live, learn, and work.

First, the chapter summarizes the prior writing assessment literacy participants brought to the FYC classroom. Prior literacy primarily traced to positive and negative educational experiences that occurred throughout participants' lifetimes as well as current educational experiences that GTAs experienced and then actively resisted in their own classrooms. Then, the chapter uses participant narratives to demonstrate how GTAs develop writing assessment literacy. Situated within the argument that GTAs' difficult working conditions (Osorio et al., 2021) tether to negative conceptions of first-year composition *and* writing assessment, I intervene against the disciplinary milieu to show the real work of graduate student instructors as the labor of writing assessment literacy development. Analysis of the results reveals the importance of past and present experience in writing assessment literacy. Third, the chapter provides a detailed analysis of conditions that affect the development of writing assessment literacy, including formal preparation (teaching assistantship, tutoring, composition pedagogy coursework, and Composition Office workshops) and emergent factors (peer influence, positionality, emotional work, and labor conditions). Last, I analyze how and to what extent writing assessment knowledge and beliefs impact writing assessment practices, recognizing the ubiquitous influence of knowledge and beliefs on practices. I conclude the chapter with a reimagination of the phenomenon under investigation that conceives writing assessment literacy development as *literacy labor* and the work of graduate student instructors.

GTAs' Experiences of Writing Assessment Literacy Development

This study set out to understand how GTAs develop writing assessment literacy. Relatedly, it aimed to account for the prior writing assessment literacy that GTAs bring to their first year of teaching. The stories that GTAs told reveal that the work at the heart of teacher development is *literacy labor*, a term that I developed through this study to account for the

experiential and process-based nature of teacher learning, the affective and emotional dimensions of writing assessment, and the material and labor conditions of literacy development. My construct of literacy labor is distinct from the phrase that appears in Christopher Carter's (2008) *Rhetoric and Resistance in the Corporate Academy*.[11] Carter (2008) uses the term to refer to "unionized composition workers" who "re-imagine the real world as a space of struggle" (p. 74). He uses the phrase in a general sense—dissimilar to my goals in this project. Rather, I argue that English Departments have historically valued intellectual labor (research and scholarship) over physical labor (teaching); paradoxically, however, GTAs' physical labor creates more value (and is often more valued) than their intellectual labor. However, the problematic binary between abstract and concrete labor (Gregory & Winn, 2016) still obscures a dimension to which GTAs devote significant time and energy: their continued growth and development as novice composition instructors. Despite the constant effort it takes, literacy labor is mainly invisible. In its contradiction and complexity, literacy labor links the divide between physical and intellectual labor as well as practice and theory.

The narratives composed through this research study show that literacy labor is a significant part of the work of GTAs. This study found that GTAs developed their writing assessment literacy primarily through experience. The labor of literacy development, as a key mechanism by which writing assessment literacy develops, emphasizes the presence of GTAs' prior and current experience in their writing assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices. The following sections analyze the extent to which GTAs rely on prior knowledge, as well as how experience impacts what and how GTAs learn about assessment theory and practice, to formulate a more process-based conceptualization of writing assessment literacy.

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[11] The term briefly appears in "Literacy Labor and Public Intellectualism" (pp. 74–76); the book critiques academic capitalism and documents resistance from graduate students, contingent faculty, and undergraduate students.

Prior Writing Assessment Literacy & Prior Experience

This study asserts that writing assessment literacy development is a complex experiential process through which novice instructors draw on past experiences and embedded knowledge, beliefs, and practices to develop their approaches. Just as "new knowledge is always built on prior knowledge" (Chicoine, 2004, p. 249), new experiences are built on prior experiences. Both prior knowledge and prior experience impacted the writing assessment literacy development of graduate student instructors in this study. Participants' experiences reflect the commonplace in teacher education that *teachers teach the way they were taught* (Chicoine, 2004; Goodlad, 1982; Knowles, 1988; Lortie, 1975; Oleson & Hora, 2013; Stygall, 2002), yet they also complicate this idea, given that there is no such convention that *teachers assess the way they were assessed*. The finding that prior experience can immensely influence teachers' approaches to assessment is consistent with research that identifies how prior knowledge, beliefs, values, and experiences impact novice instructors' engagement with teacher training (Grossman, 1990; Nyquist & Sprague, 1998; Qualley, 2017; Reed, 2020; Reid, 2017). However, this research study provides more insight into the *kinds* of prior experiences that impact novice instructors. This study contributes a better understanding of what kinds of prior experiences impact GTAs. The three key kinds of prior experience that impacted GTAs in this study were early educational experiences, undergraduate educational experiences, and current experiences as graduate students at UTK. Prior knowledge, beliefs, and practices imprint a legacy on writing assessment literacy development in positive, negative, and ambiguous ways.

Prior early educational experiences (those from childhood through high school-age) were most likely to have an impact on GTAs' deeply held values and beliefs. Stories of childhood experience were not explicitly requested; however, those who felt compelled to reflect on their

early experiences were highly influenced by them, including Camden and Keegan. For Camden, literacy sponsors (Brandt, 1998) like their nana, middle school librarian, and handful of other teachers fostered a deep love for reading and writing that they in turn tries to foster in their students. For Keegan, their experiences being homeschooled led to insecurities that they "wouldn't make the cut from an academic standpoint" and their commitment to encouraging and uplifting their students at all moments. High school experiences also impacted GTAs, including Grey, whose "typical public high school" experiences that left them feeling like they were "not good" at writing; Theresa, who learned from their AP course how to "give a really deep analysis"; and Scarlet, who took FYC courses in high school to get them "out of the way." Scarlet's dismissive sentiment reflects deeply held ideas about the value (or lack thereof) of FYC, though they had an overwhelmingly positive experience in the class. Scarlet even adapted "a film genre analysis paper" assigned in their dual enrollment course into their own FYC course when they taught for the first time. Though GTAs likely didn't know it at the time, these educational experiences from childhood built a lasting foundation of values and beliefs about good and bad teaching and assessment. Standing within their first year as teachers and looking backward at their lives, GTAs traced some of their beliefs and values to early educational experiences around the ways they were taught to read and write and the subliminal influence of the attitudes, environments, and cultures that surrounded them.

Prior experiences with undergraduate education greatly impacted GTAs; in particular, the positive or negative feedback experiences they had with their own writing seemed highly influential on GTAs' own assessment practices. As Nyquist and Sprague (1998) found, graduate students' "prior understandings of effective teaching" and "messages" they "receive[d] about teaching and how they process[ed] them" impacted their development as GTAs (p. 64). Rose

shared memorable feedback that stuck with them; “I had one professor who would always say, ‘this was really interesting but so broad.’ Usually they’d say something like, ‘this was very ambitious.’ And I never knew if it was a good thing or bad thing that it was ambitious.” Rose’s memory impacted their assessment practices that endeavored to provide specific and clear feedback on writing. Rose seemed to purposefully avoid ambiguous language in their feedback. Experiences with “not-useful” feedback informed Rose’s approach to avoiding decontextualized, impersonal feedback and instead providing hyper-personalized and contextualized feedback based on the student writer. For Keegan, feedback in a 400-level undergraduate capstone course on social issues in Appalachia was particularly memorable: “once I got the final grade on it and the feedback, my professor said that it was an excellent critique . . . I remember she told me that what I had written there was certainly worthy of the graduate-level classroom because I had expressed a desire to go to grad school, but I felt like I wasn't good enough to consider that. So that really stuck with me.” Relatedly, Scarlet shared how the feedback they received on their conclusions led to their focus on conclusion with their own students, and Camden described how their experience of the value of focused feedback on “three-to-five localized things” shaped their similar approach to focusing their feedback.

Prior educational experiences from undergraduate education were the most impactful experiences for MA/MFAs who had all recently earned their undergraduate degrees. For PhD students as well, prior experiences as undergrad shaped feedback they now give to students. Grey shared, “I just want to keep in mind what I experienced as an undergrad and then what I experienced years later as a Master’s student and keeping that in my daily approach.” Keegan traced their understanding of assessment as a conversation to “seeing more feedback on my own papers” after they transferred from a two-year to a four-year institution. Keegan felt their senior

"capstone" and "taking it through multiple drafts and having my committee readers leave comments" reinforced their understanding of "the way that I've come to see assessment." Further, GTAs' own experiences learning to write as undergraduate students shaped assumptions they made about their own students (e.g., Dryer, 2012). Graduate students do not come to programs as "blank slates" (Yancey et al., 2023), and this study reveals the impacts of early educational experiences and undergraduate educational experiences.

Third, and strikingly, GTAs' ongoing educational experiences as graduate students at UTK shaped approaches to assessment. Graduate students' own current experiences with assessment in their graduate courses, both helpful and harmful, impacted the approaches they used with their students and added to their assessment beliefs. Prior experience is a fluid concept; experience is ongoing, and GTAs are continuously having experiences that impact their teaching and assessment practices. All GTAs in this study were enrolled in graduate courses while they taught undergraduate composition courses. Their collective experiences with inferior graduate pedagogy in the ways they were taught in their own classes directly informed the way that they phrased feedback to students and worked to give timely feedback. As such, prior *and present* experience as graduate students continued to impact assessment knowledge, practice, and beliefs for graduate student instructors. While MA/MFAs tended to describe more of their undergraduate experiences, PhD students tended to share more of the current experiences as influential of their writing assessment. Scarlet described an experience they had in the Spring semester as they took three graduate courses and taught one ENGL 102 course:

> I had a professor this past semester who I did not agree with on a lot of things—I tell my students this at least once every semester, but I learned the most about my own pedagogy and my own persona from how I feel as a student from other people. I've been reminded

> ‘this is why you teach the way that you do.’ Because you don't like feeling like this from another professor. When something happened from this professor that I didn't agree with, I would use that as a teaching opportunity for my students . . . not every single thing I would talk through with my students, but I would internalize it and use it as confirmation—I like the way that I teach. I like the way that I make my students feel.

Grey described a similarly challenging experience during the Spring semester in a course that multiple GTAs, including other participants in this research study, found harmful:

> I'm going to say it because I can say it, but we had an issue in a class, and we still haven't resolved it, where our PhD faculty member copied and pasted the same feedback to everyone’s assignments with my name on another person's assignment. And we all found out . . . and this might have to go above us because you're clearly not even reading what we submit . . . [it] make[s] me feel thankful that my students can come to me . . . I tell them it's because I get some faculty members who spend weeks to getting stuff back to me, and I hate that. I want to make sure that they know that I'm not replicating the experience I'm receiving because I care about their writing and I care about their feedback. So that's definitely been a major stressor, these double standards.

In a literature course they took that semester, Grey described how the uncertainty they felt with the instructor’s lack of feedback led them to foster an environment of communication and transparency in their FYC courses:

> I'm thinking of another example where I have a final paper due for 500-level class and we haven't had any writing assignments that the professor assessed. She doesn't even read our discussion posts. I'm blindly submitting a final term paper where I've had zero written feedback from this professor . . . But again, how would it feel if I gave no feedback to

any of my students for their SSRP until I graded their final? That would be a horrible thing to experience. It's shocking that these things are so prevalent in our program.

Overall, the experiences of the GTAs in this study parallel those of the GTAs in Estrem and Reid's (2012) study, who were also "influenced more strongly by prior personal experiences and beliefs and their experiences in the classroom than by their formal pedagogy education" (p. 34). The eight participants in this research study were overall strongly influenced in their pedagogical practices by prior personal experiences, knowledge, and beliefs than most of those that occurred during their formal training. However, focusing on assessment compilates this notion. With assessment practice specifically, GTAs demonstrated more uptake of new approaches and ideas. Some GTAs' approaches to written feedback closely mirrored the experiences they had in the past, but many also took up new approaches learned from observing mentor teachers, practicing feedback in ENGL 505, or talking with peers. Equitable assessment provides a salient example given that all instructors decided to use approaches that they learned in their formal pedagogy training. Few participants had ever been enrolled in a course that used labor-based grading, so formal writing pedagogy education proved the source of equitable assessment knowledge and practices. Equitable assessment provides a case where GTAs felt invested in the practice enough to learn a new approach and apply it during their first semester teaching, which is explored further at the end of this chapter.

In summary, this study more deeply explores the role of prior experience in GTA training, finding that early educational experiences tend to most impact assessment beliefs, undergraduate educational experiences tend to impact assessment practices, and ongoing graduate-level educational experiences tend to influence assessment knowledge. GTAs' prior writing assessment literacy included prior experiences, beliefs, and knowledge as well as prior teaching

experiences and practices for those who had taught previously. It also included existing conceptions of writing, identification as a writer, and writing experiences. The use of equitable assessment unsettles the notion that *teachers teach the way they were taught* and instead suggests how writing assessment practice can give GTAs agency in their teaching. Prior experiences created pre-existing beliefs that shape whether and how GTAs apply what they learned from their training to their teaching practices or instead fell back on their own experiences as students. Xu and Brown (2016) assert that "there is a pressing need for better understanding of teachers as individuals and professionals because the effectiveness of assessment training might be offset by teachers' conceptions, emotions, needs, and *prior experiences about assessment* [emphasis added]" (p. 155). For GTAs, prior experiences as students in childhood, undergraduate, and current graduate education layer with the knowledge gained through their preparation and training to inform writing assessment literacy development.

Theory, Practice, and Experience

In writing pedagogy education, there persists a perception of a theory/practice divide in the training of graduate student instructors (Dobrin, 2005; Ebest, 2005; Estrem & Reid, 2012; Restaino, 2012). The divide is often used to explain resistance that GTAs can express during their composition pedagogy training, toward which graduate students can feel theoretical, pedagogical, and epistemological conflict (Ebest, 2005). Conceptions of resistance remain rooted in the perceived theory/practice divide, which plays out for GTAs in preparation that seems too theoretical and divorced from practical classroom teaching (Ebest, 2005; Restaino, 2012). The theory/practice binary has become a dividing line, one that graduate student instructors must assumably cross as they develop from graduate students to graduate student instructors. On one hand, GTAs are "cast as students learning a skill/trade/pedagogy or taking an introduction to a

'discipline,' and on the other hand, they are the teachers passing on a likeness of those same skills/trades/pedagogies in disciplinary knowledges to students of their own" (Dobrin, 2005, p. 28). As a result, GTAs' experiences are often framed dichotomously as either *student* or *instructor*, *novice* or *expert*, *apprentice* or *veteran,* embedded in *theory* or *practice*. As I argued in Chapter 2, these divisions are inscribed onto GTAs, intertwining the "low" status of FYC (and the "low" labor of writing assessment within it) with the "low" status of GTAs in the university (Miller, 1991). The problem with the theory/practice binary is not that it is untrue; disciplinary ideals and dispositional attitudes can impact how GTAs engage with their training (Fischer, 2005; Reed, 2020). But that myth has created a "single story" (Achibe, 2009) that flattens GTAs' experiences and contributes to the erasure of their labor. The division has perhaps limited our ability to see the complexity of the training and learning of graduate student instructors.

Based on the narratives in this research study, I make two assertions. First, GTAs' perceived resistance to theory/practice in part reflects resistance to difficult labor conditions and uneven positioning in the university (e.g., Finn, 2023; Schwaller, 2022). Second, GTAs experience the theory/practice divide more in the FYC classroom than in the composition pedagogy course. While Dobrin (2005) isolates the composition practicum as a site where the theory/practice divide is "played out, quite literally, on the bodies of new teaches and new scholars" (p. 4), the narratives left by this research study show that the discord feels even more significant in the divide between GTA preparation and the first year teaching. Rather than locating the theory/practice divide in one semester of coursework, participant voices show that a greater gap tends to occur between training and teaching—between learning and application. MA/MFAs who shared an apprenticeship year before teaching as instructors of record experienced a difficult the transition to the classroom. To explore the complexity of GTAs' first

year as instructors of record, this study locates the role of *experience* between theory and practice. This research study, in emphasizing the role of lived experience in writing assessment literacy, asks practitioners to reconsider myths and assumptions in writing pedagogy education.

Graduate student instructors in this research study learned by doing, stressing that the first year working as an instructor of record remains a time of experiential learning (Brewer, 2020; Girvan et al., 2016; Shannon et al., 1998) and experiential knowledge (e.g., Clandinin, 2013). For novice teachers, experience is hugely influential in writing assessment literacy development, including previous experiences as students and the sum of their preparation and training. The focus on experience identifies moments where instructors experienced change, growth, and evolution, showing that experience helps connect theory with practice. Particularly, GTAs' assessment knowledge seems interconnected with specific experiences, such as talking with students, conversing with peer instructors, reflecting on the ways they were assessed as students, and having formative moments in their writing pedagogy education. To illustrate, Camden's sentiment that "there's nothing that really prepares you until you do it" was shared among participants in the research study. Camden, like their fellow GTAs, did not fully realize the value of their writing pedagogy education until they began teaching and could apply what they learned to their classroom experience. The separation between *learning to teach* and *teaching* contributes to sense of anxiety and feeling like GTAs don't know what they are doing before they start teaching for the first time. As Rose's narrative revealed, the difficulties they experienced in the ENGL 505 course permeated their teaching:

> It's probably hard to teach something while the people learning aren't really doing that thing. Before, I was pretty detached from the class . . . I think that I didn't make the kinds of connections in my head between my learning and jumping forward to my doing now.

> Because I wasn't teaching very much, it feels like I didn't make the connections. Now, if I was in a class for 505 while I taught, I feel like I would get a lot more out of it. Because back then, I didn't really have a reference point for my own work. And now I'm doing my work, but I don't really remember enough reference points for previous learning. It feels like I don't remember enough from what I was doing to feel super prepared.

GTAs develop writing assessment literacy through teaching and assessment experiences. Experience accounts for the ways that novice instructors move from theory (classroom learning) to practice (classroom teaching) while also accounting for the struggle that arises in the separation between writing pedagogy education and composition instruction. Writing assessment literacy development, experienced as an ongoing process, describes the labor of the transition from composition pedagogy coursework to FYC classroom, from graduate student to graduate student instructor, from theory to practice, and from conceptions of assessment as words on a page to something material and real that circulates in the world. GTAs stand in the liminal space of experience between theory and practice; experience is the site where work and labor occur. This study locates the role of experience in the theory/practice divide, accounting for how novice instructors move between and through theory and practice. Writing pedagogy education tends to teach assessment as theory or practice, but the construct of writing assessment literacy draws attention to assessment knowledge, beliefs, and values, along with attitudes, ethics, experiences, prior and tacit knowledge, presumptions, and biases. Further, writing pedagogy education is typically separated from GTAs' teaching. Although there is often a rift between GTAs' training year and teaching year, participants in this study demonstrate that the first year as instructor of record is an extremely pivotal process of experiential learning. New graduate student instructors need continued training and support alongside their teaching.

The Impact of Writing Pedagogy Education

This research study also set out to understand the role of writing pedagogy education in GTAs' development of writing assessment literacy. The study began with a focus on the four facets of formal teacher preparation in the Department of English at UTK: teaching assistantship (as TAs in ENGL 101 and 102), tutoring and tutor training, composition pedagogy coursework, and the Composition Office's workshops and resources. This section introduces collective findings about the overall impact of these factors. The sub-sections attend to each of these (and other emergent) factors individually. Thus, attention to the phenomenon of writing assessment literacy, an under-considered facet of pedagogical development, sheds light on teacher training, learning, and the growth of knowledge, beliefs, and practices.

Although writing pedagogy education programs look distinct across institutions, the CCCC Statement on Preparing Teachers of College Writing (2015) mandates that graduate programs must provide GTAs with formal training and support, requiring "varied opportunities to cultivate and apply a theoretically informed writing pedagogy" (para. 8). All dimensions of UTK's teacher training program for MA/MFAs are mentioned in the statement as required practices, except for tutoring; the CCCC Statement (2015) later mentions "opportunities to train and work in writing centers" as "recommended" support. Although the Statement (2015) mentions "coursework . . . in writing assessment, both formative and summative," the Statement limits the need for learning about assessment to formal classroom settings instead of across a teacher preparation program. The CCCC Statement (2015) and other such works thus assume that the responsibility for learning assessment happens in the composition pedagogy classroom. However, almost all writing pedagogy education programs are multifaceted, averaging six different components (Cicchino, 2020). As Chapter 2 demonstrated, previous studies have

considered theories, practices, and implications of writing pedagogy education, but this study emphasizes writing assessment literacy development as a key component of teacher preparation.

Participants in this research study collectively identified the most impactful aspects of their formal writing pedagogy education, in order, as teaching assistantship, tutoring, composition pedagogy coursework, and the Composition Office. **Table 7** ranks these four dimensions of teacher preparation on a scale of 1 (most helpful) to 4 (least helpful) according to how participants felt each aspect influenced their writing assessment literacy development. Based on average scores, tutoring and teaching assistantship were the most helpful influences, followed by composition pedagogy coursework and trailed by Composition Office and departmental support.[12]

As the high standard deviations demonstrate, there was no universally agreed upon most-useful aspect of writing pedagogy education among the formal teacher preparation. Only two GTAs had the same rankings: Sage (MFA) and Keegan (PhD). As such, the impactfulness of writing pedagogy education is not consistently agreed upon. The variety across the scores indicates that individual GTAs had vastly different experiences with their preparation. **Figure 17** and **Figure 18** map the rankings from the table by MA/MFA and PhD.

[12] In the sample rankings, the MA/MFA students shared the four aspects of training provided by the Department of English at UTK: tutoring and tutor training, teaching assistantship, composition pedagogy coursework, and the Composition Office. The PhD students shared the same Composition Office workshops at resources at UTK, but received the other trainings from their prior institutions.

Table 7: Ranking of teacher preparation for writing assessment literacy development

Participant	Most useful aspect of formal WPE			
	Tutoring	Teaching Assistantship	Composition Pedagogy Course	Composition Office
Camden	3	1	2	4
Grey	2		1	3
Keegan	2	1	3	4
Lainey	1	2	3	4
Rose	3	4	2	1
Sage	2	1	3	4
Scarlet	2	1	4	3
Theresa	1	4	3	2
M	2	2	2.6	3.125
SD	0.707	1.309	0.857	1.053
CV	0.3535	0.6545	0.4285	0.33696
% of first rankings	37.5%	37.5%	12.5%	12.5%

Note. M = sample mean; *SD* = standard deviation; *CV* = coefficient of variation.

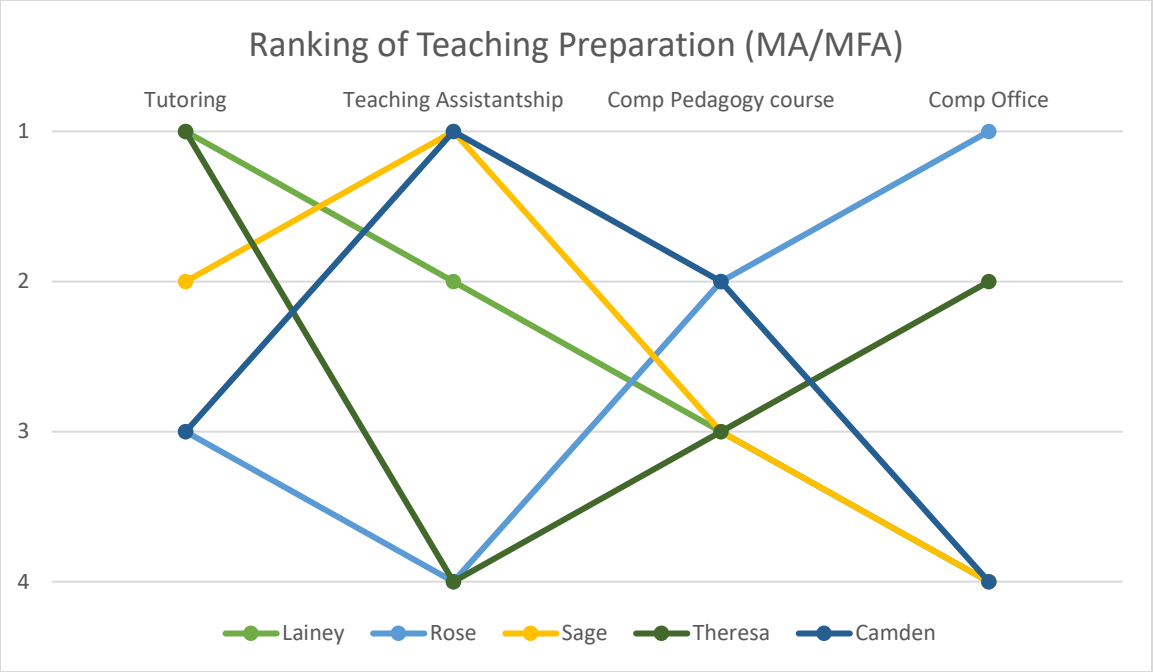


Figure 17. Ranking of formal teaching preparation for MA/MFA students.

Note. The rankings of teacher preparation for MA/MFA participants were as follows.
Lainey: tutoring, teaching assistantship, composition pedagogy course, Composition Office.
Rose: Composition Office, composition pedagogy course, tutoring, teaching assistantship.
Sage: teaching assistantship, tutoring, composition pedagogy course, Composition Office.
Theresa: tutoring, Composition Office, composition pedagogy course, teaching assistantship.
Camden: teaching assistantship, composition pedagogy course, tutoring, Composition Office.

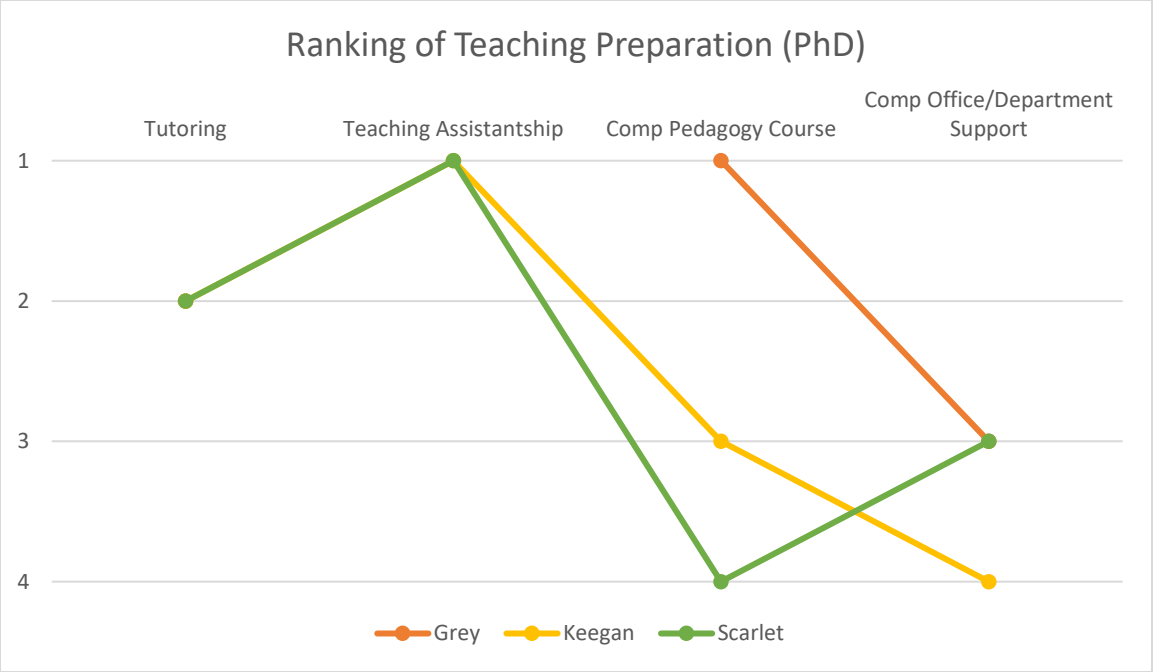


Figure 18. Ranking of formal teaching preparation for PhD students.

Note. The rankings of teacher preparation for PhD participants were as follows.
Grey: Composition pedagogy course, tutoring, Composition Office. (Since Grey did not have a teaching assistantship, it is not ranked on the figure.)
Keegan: Teaching assistantship, tutoring, composition pedagogy course, Composition Office.
Scarlet: Teaching assistantship, tutoring, Composition Office, composition pedagogy course.

These visualizations affirm that the teaching and assessment practices of graduate student instructors benefit most from tutoring experience (Clark, 1988; Ianetta et al., 2007; Mick, 1999; Raines, 1994; Worden-Chambers & Dayton, 2021) and teaching assistantship (Ebest, 2005; Lannin & Townsend, 2020). As Hughes and colleagues (2010) found, tutor education and tutoring experience "help to shape and sometimes transform [tutors] personally, educationally, and professionally" (p. 13); in particular, "the influence of peer tutoring on those tutor alumni who become teachers is profound" (p. 31). Teaching assistantship, the most long-standing component in teacher preparation, often provides GTAs with their first classroom experiences (Reid & Estrem, 2012). Research has found that "serving as a teaching assistant" can "provide a deeper experience with discipline-based writing" for novice instructors (Lannin & Townsend, 2020, p. 97). Teaching assistantship may have been underreported in Cicchino's (2020) study, which found that "the most popular components" of writing pedagogy education across 38 programs "were observation, workshop, coursework, and resources" (p. 97). Since *observation* is not defined in the study, it is difficult to ascertain what respondents specifically meant in this category. However, Cicchino (2020) noted how many programs mentioned "faculty mentorship" (66%) and "apprenticeships/shadowing" (26%) (p. 94), indicating that most writing pedagogy education programs believe that teaching assistantship, apprenticeship, and mentorship provide needed training and support to new graduate student instructors.

This data confirms that writing pedagogy education impacts GTAs' writing assessment literacy development; however, the data also tells a complex story, one in which GTAs engage with their training in highly variable ways. For each element of writing pedagogy education, graduate students applied their knowledge and skills gained from these experiences in highly inconstant ways. GTAs participate in, learn from, and transfer what they learn from their writing

pedagogy education unevenly, and the extent to which they remember and recall the usefulness of their preparation is highly contingent; these complexities are explored below.

Conditions that Impact Writing Assessment Literacy Development

The following sub-sections explore in detail the conditions that impact writing assessment literacy development. Based on the research synthesized in the literature review, I define *conditions* as multifaceted contexts that impact writing assessment literacy, such as formal and informal preparation, individual dispositions, and disciplinary and programmatic structures. Conditions include both positive and negative factors in that some conditions bolster writing assessment literacy development, while others may diminish it.

I begin with the four conditions of formal writing pedagogy education introduced in this chapter and presented in order of perceived impactfulness: teaching assistantship, tutoring, composition pedagogy coursework, and the Composition Office. Because GTAs did not identify one universally helpful type of preparation, I emphasize the role of prior knowledge and experiences in writing assessment literacy development. Then, I introduce four conditions that emerged from participants' stories: peer influence, positionality, emotional work, and labor conditions. These factors were highly influential during GTAs' first year as instructors of record. While peer support had a positive impact on writing assessment literacy development, conditions related to positionality, emotional work, and labor concerns impacted writing assessment development in ambiguous ways. As this chapter will continue to show, for these graduate student instructors, the biggest influences on their writing assessment literacy development were peer influence, teaching experience, and prior knowledge/experience from their own educational backgrounds. Participants found the peer conversations and prior knowledge and experiences more useful than their formal preparation (Reed, 2020; Reid & Estrem, 2012). I further explore

the local, departmental, disciplinary, and institutional conditions that participants reported influencing their assessment. Altogether, the experiences of graduate student instructors explored in the following sections position writing assessment literacy development as literacy labor into which GTAs invest tremendous work, effort, and time.

Teaching Assistantship & Mentorship

Half of the GTAs in this study—Camden, Sage, Scarlet, and Keegan—ranked the formal mentorship they received as teaching assistants (TAs) as the most significant influence on their writing assessment literacy development. Camden and Sage benefitted greatly from their positive teaching assistantship experiences in English 101 and 102; the other three MA/FAs, Theresa, Rose, and Lainey, each had one good and one bad experience, and the bad experiences affected them quite intensely. Among the PhD students, Scarlet and Keegan served as TAs during their MA programs at different institutions, while Grey did not have prior TA experience.

Apprenticeship via teaching assistantship has long been conceived as essential to the preparation of composition teachers (Marincovich et al., 1998; Pytlik & Liggett, 2001). The role of the teaching assistant—what historically began as behind-the-scenes essay grading—has generally evolved into a more supportive process in which first-year MA/MFAs pair with a more experienced graduate student or lecturer to observe and collaborate in their classes. As the CCCC Statement on Preparing Teachers of College Writing (2015) states:

> Teaching assistantships provide a critical opportunity for graduate students to gain needed experience in the classroom, particularly in the application of practices and content covered in composition and rhetorical pedagogy and theory courses. Such experiences may include developing course curricula, assignments, and lesson plans and cultivating a pedagogical persona. (para. 12)

The Composition Office's Mentor/Mentee guidelines (2024) state that teaching assistants should attend and participate in all class sessions, assist with lesson planning, teach some lessons, grade and provide written feedback on work, conference with students, and meet regularly with the mentor teacher throughout the semester. These responsibilities should be negotiated between the mentor and mentee. Camden reported that their two mentors greatly shaped their approaches to teaching and assessment along with the preparation they received in English 505. Sage attributed their TA experiences, closely followed by their tutoring experiences, as the reason they "didn't feel utterly unprepared" to teach. The TA experiences "were the highlights" to Sage, who said, "I learned from them more than I ever learned from any of the workshops or the pedagogy classes. It's just seeing that in real life in action." Especially for MA/MFA GTAs who enter the program without prior teaching or tutoring experience, a teaching assistantship offers an opportunity to practice writing assessment with real stakes before they become instructors of record.

Three MA/MFA students in this study had the shared experience of one good semester and one bad semester as teaching assistants. This pattern mirrors the anecdotal experiences whispered around the English Department in the 2023–2024 academic year, when the Composition Office had only informal guidelines for mentors and mentees to follow rather than formal requirements. Poor "mentorship relationships" have been identified as a significant source of stress for GTAs (Grady et al., 2014, p. 5). The lack of formal guidelines meant that GTAs had highly disparate and uneven experiences across semesters and thus entered their first year teaching with uneven preparation. As the narratives revealed in Chapter 4, Lainey and Rose had particularly negative experiences that not only left them unprepared but damaged their self-image. Lainey felt that the second semester mentor in ENGL 102 was a good experience overall, but the first semester in ENGL 101 was a bad experience and a course in which the students

seemed unmotivated and many failed. Grading during the teaching assistantship did not prepare Lainey to assess writing on their own.

Although the lack of opportunity to grade in the Spring reflects a shared decision between Lainey and their mentor, the mentor did not provide encouragement, support, or purposeful learning experiences for Lainey. Lainey reflected on the mentorship experiences and how those experiences could have been improved, feeling that "strengthening their prep" would have led to more consistent and supportive experiences. Lainey only met with their 101 mentor once before the semester began and never again:

> It was really disappointing because I wanted to know more about not just the writing assessment but why she teaches that way. What was behind it all? I know some people this year have really excellent mentors who meet with them twice a week and are prepping the classes with them, which it depends on their availability. I don't know what the mentor system looks like, but maybe not giving third-year PhDs mentees if they're busy with the Comps—that I think definitely had something to do with it.

Participants expressed a desire for more opportunities to shadow or observed experienced instructors, especially instructors who take different approaches than their assigned mentor instructors. Rose had disparate experiences with mentorship:

> In English 101 . . . the grading was the hard part because it's not the same kind of grading that I'm going to do, and it was so new to me. I was trying to follow the rubric, but I kept having to e-mail her. 'This does not seem like a fair grade. They are basically failing. But I'm trying to follow the rubric, but I don't feel like this is a failing paper.' She'd go in and fix it, and but I learned a lot about feedback because I gave so much feedback in that class . . . that taught me the value of giving feedback, but it also taught me that I wanted

> to find a way that worked for me with assessment. Because I think that she was very fair and generous and helped her students learn a lot. But my brain just doesn't work very well with rubrics . . . I'm so glad I had that experience because my 102 experience was just wild. It was not very good. I don't think that the instructor was really teaching 102. And their assignment sheets were actually the ones that the Writing Center was always sending out like, 'just be warned, people are being asked to do this weird thing.'

In Estrem and Reid's (2012) construction of writing pedagogy education as an effort that "encompasses the ongoing education, mentoring, and support of new college-level writing instructors" (p. 223), teaching assistantship often serves the "mentorship" component primarily, followed closely by "education." The teaching assistantship is a key site for new instructors to gain "academic content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and knowledge about how students learn" (Ronkowski, 1998, p. 44). As teaching assistants, GTAs can effectively move between their student and instructor roles and learn how to think and act like writing instructors without the added labor and responsibility of being an instructor of record. Without consistent, regulated guidelines, however, TAs at UTK felt more like assistant teachers than mentees. Good mentorship—collaborative, supportive, reflective, and in close contact—facilitated the development of writing assessment literacy, but ineffective mentorship left GTAs with more questions than answers, stalled in their development. GTAs need mentorship that supports their status as learners (Ebest, 2005; Lambrecht, 2023; Stenberg, 2002), respects them as colleagues (Bly, 2000), and supports professional development (Latterell, 1996b).

Tutoring & Tutor Training

All eight GTAs in this study tutored before they became instructors of record, affirming the well-established dictum in writing pedagogy education that tutoring experience benefits new

composition instructors (Adams et al., 1987; Clark, 1988; Coulbrooke, 1999; Ianetta et al., 2007; Worden-Chambers & Dayton, 2021). The MA/MFA students in this study experienced the same year of tutoring and tutor training in the JAHWC at UTK, while Keegan, Scarlet, and Grey tutored for one year during their MA programs at other institutions. While research has established the benefits of tutor training for graduate student instructors' pedagogical development (King et al., 1997; Van Dyke, 1997) and identity development (Clem, 2022; Lugg, 2023; Nicolas, 2008), prior research has overlooked its impact on writing assessment literacy.

In this study, Lainey (MFA) and Theresa (MA) ranked their tutoring experiences as the most helpful influence on their writing assessment literacy development, while Sage, along with the three PhD students, ranked tutoring as the second-most impactful experience on their writing assessment. Tutoring at UTK taught Sage "how to read students' writing," which helped with conferencing and providing feedback to individual students. Theresa felt that their tutoring greatly shaped the ways they provided praise to students and their writing, and both Theresa and Camden attributed tutoring and the FYC workshops to offering their "practice giving feedback." Camden reported, "I think because of tutoring and tutor training, I was more intentional about providing specific examples in their writing." Lainey, along with Camden and Rose, brought up Bean's Hierarchy and the emphasis on "global concerns" as an approach that directly impacted their feedback practices. Lainey felt that their experience with tutoring was "really good:"

> I learned so much about the curriculum that I would not have been able to understand had I not been able to see the work in-process and in-progress and help the students understand things. I learned a lot through talking through examples with a lot of students, which was super helpful. I learned a lot about like how to prioritize things in writing, and I think that helped my writing for my class because I started to see the patterns that I was

helping students correct in their work or helping them revising their work. It's helpful to have that other perspective and to see that most people are still learning about writing.

Additionally, verbal feedback practices evidenced the impact of tutoring on approaches to assessment. GTAs' positive recollections reinforce the meaningful connection between tutoring and teaching, one that Lugg (2023) describes as "co-informing" (p. 74) and Raines (1994) describes as a "dialectical" relationship (p. 150). Tutoring fostered conditions for GTAs to practice providing individualized feedback with students, a necessary skill for FYC instructors.

Yet, the MA/MFA participants in this study also shared some negative perceptions. Mainly, the GTAs found tutoring and its practical applications far more useful than tutor training and its theoretical and pedagogical applications once they entered the composition classroom. Some GTAs reported learning more from their experiences tutoring rather than the time they spent in training. Lainey reported that "tutoring was the most useful part of learning how to assess and how to give feedback on writing assignments," sharing in the next breath, "the tutor training wasn't always the most useful." The training felt like "a lot of busy work" (Lainey). These kinds of comments reveal that GTAs experienced some disciplinary tensions around the use of tutoring as a "prerequisite" for teaching (Lugg, 2023, p. 80; see also Nicolas, 2005). As Lugg (2023) recognizes, "making writing center tutoring a requirement for TAs who will go on to teach composition casts the writing center as training wheels for the more significant work of teaching" (Lugg, 2023, p. 80). This may explain some of the GTAs' discontent around tutor training; although tutor training is part of their broader pedagogical training, some GTAs seemed to perceive it as job training with limited use beyond the center.

For instance, Rose felt that "I couldn't get the hang of it because the turnaround was just so fast. I could never get my bearings." These struggles persisted and shadowed Rose's tutoring

experiences. However, looking back, Rose could identify several specific ways that tutoring usefully informed their practice, such as learning how to engage "one-on-one" with students and "show[ing] them how to use the textbook." Ultimately, Lainey felt like "I'm really glad that I got that experience before teaching." Lainey reflected, "I know that people have found their mentorships and most useful to them, way more useful than the tutoring, but I think I just got two mentors that were really, really busy and overwhelmed and weren't able to like mentor me as closely as maybe I would have liked." Although GTAs' writing center experiences benefitted their teaching approaches, they often needed purposeful reflection to realize its impact. GTAs generally perceived tutoring, rather than tutor training, as more impactful for their writing assessment literacy development.

Composition Pedagogy Coursework

All GTAs in this study took a course in composition pedagogy as part of their training to teach FYC courses. The MA/MFA participants enrolled in the same ENGL 505 course, while PhD participants took at least one composition pedagogy course at their prior institutions. The CCCC Statement on Preparing Teachers of College Writing (2015) asserts that such coursework pays an essential role in training because if offers a key place where GTAs study composition theory and pedagogy (Ebest, 1999; Dobrin, 2005; Farris, 1996; Fischer, 2000; Latterell, 1996b; Pytlik & Liggett, 2001; Stancliff & Goggin, 2007; Stenberg, 2002). As Dobrin (2005) explains, "the 'practicum' often than not serves as an introduction to composition theory, to research methodologies, to pedagogical theory, to histories of composition studies as a discipline, and to larger disciplinary questions about writing, not just to teaching writing per se" (p. 2). While "composition theory" and "pedagogical theory" might subsume writing assessment theory and practice, assessment seems notably absent from this and many other descriptions of composition

pedagogy coursework. Its absence is indicative of the role of composition pedagogy coursework in writing assessment literacy development. In connection to their writing assessment literacy development, the graduate student instructors in this research study had disparate feelings about their composition pedagogy coursework and therefore had variable engagement with the composition theories and practices it promoted. In terms of its usefulness for the development of writing assessment literacy, Grey ranked composition pedagogy coursework as the most useful preparation, while Camden and Rose ranked their coursework second. The remaining GTAs felt highly ambivalent about their experiences, generating tensions and confusions that remained even after they had taught for one year.

GTAs reported several benefits from composition pedagogy coursework similar in kind to those articulated by Latterell (1996b), who suggested that composition pedagogy courses "imbue GTAs with practical teaching strategies, pedagogical texts, and most of all, a language for talking about teaching" (p. 15, qtd in Cicchino, 2020, p. 100). The PhD GTAs in this study took composition pedagogy classes as part of their training before coming to UTK. Grey participated in a "Topics in Composition" course with their institution's Director of Composition, which covered topics such as "antiracist pedagogy" and "pedagogy for the pandemic." They also had a "Methods of Teaching ESL" independent study that discussed pedagogy and assessment, and Grey took a few other graduate courses that incorporated "something related to pedagogy in the course for our benefit." Perhaps because Grey did not have teaching assistantship experience, Grey found the coursework most useful for informing their approach to teaching FYC. "It was the best experience I could have had as someone who worked full-time. They knew what we wanted to do, and they said, 'we'll do whatever it takes to help you get there.'"

Keegan, as a first-year MA student, took a course at their previous institution titled English 640: Composition Pedagogy. “The idea is to train you to teach composition. Sounds great in theory, doesn’t really train you to do everything.” Keegan remembered having “a lot of discussions about assessment” and “equitable assessment” in the class, including practice analyzing and designing “rubrics.” “Our discussion of assessment really revolved around rubrics,” they shared. Rather than their composition pedagogy course, Keegan reported that the graduate courses they took at UTK while they simultaneously taught informed their teaching; the ENGL 682: Research Methods in Rhetoric, Writing, and Linguistics course prepared them to teach the qualitative research project in ENGL 102, while the ENGL 575: Teaching Second Language Writers course assisted in their preparation for teaching multilingual students in ENGL 102/132. The usefulness of the Research Methods course aligns with this study’s finding that GTAs’ current experiences as graduate students—including coursework not explicitly taken for teaching preparation—can provide pedagogical training.

Scarlet took a composition pedagogy course as a first-year MA student elsewhere that was notably unhelpful, as recounted in their narrative in Chapter 4. The course suffered from a distracted instructor, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Spring 2020, and a lack of support that left their feeling “thrown to the wind” before teaching. However, Scarlet also participated in a composition practicum course *during* their first semester teaching as a graduate student, which they found notably helpful. When Scarlet and their small cohort of 3–4 fellow GTAs began teaching for the first time, Scarlet was enrolled in a one-credit “supervised teaching” course where the GTAs met regularly to “talk through any issues we were having” and listen to speakers the instructor brought in “to address specific situations.” “Having that one-on-one, I feel like that was pretty helpful in terms of our training and then just getting experience teaching every class

every semester," Scarlet shared. Scarlet was the only instructor in the study to take a practicum course *while* teaching for the first time specifically designed to help novice instructors reflect on their experiences, troubleshoot, and discuss teaching with fellow GTAs.

MA/MFAs who took UTK's English 505: Teaching First-Year Composition course highlighted the sense of community they gained. Sage noted, "the greatest part about 505 was talking to other people who teach." Graduate students felt what Rose called "camaraderie between the other students" and the instructor. In the class, GTAs developed their teaching philosophies and better understood their own conceptions of writing. Most of the benefits they described focused on the teaching approaches and activities they learned in the course to align with the FYC curriculum rather than assessment theories or practices, though some GTAs could identify specific facets of assessment that they learned in the class. Camden felt that "505 really stressed the importance of giving relevant feedback," mirroring their efforts to provide feedback in a timely manner. Sage specifically learned the "feedback sandwich" approach for couching constructive criticism within positive feedback while enrolled in ENGL 505.

Participants pointed to two class sessions in ENGL 505 that developed their assessment literacy: one where they practiced giving feedback on a student draft and one where they practiced developing rubrics. The Fall 2023 ENGL 505 syllabus lists these lessons on Monday, April 24 as "Responding to Student Writing" and Monday, May 1 as "Developing Assessment Materials." Rose remembered one class session "when we designed our own assessment materials" that they used in the FYC classroom. Sage traced the decision to use labor-based grading to ENGL 505. Other than these few examples, the course did not heavily figure into GTAs' assessment practices. In their words, participants found teaching assistantship and tutoring generally more useful for the development of writing assessment literacy.

Graduate student instructors experienced some ambivalence and negative perceptions of the course perhaps rooted in their developmental experiences reflected in the disjunction between theory and practice. Restaino (2012) wrote that first semester GTAs "have little room for thinking critically about existing scholarship and little time and space for thoughtful, pedagogical decision making" and, instead, "desire . . . survival tools for [their] day-to-day classroom existence" (p. 26) (qtd in Cicchino, 2020, p. 98). New GTAs can feel "frustrated" by the theory presented in their coursework and training (Obermark et al., 2015, p. 39). For first-year MA/MFAs at UTK, those feelings of needing to survive seemed present in their first year, too; as Sage shared, most of the aspects of ENGL 505 felt like "busy work," and "it was a lot" of work to manage "doing assignments of two semesters every single week" while taking other courses. Nyquist and Sprague (1998) articulate that new GTAs are in "survival" mode, so they don't often have capacity to attend to theory (p. 66). Sprague and Nyquist (1991) introduced a three-stage model of TA development: senior learner, colleague-in-training, and junior colleague. MA/MFAs at UTK, as they experience the apprenticeship year, are still learners, with their classroom experiences as students (not teachers) to fall back on. GTAs' priorities shift during this process, and these shifting priorities play out with assessment, in which instructors felt more concerned about the day-to-day of assessment rather than larger theories.

Camden shared that, in English 505, "I think it was really helpful to talk about and consider different ways that grading assessment is useful," but "I really don't know if we actually ever practiced what that would look like." The lack of practice with assessment was noted in connection to the emphasis on day-to-day teaching activities, as Camden added, "overall, I would say I feel very prepared to make a syllabus and write a lesson plan. I just don't really know if I'm prepared to be an engaging teacher. Maybe that's something that I will learn

when I get there." Camden also felt that "it would have been nice to learn a little bit more about inclusive teaching or teaching for diverse communities" and "more guided information about how to use Canvas." As the course title indicates, a key goal centers around teaching the FYC curriculum to new instructors; graduate student instructors must learn it in order to teach it to their students. Rose felt that ENGL 505 "didn't help prepare very much for 101, but it felt like I had more prepared for 102 after that class."

Lainey, who ranked ENGL 505 as the third most useful influence on their writing assessment development, reflected on both positive and negative aspects of the course. They reported that the course was most helpful for developing teacher identity; "I think I resonated with 'facilitator.'" Lainey connected this concept to their mentorship experiences in ENGL 102, in which they observed the mentor use "a lot of games and activities." ENGL 505 also provided models that they used to create rubrics for their classes. However, in terms of writing assessment specifically "I don't think it impacted my assessment very much at all. We did not really like talk enough about assessment in 505." Lainey remembered, "we focused way more on getting students to write every day in class and we did some of the projects for like 102 just so that we could see what they looked like." In the first interview, Lainey seemed to remember several benefits from the class; they described practicing assessment "on sample writing" and "we did the projects ourselves" and "two people got to review it and respond with any feedback they had, which was really cool." Lainey took away that "some people had some amazing ideas that I'm going to use and people told me that I had some interesting ideas" as well. Additionally, they recalled theoretical and value-laden conversations about the purposes of writing assessment:

> Technically, these are the things we're looking for FYC students to know how to do. But do you think you're going to grade grammar? If you're going to grade something,

> shouldn't you be teaching [them] how to do it? You can't just expect all of them to have had the same education as you. So how are you going to do that? And I was like, that's really interesting. I don't think I can grade grammar then because I don't want to teach grammar . . . It was in a very helpful class just being able to talk through all of those things and questions that I've never thought about.

However, looking back from their stance as an instructor of record at the end of the Spring semester, Lainey felt critically that:

> I really think 505 misses an opportunity to have us engage with syllabus making or planning. I think doing any of the prep work in that class would have been helpful for me to then teach without feeling overwhelmed by the prep work, which I feel like is a missed opportunity . . . I said that in my feedback last year when I took it and the feedback has not been implemented. I think that it would be way more useful for 505ers' time to not do example projects and rather spend more time on planning to teach things.

While Lainey seemed to have a better recall of ENGL 505 in August, three months after the course had ended, other GTAs had better recall of specifically useful aspects of English 505 *after* they had started teaching. This finding reflects the value of time and experience in helping GTAs see the value in their coursework and apply it to their teaching (e.g., Driscoll, 2013). Between the first interview (before the semester began) and during the second and third interviews (after GTAs had been teaching), GTAs often remembered more specific skills or approaches they learned from English 505. Theresa, for example, did not have notable experiences to share from ENGL 505 in the first interview. In the second interview, however, they pointed specifically to a reflective journal activity as a practice gained through their own coursework. Rose also did not seem to find much value in ENGL 505 until after they had started

teaching, when they acknowledged the assessment experience gained in the course. Similar to fellow MA/MFAs who took the course, the utility of ENGL 505 centered around composition pedagogy and day-to-day teaching practice. As Rose reflected in the second interview,

> I think that the most helpful aspects of 505 was that we did do a few things like planning a module and planning a few lesson plans. I think that if that class had contained more of those really hands-on experiences, guidelines, feedback, I think that could have been super, super handy just to do more of the same thing over and over again instead of trying to fit in a lot of different things. I feel like the module planning, the lesson planning, does make you consider all the other small moving parts. But I do think that those are things that take a lot more time and practice . . . It feels like with the 505 class, it feels like we tried to fit in too much. And at the same time, I still had good takeaways from it and my takeaways might not be the same as anyone else's, so maybe you have to try to fit in a lot.

GTAs need purposeful reflection to cement the value of the composition pedagogy course (Driscoll, 2013; Nyquist & Sprague, 1998; Reed & Williams, 2023; Reid, 2009; Wisniewski, 2018). Reid (2009) advises that composition pedagogy courses need "writing assignments that are overtly, deliberately *difficult, exploratory*, and *reflective*" (p. 198). Reflection does begin in the composition pedagogy classroom, but it should not *end* there. As Reid and Estrem (2012) have cautioned, "beyond the controlled spaces of the pedagogy course, reflection may disappear if it does not become a familiar practice, one that teachers deem valuable" (p. 61). Prior research has identified that new TAs seem to value the "'practical' elements of the pedagogy courses immediately valuable in building their teaching skills" (Reid & Estrem, 2012, p. 56) more so than theoretical elements (Fischer, 2005; Guerra & Bawarshi, 2005).

The composition pedagogy course marks a long-contested site in writing pedagogy education, one in which GTAs' challenges with composition pedagogy have been well-documented (e.g., Farris, 1997; Ebest, 2004; Rankin, 1997). Yet, such courses remain a cornerstone of training composition instructors. Cicchino's (2020) study found that coursework was among the most common component of writing pedagogy education programs, with respondents connecting it to "pedagogy, classroom practices, composition theory, and rhetorical theory" (p. 93). As has been articulated, "just as we have long known that no one writing course can inoculate college writers forever, no "one-shot" approach to pedagogy instruction (the TA seminar, for example) can be expected to succeed in dramatically altering students' root practices" (Reid & Estrem, 2012, p. 34). Pedagogy coursework can impact novice GTAs' knowledge and beliefs about learning (Lee, 2017) and GTAs' developing pedagogical approaches and teacher identities (e.g., Bishop, 1990). However, if GTAs feel confused or overwhelmed with theory, they may not gain practical benefits. Perhaps "too many TAs exit their pedagogy seminar without fully developing an understanding of their writing or their teaching" (Ebest, 2005, p. 5); it is only when GTAs begin to teach that they encounter the exigence to do so.

The Composition Office: Departmental Support & Training

While teaching assistantship, tutoring, and composition pedagogy coursework in UTK's writing pedagogy education all ended after MA/MFA students' first year, the Composition Office provided a throughline that connects year one with year two. The Composition Office and its network of support and resources offers the only continued training for second-year MA/MFAs and the primary mode of training for PhDs in the first year and beyond. Composition scholars have expressed concern that most teacher preparation ends after one year (Michael, 2005; Obermark et al., 2015; Yancey, 2002). In the traditional view of writing pedagogy education,

GTAs have completed their training when they enter the classroom for the first time and, arguably, need support *the most*. Postareff et al.'s (2008) study of faculty at the University of Helsinki also emphasized how ongoing pedagogical training significantly influences teaching approaches as those approaches change and develop over time. UTK's Composition Office provides writing pedagogy education in the form of August Workshops (two weeks of unpaid summer workshops), Winter Workshops (one week of unpaid winter break workshops), and the FYC Canvas site, which houses an abundance of teaching and assessment resources, templates, and information. The Composition Office (more accurately, the graduate student who serves as the AD) creates and disseminates all Canvas course shells, syllabi templates, course calendars, assignment sheets, and scaffolded activities. In the year that the research study took place (and assumably most years prior), the Composition Office bears the responsibility of practically all the Department's ongoing teacher training for GTAs.

Three of the five MA/MFAs and all three PhDs ranked the Composition Office's support as the least useful aspect of their preparation to assess writing. Grey reported that "what I learned is definitely curriculum related" about ENGL 101 and 102 as well as "mechanics," a sentiment that reflects that PhDs perhaps felt that the Composition Office served a more instrumental or supervisory role rather than providing assessment training. This presents a conundrum because the Composition Office is the main avenue for support for incoming PhDs, who begin teaching as instructors of record immediately. For example, Scarlet said of the August Workshops, "sometimes with all the information, it could be a little bit overwhelming. But I think it was enough to where I felt like I knew what was expected of me and what the curriculum expected."

In their second interview, Keegan expressed, "if I'm being honest, despite all the workshops, I still felt really unprepared" at the start of the Fall 2023 semester. In the third

interview, however, Keegan articulated more specifically one lesson they reported learning from both the Composition Office's workshops and their prior tutoring experience: the need to "respect your own time" when providing feedback on student work:

> Go easy on the student because we know from research that more comments and more feedback doesn't necessarily translate to a better paper. In some cases, it can just translate to the student opens it, sees all these comments, is like, 'hell no,' and then just doesn't do anything to address the concerns or try to improve the paper.

Although many participants referenced the equitable assessment workshops, materials, and examples as useful, the Composition Office was consistently ranked as least impactful on writing assessment literacy development. Perhaps participants felt that their assessment approaches were more informed by the hands-on practice, semester-long course, and year-long tutoring experience rather than the workshops. After all, by the time GTAs participate in August Workshops, they are mere weeks away from stepping into the classroom as first-time instructors of record at UTK.

Notably, the Composition Office bears responsibility for a ubiquitous aspect of writing pedagogy education—the summer workshop that serves as a crash course orientation to the course and the university (e.g., Anglesey, 2023; Latterell, 1996b; Schwaller & Miller-Cochran, 2020). These orientations are often "too focused on survivalist methods for novice teachers" (Edwards & Lovas, 2023, p. 162)—how to use Canvas, how to avoid burnout, how to make a syllabus. The overemphasis on "policies, practices, and procedures" seems to "function more as a stopgap to maintain the structural integrity of first-year writing courses and programs and, while such an aim is important from a university and programmatic level, it does little to serve the TAs whose institutional identities are situated on unstable ground" (Anglesey, 2023, p. 169). However, some specific workshop sessions materialized in participants' stories of their learning

and development, and those details seemed to concretize over time. Theresa was better able to recall the influence of August Workshops after teaching for one semester compared to before they taught in the Fall. Theresa mentioned specific useful ideas they learned from the workshops like "the emphasis in August Workshops on doing different types of feedback so you don't get burned out on just written feedback" and "the emphasis on not catching every single thing in a paper or not commenting on every single thing because that's just not feasible."

Relatedly, Camden reported that "the antiracist pedagogy workshop was my favorite one that I went to." That was helpful because "we didn't really talk about it a lot in my mentorships or my 505." Throughout their training, Camden would have liked more preparation to do "more antiracist and inclusionary teaching practices." Yet, in the second interview, Camden felt that "in terms of practical skills, I didn't' take as many away from the August Workshops as some of the other training opportunities that we had." Camden, reflecting on the August Workshops they attended as a first-year MA student, reported, "I feel like it was such an information overload last fall that I wrote all these things down and I couldn't even tell you what it was that we talked about." They reflected that many of their difficulties engaging with August Workshops stemmed from their unfamiliarity with the department and university community:

> I think some of the information that they were giving and some of the information that we had at the workshops, I was like, I don't understand any of this. You haven't met the community at UT yet, you don't really know what's going on, I think this year is gonna make a lot more sense . . . I think that honestly, I won't know until we have done it.

Although the Composition Office often ranked behind other dimensions of teacher training, it doesn't mean that the Composition Office was a poor support system. GTAs still identified ways that August Workshops were extremely helpful. Learning about the FYC

curriculum is an important aspect of the Composition Office's workshops, especially for PhDs who are being exposed to the program for the first time. Grey explained:

> I feel like the August workshop said so much information that it's hard to pinpoint one or two things. I think one thing I took away most was the structure of the curriculum. And so knowing how all the assignments build off each other, I didn't really know that until the August Workshops until I was took a deep dive into the curriculum . . . understanding the curriculum is kind of influenced how I would give feedback.

Keegan and Scarlet both reported that August Workshops offered the first exposure to a "labor-based approach" to assessment. The Workshops introduced them to the community of equitable assessment at UTK. Keegan felt the "avoiding burnout workshop" was most useful. For MA/MFAs, Rose most enjoyed the "in-person panel with 101 and 102 teachers sharing their tips." Rose identified the virtual workshops as a challenge; "I think there was probably really good material covered in the August Workshops, but because they were over Zoom, I really didn't pay very much attention," so they preferred the few in-person sessions." Some GTAs found the FYC Canvas site difficult to navigate. Rose shared that, "for some reason, I forgot for most of the semester" about the sample modules in the template "and I only fell back on those once or twice. And every time I did, my teaching was so much better and it really, really helped."

All GTAs in the study used the Canvas course shells for English 101 and English 102 as well as the Composition Office's course calendar template, syllabus template, and shared assignment sheets. While instructors are encouraged to personalize these materials, the Composition Office provided the material resources that these new instructors needed to teach for the first time at UTK. On the FYC Canvas site, "most of it was extremely helpful in organizing my class and then making sure that the activities that we were doing was like directly

applicable to what they were learning," explained Lainey. Further, all GTAs in the study used labor-based assessment practices with the support of the Composition Office. GTAs adapted assessment materials, template language, policies, peer review resources, and sample rubrics into their own courses. For example, most of the instructors who use labor-based assessment include a syllabus statement originally written by Megan Von Bergen.

During my time as AD of FYC, I created a Canvas Module titled "Equitable Assessment & Ungrading" populated with ungrading materials used by experienced instructors and project assistants from the Equitable Assessment pilot program. Resources included sample projects, handouts, and teaching materials. As Lainey expressed, August Workshops and the FYC Canvas site provided the locations "where I found most of my inspiration for how I grade." Thus, the Composition Office sponsored the assessment of GTAs, who felt empowered, supported, and permitted to use alternative assessment methods in their courses without fear of programmatic backlash. As Lainey reflected, "I love that we have the ability to grade how we think it's best to grade. And I'm really glad that I'm not being forced to do it one way or the other and that I'm able to find a way that works for me."

In addition to August Workshops before the Fall semester and Winter Workshops before the Spring semester, the Composition Office provides continued support for instructors through syllabus review, workshops, resources, and administrative support to lend an ear, problem-solve, or intervene in challenges. As AD, I sent regular emails to the ENGGRAD email list with supplementary readings, activities, and additional resources for GTAs to incorporate into their teaching. Several GTAs mentioned finding these emails useful. "I referred to the links you provided a lot. Like, almost weekly through the semester." The AD primarily supports GTAs, while the Associate Director and Director primarily support lecturers and more experienced

instructors. Lainey felt, “I think just knowing that your team would be available for an email or for a Zoom or something if I’m panicking or if I had a question about how to approach something with regards to assessment or just FYC in general. I feel like that that would help me.” Lainey received additional support in the Spring semester because they taught the 101 pilot and attended training sessions and individual meetings to plan for it. GTAs often did see the Composition Office as part of building community for writing instructors. Grey reported that, overall, “the collegial experience among the Comp Office and all the other FYC instructors helped me be prepared.”

Only one MA student, Rose, reported that the Composition Office had the most influence on their development of writing assessment literacy. When I asked Rose in the second interview which aspect of their preparation they felt “had the most impact on your development and on your writing assessment practice,” they confidently responded:

> I think definitely the Comp Office. I think that there are bits and pieces that I can pick it out from the Writing Center and from 505 that in one way or another did help. But they were very detached from this role. The Comp Office, especially with the assessment materials—just being able to go down a list and see different ways that different folks have approached things, just to read one after another example of these things so I feel like I'm putting a lot of other perspectives together—has been informative for me. I think the stability of having things that I can go back and re-read is pretty helpful . . . there's discussion energy from having so many different people approaching the same things.

Even though Rose had difficulties engaging in virtual August Workshops, they identified the teaching resources, models, and support as significant to the development of assessment literacy.

The Composition Office bears primary responsibility for preparing new graduate student instructors to teach FYC courses at UTK; yet, most participants in this study ranked different aspects of their writing pedagogy education much more highly.

Peer-to-Peer Influence

Peer-to-peer support, alongside only the Composition Office Workshops, served as an ongoing source of assistance for GTAs during their first year as instructors of record. In addition to formal writing pedagogy education, participants reported the value of peer influence, interaction, and support. This finding aligns with studies that affirm the value of peer teaching support for new composition instructors (Anders et al., 2023; Athnos et al., 2022; Bishop, 1997; Puccio, 1988; Reid & Estrem, 2012; Restaino, 2012; Wallis & Jankens, 2017; Weiser, 2001); my study adds to the conversation by focusing specifically on peer assessment support and identifying some factors that impact whether GTAs actually seek the peer support they desire.

All eight instructors in this study referenced the value of peer-to-peer influence. GTAs teaching for the first time often reached out to more experienced graduate student instructors, or peers in their cohort they admired, for advice and resources. As Rose stated, “I’m so grateful to have that kind of expertise and generosity in this community so that I can draw from it.” Throughout each semester, GTAs frequently discussed assessment practices among themselves, including strategies for giving feedback, approaches to handling academic dishonesty and inappropriate use of generative AI, and sharing course materials like rubrics. GTAs reported adopting various assessment practices based on their peers, such as giving more feedback on rough drafts than final drafts and approaches to using rubrics. “Talking with friends” throughout the semester taught Theresa “more generous or more motivational ways” to approach feedback; their conversations with fellow GTAs gave them “a lot of insight into how to kind of take a step

back." Scarlet reported talking with other instructors who taught the "Monsters & Myths" ENGL 102 theme "because I felt like what was on the FYC Canvas Page was more general and not super specific to the theme." Scarlet sought validation from similar instructors, showing that GTAs often consult with peers in the same discipline or program of study. In contrast, Theresa sought more general advice on teaching strategies and assessment practices. Graduate students often formed networks in their cohorts to seek informal support and camaraderie as first-time instructors. Reid and Estrem (2012) similarly assert that "TAs' prior experiences and social networks figure prominently in their approaches to and decisions about teaching" (p. 57); this study affirms the value and influence of both prior knowledge and social connections.

Some participants reflected that they wanted and would have benefited from more opportunities for peer-to-peer connection. Sage and Lainey both discussed wanting to observe more classes before they taught their own classes. Rose referenced August Workshop sessions on developing a teaching persona and building a classroom community to express a desire for "having more time with multiple different instructors to kind of hear their advice and talk more about those things." A stronger peer network would create "more of a foundation of a community" to support GTAs through their teaching (Rose). The MA/MFAs in this study especially felt that they lacked support; as Sage shared, "I feel like we're all really disconnected. Because we were all also focusing on the thesis." Sage managed to have conversations about assessment with "especially the MFA people and some of my MA friends" and "also some of the PhDs." "It's never a scheduled conversation," but instead "just running into each other," and "there will always be some small advice that will stick true" (Sage). They still wanted formal support beyond these hallway conversations happening in the "Grad Lab," the writing center, the hallways of McClung Tower and HSS, and the graduate offices in the Panhellenic Building

(Sage). “I don’t even know if this happens or not or if I’m just out of the loop,” they said, but they wanted grad students to “have a set time probably like once every two weeks” to talk about what works and what’s not working well in their teaching. This was happening in the form of the Pedagogy People Group, but Sage did not attend, likely because of their busy schedule and difficulty balancing their many responsibilities.

As this story indicates, despite expressing the desire for more support, some GTAs struggled to seek out the support networks that did exist. They reported wanting more peer support but when given the opportunity did not attend. The Pedagogy People group is an example of this. Grey and Keegan explicitly discussed how the group was helpful for them. The group provided “universal and accessible” “resources” more so than “some of the resources on Canvas” from the Composition Office (Keegan). Grey shared, “I think the most important thing for me was knowing what other instructors were doing and talking about it casually.” Keegan stated that the meetings were “one of the most valuable support resources” for their teaching because it provided “moral support and a place to be heard.” “Pedagogy People was, for that reason as well as the practical resources and knowledge that were shared, one of the most valuable support resources of the semester.” Grey, at the end of the second interview, felt that Pedagogy People group helped make the knowledge gained from August Workshops more practical and useful. “I think it was when I started going to the Pedagogy Group meetings, that’s when things would come up from the workshops, and that kind of helped me reconnect.” Lainey and Scarlet also attended at least one meeting in the previous year, but did not mention it during their interviews. The other participants, perhaps because of conflicting schedules, were not involved with the group. Pedagogy People served as “an incredible resource” (Keegan) for those who attended, but low attendance limited its reach and left many GTAs feeling like they wanted

more support. As such, the informal support—hallway conversations in between classes—ended up being the primary way that GTAs received support, resources, and ideas from each other.

Positionality & Standpoint

GTAs' positionalities shape their possibilities for being in the composition classroom. The concept of positionality is central to this study because it attends to individuals' socially situated beliefs, values, and identities (Foot et al., 2014; Rankin, 1994) and it emphasizes the unique perspectives of my participants and myself. Positionality is also necessary for understanding how GTAs form affiliations, communities, and partnerships as they enculturate into the university and serve as instructors of record. Embodied positionality always impacts the interactions that students and teachers have in the classroom (Johnson, 1994; Probyn, 2004; Saur & Palmeri, 2017). Taking this construct further, I borrow the feminist sociological construct of *standpoint* (Smith, 2005), which "refers to an individual's unique perspectives, attitudes, or position, recognizing that the way an individual must be in the world is often highly prescribed. Knowledge, experience, and our related personal situations are highly individualized but are also constantly shaped by historical, cultural, and social values and beliefs" (LaFrance, 2019, p. 6). Broadening from positionality, standpoint draws attention to material conditions, reflexivity, and the situatedness of knowledge, action, and work conditions.

In this study, *positionality* accounts for the liminality of GTAs' experiences (Macauley et al., 2023) and the strain of their workload (Grady et al., 2014) while *standpoint* draws attention to the ways that social, cultural, and institutional conditions construct liminal conditions. Assessment emerged as a site where GTAs' tensions and confusions around positionality and standpoint were brought to bear. In this study, all participants' designation as GTAs impacted their writing assessment literacy development. As such, their experiences with writing

assessment literacy development cannot be separated from their identities as graduate student instructors. Key aspects of positionality that impacted participants' teaching and assessment included age and life experiences, disciplinary identifications, and learning dispositions.

GTAs come from what Lainey describes as "vastly different ages and walks of life" than their students, so they often worried about how their students might perceive them. All participants expressed nervousness around their status as graduate student instructors and first-time instructors of record (a sentiment explored in the next section), and some identified additional characteristics such as gender and nationality that complicate their teaching and assessment. Ambiguities around their existence as GTAs often emerged from their dual and conflicting roles as students and instructors (Cervantes & Inlow, 2022; Dryer, 2012). GTAs "face a fundamental conflict between the position of authority they possess as composition professors and the lack of authority inherent in their roles as students in a graduate program" (Bly, 2000, p. 2). Lainey spoke to the anxiety that many first-time instructors of record feel, sharing, "I'm trying to see how being 22, I can somehow establish any type of feelings of confidence and that I know this material." Lainey perhaps expressed one of the highest levels of feeling "a little bit anxious about knowing everything and not knowing everything" as being the "biggest worry teaching." PhD GTAs felt similarly. As Grey reflected in the second interview, "the only thing I struggled with was just the personal side of it, the nervousness and being in front of all the students and it also being my first year at UT. I was very explicit with them, ad when they would ask me questions, I'm like, well, let's go look that up together." Theresa similarly felt "so nervous" about "the idea of getting in front of a class and talking every day." As participants in this study affirm, GTAs often live and work on "border terrain"—the uncertain ground upon which GTAs serve as "at once both student and teacher, outsider and insider, novice and expert,

assessed and assessor" (Latterell, 1996a, p. 1). It is important to recognize the institutional, material conditions that shape the experiences of graduate student instructors.

GTAs in this study also exhibited strong disciplinary identifications that impacted whether and how they engaged with their writing pedagogy education. Graduate students in English take up the highly embedded, hierarchical "curricular turf struggles" (Fitts & Lalicker, 2004, p. 427) that play out in English departments between literature, creative writing, and rhetoric and composition. GTAs "in disciplines other than rhetoric and composition appear to hold even less value for formal experiences, particularly those formal experienced focused on disciplinary knowledge" (Reed, 2020, p. 120). Among participants in this study, graduate students in creative writing (Sage and Lainey) had the strongest allegiances to their field, perceiving creative writing at odds with rhetoric and composition and, consequently, composition pedagogy. The MA/MFA students, who all took the same Composition Pedagogy course, had the opportunity to think generatively about difference. Lainey felt that graduate students across the Department's three divisions approached the course "differently." "I could see clear difference in the way that MFAs approach it versus MAs, which was really interesting to me as well . . . so we got to kind of bounce ideas off of each other." Lainey has clearly stated conceptions of writing and beliefs about assessment, but an undercurrent of the perceived division between FYC and creative writing that shades their practices. It impacts their perception of "getting them to buy into things that you have to teach," as Lainey felt in the first interview.

Scarlet, a literature PhD, also had a similar perception between ENGL 101 and ENGL 102 that inhibited their ability to apply their pedagogical training across both semesters. They struggled to identify aspects of their teaching and assessment that they reused from 101 to 102. "I don't know if I thought about it that way because I feel like they seemed like two entirely

different classes that I wanted to sort of approach 102 just as 102." But they continued, "I mean, I did carry over some of the basic policies, and I did carry over ungrading, so I guess that would be the main similarity. I did carry over pretty much the exact ungrading format that I did from 101 into 102 because I found that to be extremely helpful." RWL graduate students (Keegan, Grey, and Camden) had strong affiliations for composition pedagogy and actually perceived the divisions as less severe than creative writing and literature students. For MA/MFAs, the apprenticeship year seemed highly influential for forming these disciplinary allegiances (Finn, 2021; Johnson, 2021) along with their coursework in which they subconsciously pick up on institutional formations and divisions of people. The tensions are "further complicated by the reality that GTAs in writing programs, especially those outside of rhetoric and composition, will graduate and enter their own teaching positions with fewer opportunities for additional preparation post-graduation" (Cicchino, 2020, p. 87). Graduates face declining career prospects in academia (Porfolio et al., 2013). GTAs with different disciplinary allegiances embody different perspectives on teaching, writing, and the purpose of teacher training.

Third, and relevant for this research study, graduate students' learning dispositions also shaped writing assessment literacy development. Dispositions refer to attitudes and preconceptions that GTAs held about their training, their students, and the teaching of FYC that impacted their experience. Disciplinary influences on dispositions influence how GTAs engage with their writing pedagogy education and apply their learning to the FYC classroom (Driscoll & Wells, 2012; Reed, 2020). In this study, participants' preconceived notions about writing, teaching, and learning shaped their engagement with their formal writing pedagogy education. Tillema (1994) theorized that teachers' pre-existing beliefs impact their learning:

> The greater the correspondence between teachers' beliefs and what was presented in training, the more likely learning was to take place. On the other hand, taking beliefs into account by diagnosing beliefs to facilitate greater congruence was not found to be an effective strategy. Apparently, other interventional techniques will have to be considered if teachers' beliefs are to be integrated with professional knowledge. (p. 601)

Divisive learning dispositions and disciplinary identifications can increase GTAs' sense of liminality that arose from the duality of being students and instructors at the same time. Grey felt like "I live in two different worlds, my grad-level classes and then my teaching world." Grey candidly shared that "sometimes I think being a PhD student, I'm getting a way different experience than the experience I'm creating for my students." Several participants in this study felt that their learning as graduate students suffered from a lack of ethical graduate pedagogy. Discontent fueled some GTAs' development as teachers. Some GTAs harnessed this uncertainty as a strength. GTAs used these experiences as motivation to provide positive experiences for their own students. As the narratives in Chapter 4 revealed, GTAs drew on negative experiences in their past education as well as their current graduate education to provide opposite, more positive experiences for their own undergraduate students.

The role of positionality is so central to GTAs that it is acknowledged in CCCC Statement on Preparing College Teachers of Writing (2015): "Graduate student teachers inhabit an acutely vulnerable space because they are simultaneously students and employees of a postsecondary institution: their status as both learners and as emerging practitioners in the classrooms must be protected." The *acute vulnerability* experienced by GTAs is a material condition of their teaching and assessment practices. The narratives shared in this research study

shed light on the difficult conditions of existence as a GTA and the constant instability and search for balance across teaching, learning, scholarship, and life outside of the university.

Emotional Work

The development of writing assessment literacy, for the graduate student instructors in this study, had a significant affective dimension. As the literature review explored, postsecondary instruction often requires significant emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983; see also Meanwell & Kleiner, 2014) and emotions might impact the effectiveness of teacher preparation (e.g., Xu & Brown, 2016). The practice of writing assessment and the teaching of writing carried emotional weight that GTAs felt when they sat down to respond to student writing. All composition instructors encounter emotion in their teaching (Saur & Palmeri, 2017) and their response to student writing (Benesch, 2017; Caswell, 2011, 2014; Ferris et al., 2011) as well as emotions that students share within their writing (Miller et al., 2023). Feedback is personal, interpersonal, and relational (Sommers, 2013; Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Lee & Schallert, 2008), and providing feedback on student writing is often the most labor-intensive aspect of teaching (Wisniewski, 2024). When GTAs teach as instructors of record for the first time, bearing responsibility for all written feedback for students for 16 weeks, it is their first experience dealing with the quantity of feedback and the emotional weight. Graduate student instructors often feel that they need to "suppress" and "internalize" negative "emotional responses" (Drew et al., 2003, p. 170). Emotional labor is typically positioned lower than even physical labor and is typically not visible.

The experiences of GTAs show that emotional responses can impact assessment practices and beliefs. Keegan especially felt the emotional weight of writing assessment:

> If you're going to do it well and do it ethically, in my opinion, then it should require some type of emotional labor from you. Not like to the point of, like, you become a martyr or anything like that. But again, I just think language is so personal and I think students in FYC specifically are very vulnerable with us in ways that they aren't with professors in their other classes . . . I wish I had known what a time commitment it is and how much emotional labor goes into it and just how important it is for any instructor, but especially instructors of writing, to really make sure we take care of ourselves because students can dump some really heavy stuff on us. And on the one hand, I'm always grateful that students think I'm a safe place for that. On the other hand, I'm not a therapist, either.

The dimensions of positionality explored in the previous section, such as Lainey's anxiety about being someone who is "22" and "just learned all of this one year before and I'm trying now to teach it to them as if I'm a master of this," carry emotional weight. Assessment is a space where GTA anxiety can surface (Cheek, 2022). "Uninformed assessment" negatively impacts instructors by causing them "to feel uncomfortable and unprepared" and unable to build classroom community" (Crusan et al., 2016, pp. 43–44). Participants in this study felt that it takes more time to provide responsive, personal feedback. As such, written feedback is a space where both emotional and physical labor overlap GTAs experience a lot of emotional labor (Andrzejewski et al., 2019; Clem, 2022; Dale & Frye, 2009; Kelchtermans, 2011).

In addition to specific emotions about responding to student writing, GTAs can approach their teaching with apprehension. They can feel doubts about whether their training has prepared them to teach. All participants in this study felt "nervous" to teach for the first time at UTK. Seven participants explicitly stated that they felt "anxious;" Theresa, the one exception, seemed to express some anxiety in their "insecurity" and descriptions of teaching as "nerve-wracking.".

Since Camden felt “there's nothing that really prepares you until you do it,” they felt “really anxious, very nervous that I wasn’t gonna be prepared” for their first semester of teaching. Camden used words such as “nervous,” “afraid,” “concerned,” and “worried” in the first interview. Keegan felt “overwhelmed” and “a little nervous,” with “grading” being “a source of stress.” Rose felt the most nervous and “intimidated” about assessment:

> My biggest fear or trepidation in approaching teaching has always been assessment. I don't know how I'm going to assess people's writing. Things really clicked when I learned about alternative ways of assessing . . . Something like contract grading for a course like this just really made things click for me because now I don't really think of it as this one golden rule that decides all papers that is this kind of mysterious thing that I don't know how to do. I really understand assessment now that it's just an added teaching tool.

In the second interview, Camden described feelings of “guilt” and “frustration” around assessment; “I have a lot of guilt in terms of giving feedback because I want them to know that I am invested in and value their writing progress. And as their instructor, I really do want to give them genuine, constructive feedback. I don't want to just copy-paste feedback, but then also that takes forever. So I'm really torn between those two aspects.” While most writing pedagogy education assumes nerves, anxiety, and stress around teaching for the first time, understanding these affects as emotional labor identifies the amount of work that GTAs invest into writing assessment. How graduate students feel about the preparation they received may impact how they engage with that training after they become instructors.

Physical & Intellectual Labor

Participants in this study experienced tensions inherent to the nature of their standpoints as graduate student instructors and the affective nature of their work; these challenges

materialized most clearly in their working and laboring as first-year composition instructors. As Chapter 2 argued, GTA labor is "crucial to institutions of higher education across the United States" (Osorio et al., 2021, p. 131). Thus, collectively, graduate student instructors have been identified as one of the most overburdened (Kahn et al., 2017), undervalued (Watkins, 1992), and exploited (Brown, 2023; Porfilio et al, 2013) groups in higher education. Inadequate material conditions such as "low pay, inconsistent access to healthcare, and little support for health and family life" negatively impact GTAs (Osorio et al., 2021, p. 131) in addition to challenges that stem from a lack of training and preparation (Marshall, 2004; Restaino, 2012; Saenkhum, 2020). While the individual participants in this study each have their own stories, their experiences mirror the labor struggles of many other GTAs. During the time of this study, Keegan taught as an adjust instructor at two other universities and Grey worked a full-time job while teaching as an instructor of record. MA/MFA participants all pointed to the intense difficulties of the Spring semester of their second year, when they had to teach and complete comprehensive exams and/or thesis projects. Every participant expressed difficulties managing the workload of being a student and an instructor. As both students and instructors, GTAs have been harmed by the rise in contingent "just-in-time" (Watkins, 2015) labor in a "gig academy" (Kezar et al., 2019) that renders their presence and labor nearly invisible. GTA labor is "generally justified as being part of the education of graduate students, as part of an apprenticeship in the academy" (Wright, 2017, p. 275); as such, the use of GTAs to teach "labor-intensive" FYW courses "minimize[es] both the presence of the course and the work of graduate students" (p. 276). This study surfaces these challenges and locates them within a tension in the English Department that places too much emphasis on the physical *teaching* labor of GTAs and too little importance on the intellectual *learning* labor of GTAs.

Participants shared the experience of feeling overworked in the English Department. The university held that the teaching of one course equaled ten hours of work each week; however, conversations with participants in this study and other GTAs in the Department have proven this figure consistently inaccurate. At the same time as I collected data for this research study in Fall 2023, I conducted an internal study in the Composition Office that found that GTAs worked 17 hours per week per course on average instead of the widely accepted 10 hours per week per course. A national study conducted by Osorio and colleagues (2021) found that 65.45% of GTA respondents reported working more hours than they are contracted to work, and the participants in this study also tended to work more than their contracts paid them to work. Scarlet explained the shared problem of workload among GTAs:

> And the whole 'we only spend 10 hours doing our work,' even with me just teaching one class, that's not true. I taught Tuesday/Thursday. I'm in class for an hour and 15 minutes two days a week. I have to lesson plan for both of those classes twice a week, so that usually takes me at least an hour, if not more, depending on the materials that I would have to create for class. And there's emailing that you have to do with students. There are your office hours that you are required to hold, so that's two hours a week. So that's already at 4-6 hours at least. Probably 7, just to be safe. And then there is the grading that you have to do. On weeks where you might just have a smaller assignment due like a research plan or a research question, you might be able to get it all done in 10 hours. But then when you have rough drafts or final drafts, if I spend 20 minutes per paper, that's three papers in one hour, and there's 22 papers, so 10 hours alone could be just spent on grading, plus the seven additional hours that we spend teaching, holding our office hours, emailing, lesson planning, all of that. And then the weeks when we have conferences,

> that's an even longer time commitment because we're meeting individually with students for 20 minutes. And again, there's 22 of them, so that turns into a longer week as well. If we were held to a standard where we had to clock in and clock out for 10 hours a week, we wouldn't be able to get our work done for the semester. I don't see how we would.

As a first-year PhD student, Scarlet taught one class per semester; a 2-2 load (as the MA/MFAs taught) would require even more work, especially when it comes to writing assessment. It is often difficult for GTAs to learn how to respect their own time, perhaps in part because their Departments and institutions do not. Even when instructors teach two sections of the same course, each class doubles the quantity of students who need written feedback and assessment. On the 10-hour institutional construction Rose reflected, "it's just hard to know how much time I've spent where. I would say that some weeks, it's a lot less than that, and some weeks, it's a lot more than that." Grey expressed, "in terms of workload, though, I don't feel overwhelmed by my teaching at all. In fact, I would love to spend more time doing teaching stuff, but again, a lot of times, I'm reading for coursework or prepping presentation for coursework."

Yet again, challenges around labor and workload materialized in writing assessment—the task of the composition instructor that requires the most time. Keegan thought that, prior to teaching for the first time, "I wish I had known how much time that writing assessment specifically requires." Sage shared, "grading seems to be like a very stressful topic for everyone, no matter what section they're teaching:"

> It's good to know that everyone's struggling in some way. No one's been like, oh, my teaching has been so perfect. Which makes me feel good because this year I was feeling guilt ridden a lot, actually. Like right after my thesis. I just want to be there for them, but I'm not. And like this is your 100% right now and it looks different from your 100% last

> semester. And you have to embrace it. Which makes me feel better. Because I've seen other people that are struggling a lot.

As an MFA student, Lainey shared a similar experience of the ways their work as a student limited their ability to do their work as an instructor. In the second interview, reflecting on their first semester as an instructor of record, Lainey recounted these challenges; “I thought I would have the capacity to read everything in full with all of my attention every single time. I thought that I would do things more on time. I thought I would grade more timely than I did.” Because new graduate student instructors are still learners who are developing their approaches, assessment takes more time, a reality that the institution fails to account for. Camden, as a second-year MA, felt that “it’s really hard to be a graduate student who is going through Comps at this and trying to get a job at the same time where you're a teacher.” For them, these difficulties are unavoidable; “I think it’s just the fact of being a student at the same time as being an instructor. And I’ll always try to prioritize students over my own classes because I don’t really think you can have both at the level of teaching that we’re doing.” Camden felt that they did not sacrifice on the amount of feedback they gave students, but “at the consequence of that, either I turned in a paper late for another class or I didn’t’ study for Comps as much as I would have liked to.” Theresa had a similar experience; “it was definitely difficult to manage time between teaching and studying for that. And at times I felt like I could have been a better teacher because I was so wrapped up in my Comps Exam studying. And then other times I was also like, well, I could be a better student in general in the classroom, but I prioritized my teaching over that. So it was challenging to juggle those.”

When the MA/MFA participants taught for the first time, they felt that they were missing some kind of balance. But balance was hard to achieve even for the more experienced GTAs in the study. As Keegan expressed with their workload as a first-year PhD GTA:

> I don't know if there really is a balance . . . I think I have always expected a lot of myself when it comes to giving feedback and assessing student work. I think just realizing that I can't give the thorough kind of feedback that I used to at this time in my life and that's OK. It's not like a reflection of a moral failing on my part. I'm just literally drowning in work. And I am also a student. I'm a scholar. And I have to leave something in the tank for myself. I'm very transparent with my students now about my schedule and about how much work I have to do . . . that weighs on me a lot.

Even as someone with teacher training and experience before coming to UTK, Keegan (along with Grey and Scarlet) still struggled to reckon with the sheer time it takes to teach FYC courses, especially with writing assessment. Scarlet similarly shared:

> I ended up being really transparent with my students all semester to be like, hey, this is the first time I'm learning about this, too, or this is the first time that I'm going through this class with you all. And I think that they really appreciated that because it kept the relationship open to say if they were struggling, I could help them more. We could sort of get through it together. It built up a better sense of camaraderie.

Their positionality as a GTAs impacted teaching practices by creating a more relational, community-centered classroom. Because it was their first time teaching at UTK, Scarlet implemented teaching practices such as "a lot more group work," which led to "a lot of feedback from students saying that all of the in-class work was beneficial to them."

Some GTAs discussed the amount of time spent on providing written feedback on drafts. Camden stated that it "takes forever" to provide written feedback on a rough draft, averaging "anywhere from 15 to 30 minutes." Scarlet spent "anywhere from 15 to 20 minutes because I try not to go over that if I can" on final drafts in general, and "the rough drafts it usually takes me 20-25 minutes just because I do try to give more." Grey stated that final virtual museum exhibit projects took "15 to 20 minutes per person" while a paper usually takes "20 to 30 minutes each." Rose shared, "it's really hard to follow the advice that so many people have given me to spend five or ten minutes per paper, so I always end up spending more time than that."

To summarize, the participants in this study elucidated how four aspects of writing pedagogy education—teaching assistantship, tutoring, composition pedagogy coursework, and Composition Office support—impacted the development of writing assessment literacy. By listening to their stories and composing their narratives, I identified four additional factors—peer influence, positionality, emotional work, and physical and intellectual labor—that shaped writing assessment literacy development. One thread that binds these conditions is the nature and impact of experience. This study emphasizes the role of lived experience and prior knowledge in writing assessment literacy development, conceiving literacy development as the work of novice instructors. Marshall (2004) reasoned that "preparing graduate students to teach is a complicated process, because teaching, if rightly understood, is a complicated process already, and teaching teachers is doubly so" (p. 173). Words such as *preparation* or *training* make GTA learning seem like something that can be completed, a requirement that can be checked off, when learning to teach is actually a lifelong experience. The fact that formal GTA preparation ends after the first year, leaving MA/MFAs and first-year PhDs solely supported by the Composition Office, further serves to divide GTAs' experiences as a before and after, as apprentice and teacher. This devalues

the experiential learning that continues to take place when GTAs begin teaching as instructors of record, and particularly the writing assessment literacy development.

This study shows that literacy labor is part of GTAs' intellectual labor, and it is an unseen labor into which GTAs exert a significant amount of time and effort. Historically—usually—there is a division between intellectual and physical labor in English departments, where intellectual labor (research) is valued more than physical labor (teaching). The labor of learning is subsumed under intellectual labor or cognitive processes. However, for GTAs, it is the opposite: their physical labored (teaching) is valued more than their intellectual labor (learning as students and novice instructors). This study argues that writing assessment literacy and teacher learning are a significant part of the work of new GTAs. In the binary of academic physical labor and intellectual labor, this study first adds emotional and affective labor to this division, emphasizing these emotional connections. Then, this study identifies literacy labor as the developmental work that GTAs do that is the least visible and least valued kind of labor although it is just as important and necessary. The pervasive ways that English Departments treat as "high discourses" intellectual labor such as research and the study of literature and as "low discourses" physical labor such as the teaching and study of FYC (Miller, 1991, p. 1) leaves little space to conceive literacy development as a significant portion of labor that GTAs contribute to English Departments and their professional growth.

How Assessment Knowledge and Beliefs Shape Assessment Practice

Writing assessment literacy has been defined as comprising of assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices (Crusan et al., 2016); however, few studies of assessment literacy "covered all aspects concurrently," focusing instead only on "one or two aspects, failing to take a holistic view of all three components (Kang & Lam, 2024, p. 6). Moreover, participant narratives in this

study revealed the impact of a fourth dimension of writing assessment literacy development: experience. This study's findings support Crusan et al.'s (2016) assertion that teaching experience "significantly affects beliefs about writing assessment and assessment literacy" (p. 53). Connecting experience to knowledge, beliefs, and practices can help teachers move from what Matre and Solheim (2016) describe as an instrumental, ritualized use of assessment toward a flexible, functional use of assessment (p. 192), and it can facilitate implementation of assessment practices that align with assessment beliefs. However, instructors need purposeful reflection and metacognition to make use of their past experiences (Hillocks, 1999). Assessment literacy requires "self-awareness," which justifies "the need to work with the often-tacit preconceptions, beliefs, understandings, and worldviews about assessment that teacher-assessors bring to teacher professional learning programs and that inform their conceptualizations, interpretations, judgments, and decisions in assessment" (Scarino, 2013, p. 309). Experience accounts for processes of learning, reflection, and application that engage teachers as lifelong learners and assessment practitioners who continue to develop over time.

The participant narratives detailed in this research study reveal the impact of experience on assessment practice and, particularly, how assessment knowledge and beliefs inform assessment practices (Brown, 2008; Scarino, 2013). Extensive K-12 education research has confirmed that teachers' beliefs, values, and conceptions of assessment shape assessment practice (Brown, 2008; Bucci, 2003; Fives & Buehl, 2012; James & Pedder, 2006; Remesal, 2011). The impact of assessment knowledge and beliefs has also been explored in the teaching of L2 writing on a global scale (Barnes et al., 2014, 2017; Barrot, 2016; Hedia, 2020; Latif & Wasim, 2022). Assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices are "closely interrelated" (Kang & Lam, 2024, p. 18). Analysis of GTA narratives in this study affirm that assessment knowledge is embedded in

all assessment practices; put another way, what instructors know *how to do* with necessarily informs what instructors *choose to do* with assessment. But knowledge alone "is not enough to guide practice" (Wisniewski, 2024, p. 375). Assessment beliefs are also entrenched in all assessment practices (Buehl & Beck, 2015; Metz & Knight, 2021); the motivations that inform *why instructors do what they do* with assessment shape assessment practices. While assessment beliefs can and do originate from assessment knowledge, deeply held beliefs also trace to attitudes, affects, emotions, and ingrained prior experiences. Teachers' "conceptions of teaching, learning, and epistemology" (Hillocks, 1999, p. 4) inform their assessment decisions, whether they are aware of it or not. More so than knowledge and practice, assessment beliefs are closely tied to prior experiences and conceptions of assessment and writing. Assessment beliefs reveal the impact and nature of past experiences, while assessment knowledge and practices reflect the role of writing pedagogy education. If "what a teacher knows or believes in insufficient unless teachers also make changes to their practice" (Girvan et al., 2016, p. 137), participants' knowledge and beliefs are best understood in relation to assessment practices. Assessment knowledge, beliefs, and experiences shape possibilities for practice in the composition classroom.

Participant narratives revealed instructors' assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices. Further, the ways that GTAs described their assessment experiences provides insight into their perceptions of their knowledge and beliefs. **Figure 19** presents an NVivo word frequency query of the 20 most frequently spoken words across all 24 participant interviews, helping to document one way that participants told their stories. As **Figure 19** demonstrates, the most common word used to articulate knowledge was "think" (2.46%) followed closely by "know" (2.31%). Participants typically used phrases like *I think* and *I know* interchangeably to describe their

Summary | Word Cloud

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage	Similar Words
think	5	2,924	2.91%	think, thinking, thinks
know	4	2,753	2.74%	know, knowing, knows
students	8	1,625	1.62%	student, students, students'
writing	7	1,567	1.56%	write, writes, writing, writings
things	6	1,365	1.36%	thing, things
kinds	5	1,184	1.18%	kind, kindly, kinds
feel	4	1,120	1.11%	feel, feeling, feelings, feels
class	5	1,076	1.07%	class, classes
want	4	1,036	1.03%	want, wanted, wanting, wants
lot	3	949	0.94%	lot, lots
one	3	876	0.87%	one, ones
feedback	8	845	0.84%	feedback, feedbacks
times	5	809	0.80%	time, timed, timely, times, timing
teaching	8	781	0.78%	teach, teaches, teaching
also	4	776	0.77%	also
assessment	10	759	0.75%	assess, assessed, assessing, assessment, assessments
works	5	734	0.73%	work, worked, working, works
helpful	7	711	0.71%	help, helped, helpful, helping, helps
way	3	702	0.70%	way, ways
grading	7	696	0.69%	grade, graded, grades, grading

Figure 19. NVivo Word frequency query for the most frequent words in participant interviews.

Note. The word frequency query excluded stop words such as *like*, *just*, *really*, and *yeah*.

knowledge and beliefs about writing assessment. The next most frequent verb was "feel" (0.94%), which was spoken less than half as frequently as "think" and "know." *Feel* expressions were followed by "want" (0.87%) as a verb used to describe participants' goals and motivations. "Believe," which is not included in the figure, appeared only 0.06% of the time, showing that *I believe* statements were infrequent and uncommon in the interviews. It seemed that participants most often used the verb *feel* to express their beliefs. Of course, the verbs that participants used to tell their stories were often prompted by the question I asked them. An exchange with Lainey reflects this consideration:

> Madeline: What would you say you believe about writing assessment? Your set of beliefs about assessment?
>
> Lainey: I think—no, I *believe*—I believe that all writing is a process and that it helps us process.

Still, it is revealing that participants most often talk about assessment in terms of what they *think* and *know*, and, to a much lesser extent, *feel*. The language that participants used to tell their stories reveals the role of emotions, feelings, and affect in assessment knowledge and beliefs, which then inform assessment practices. This data also supports the observation that it seemed difficult for participants to express their beliefs about writing assessment since they typically defaulted to expressing thoughts or knowledge rather than beliefs. Rose, who still felt unsure as an instructor after teaching for one year, expressed some of this uncertainty when they reflected, "I guess I feel like I don't have a real sturdy foundation of beliefs about writing assessment. I feel like I would characterize my beliefs almost more as a mix of enthusiasm and anxiety." Perhaps whether an understanding is perceived as knowledge or beliefs depends on how an

individual classifies information according to their worldview; perhaps GTAs needed more purposeful reflection to articulate a set of beliefs they held about writing assessment.

Another insight gained from the word frequency query centers around the ways that participants talked about assessment; the most used word was "feedback" (0.84%) followed by "assessment" (0.75%) and then "grading" (0.69%). Participants tended to use these three words interchangeably, but in general, participants showed a preference for referring to their assessment activities as *feedback*, revealing how GTAs perceive the purpose of assessment and their role as instructors in the composition classroom.

Participant narratives provide an expanded construct of assessment knowledge. Teacher knowledge has been defined in several different ways that, as Chapter 2 demonstrates, typically minimize assessment knowledge. Elbaz (1983) defined teachers' "practical knowledge" as knowledge of self; knowledge of the milieu of teaching; knowledge of subject matter; knowledge of curriculum development; and knowledge of instruction (qtd. in Grossman, 1990, p. 5). Grossman (1990) devised in the late-1980s seven categories of teacher content knowledge: knowledge of content; knowledge of pedagogy; knowledge of curriculum; knowledge of learners and learning; knowledge of contexts of schooling; pedagogical content knowledge; and knowledge of educational philosophies, goals, and objectives (p. 5). They summarized that the generally agreed upon "cornerstones" of professional knowledge for teachers are "general pedagogical knowledge; subject matter knowledge; pedagogical content knowledge; and knowledge of content" (p. 5). In these constructions, assessment knowledge is subsumed within "knowledge of instruction" and "pedagogical content knowledge;" it is not seen as its own dimension. Grossman (1990) found that teachers develop pedagogical content knowledge primarily through apprenticeship of observation, disciplinary background, professional

coursework and training, and learning from experience. Scholarship on assessment literacy more thoroughly defines the idea of assessment knowledge. Brown and Bailey (2008) summarized seven standards for teacher assessment knowledge and skills, and Xu and Brown (2016) specified six dimensions of a teacher's assessment knowledge base: knowledge of assessment purposes, content, and methods; knowledge of grading; knowledge of feedback; knowledge of assessment interpretation and communication; knowledge of student involvement in assessment; knowledge of assessment ethics. Yet, as this analysis has shown, assessment knowledge is much more than formal education; it also includes personal knowledge, feelings, and prior experiences. When participants spoke about what they knew, they generally spoke to content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge rather than assessment knowledge specifically, even though assessment is a substantial part of the work of the writing classroom. Following the pattern from their writing pedagogy education, assessment knowledge is often subsumed within discussion of pedagogical knowledge.

Assessment knowledge is highly variable since all GTAs bring different educational backgrounds, upbringings, and experiences. Assessment knowledge is very contextual; GTAs often discussed assessment knowledge in relation to the way they approach particular students or situations. Assessment knowledge is deeply personal; it is tied to previous educational experiences in secondary and postsecondary education. Assessment is also affective; as this study has affirmed, assessment carries emotional weight. Assessment knowledge and beliefs, along with classroom experience, shape assessment practices. Assessment practices become cemented when GTAs teach as instructor of record for the first time because although GTAs come in with a body of knowledge and range of beliefs, they do not often bring assessment practices. New graduate student instructors develop a foundation of beliefs and knowledge before they choose

their practices, especially for those who had an apprenticeship year before teaching their own classes. Then, as GTAs teach for the first time and expand their knowledge, their practices develop alongside. Thus, the role of experience cannot be overlooked for its significance in writing assessment literacy development. Whether something is knowledge or beliefs depends on the person and how they classify it in their worldview. Beliefs and knowledge are shaped by context/audience. Writing assessment literacy does not just describe a teacher's knowledge, beliefs, and practices but also their reflexive understanding of the interconnectedness of these dimensions, a critical understanding about how these elements influence each other. Experience is a key component that needs to be considered alongside knowledge, beliefs, and practices.

Assessment beliefs, including those connected to prior educational experiences, the purposes of assessment, andvthe purpose of FYC courses, help GTAs decide how to assess writing. GTAs' assessment practices may be largely informed by assessment beliefs (e.g., Wisniewski, 2024), but practices are also shaped and constrained by labor conditions and institutional contexts. To summarize, GTAs' assessment knowledge and beliefs, as well as prior and current experiences, greatly inform assessment practices. As first-time instructors of record, GTAs tended to rely on their prior knowledge and experiences from their own educational backgrounds as well as the influence of their current teaching experience rather than the formal education gained through their writing pedagogy education. Writing assessment knowledge and beliefs, intertwined, are both highly personal, subjective, contextual, and conditional.

Graduate Student Instructors' Use of Alternative Assessment Methods

It was unexpected that all eight participants in this research study used ungrading methods in their FYC courses. As a result, this study provides insight into how GTAs respond to current exigencies in the fields of postsecondary education and rhetoric and composition around

the need for more ethical and just assessment practices (Baker-Bell et al., 2020; Condon & Ashanti-Young, 2016; Elliot et al., 2016; Inoue, 2015). *Ungrading* is an umbrella term that can include many alternative assessment practices (Von Bergen, 2023), but commonalities shared among the instructors in this research study include the use of complete/incomplete grading and the use of a grading matrix to determine final grades. Additional ungrading practices implemented by participants include collaborative rubric development, antiracist peer review, reflective self-assessment, and flexible revision, attendance, and late work policies. For participants, ungrading enabled alignment among assessment practices, knowledge, and beliefs.

Participants reported having agency to choose, adapt, and implement alternative assessment practices that upheld their assessment beliefs. Graduate student instructors felt supported within the English Department's culture of alternative assessment established in the prior two years through the equitable assessment pilot and program; as such, the Department created a welcoming environment in which GTAs could experiment with their assessment practices. Within a programmatic culture supportive of alternative assessment practices, GTAs primarily decided to use ungrading as a response to challenging labor conditions and negative prior educational experiences. Faced with an overwhelming workload, ungrading helped instructors alleviate what has long been identified as the grading burden faced by novice instructors (e.g., Restaino, 2012; Qualley, 2001). Ungrading seemed to lessen the workload of assessment for new instructors while simultaneously reducing the well-documented negative impact of grades on undergraduate student learning and writing development (e.g., Kohn, 2011), allowing GTAs to use assessment to support student learning and motivation (Adler-Kassner & O'Neil, 2010). Thus, GTAs' experiences with ungrading in this study corroborate the benefits of alternative assessment practices for composition instructors (Blinne, 2021; Blum, 2020) and

undergraduate students (Feldman, 2023; Stommel, 2023). Further, ungrading allowed graduate student instructors to provide more supportive feedback and positive classroom experiences than they had received as undergraduate and graduate students. Prior negative experiences with writing assessment inspired GTAs to create better experiences for their own students. The implementation of equitable assessment practices by graduate student instructors was primed by their prior experiences and beliefs; informed by their knowledge gained through writing pedagogy education; and encouraged by a supportive programmatic context.

Through ungrading, GTAs worked to recreate the positive prior experiences they had with writing assessment and negate the negative prior experiences they had with writing assessment. Graduate student instructors tried to recreate positive feedback they received on their own writing while working to avoid negative feedback they received in the past. GTAs actively worked to reduce the harm of number and letter grades and hurtful written commentary on undergraduate student writing development. GTAs felt that ungrading can "transform what your students can expect to have in your classroom" (Grey). Ungrading shaped GTAs' feedback practices, leading to "more content-oriented feedback that would help them actually improve their writing rather than having them see a letter grade, panic about it, feel defeated, not want to make the changes at all because they feel defeated" (Scarlet). In a story they told about teaching English 101, Scarlet recounted that ungrading helped students learn and grow "because I think they were forced to focus on the feedback. The letter grade wouldn't discourage them. So there was no sort of discouragement with the grade. Force them to focus more on improvement and content rather than the stress of the grade." With ungrading, "they don't have that pressure on them to perform in a certain way. They can just perform as they are and work towards their goals that way" (Scarlet). They felt that their students "improved tremendously, and I think ungrading

was a big part of that" (Scarlet). GTAs adopted ungrading for practical reasons; Camden found ungrading to be "so effective" and "so useful" as a first-time instructor. As recounted in their narrative, Theresa perhaps made the biggest change between semesters because of their choice to use alternative assessment in English 102; they found it "inspiring and motivational" to see students' effort and engagement in an ungraded course. At first, Theresa's uncertainty around teaching for the first time led to their use of conventional grading because it mirrored the ways they had always been assessed in courses. They defaulted to prior experiences as a student despite the knowledge they gained through English 505 and the Composition Office's workshops. As such, their experience as a first-time instructor of record with sole responsibility to assess student writing served as the main influence to use ungrading.

Participants all felt that ungrading benefits students and instructors. Scarlet said it "felt really good" to get rid of grades in the classroom. Camden described,

> it takes a lot of the arbitrariness of grading out of the classroom . . . I really think that all of my students were a lot less stressed taking this class and they were a lot more exploratory because they did not have to worry about getting a C- on a paper. I really think that labor-based grading still gives you room to give feedback because that's what it's about anyway. It's about feedback and developing yourself as writers. It just makes a better environment for everybody overall.

Grey felt "more confident" as a new instructor of record because of "the power" to use ungrading. They felt that their students were motivated by ungrading because of its focus on their effort and labor rather than the quality of their writing:

> I think they actually worked harder [because of the use of ungrading] because they knew that the results weren't going to just be a number that really had no meaning to them.

> They knew that the results were my feedback on their writing and how they could develop their own voice a little bit . . . For the conventional approach, they're writing to get that score. They're not writing because they're interested in my feedback or they're interested in exploring something. They're writing to pass the class. Where with this ungrading method, they're not writing to pass a class. They're writing to work on their own writing for the sake of it and explore the different things that come along with it . . . I think the only downside to the ungrading, the flexibility of it, is deadlines, which I am going to be more strict about next semester.

The use of ungrading created new possibilities for assessment practices for graduate student instructors. GTAs felt that ungraded classes offer students more opportunities for "revision" and "self-reflection" (Sage) and a "very heavily feedback-based" learning environment (Lainey). Ungrading allowed GTAs to align assessment knowledge and beliefs with assessment practices. Lainey said, "I think the purpose of writing assessment is to allow the writer to hear how their work is being received," which aligned with their emphasis on "reflection" and "peer review" in their courses (Lainey). For their courses, they felt, "I don't want it to be super grade-focused and super product-focused because I don't think writing is just a product" (Lainey). Through ungrading, GTAs experienced alignment between their assessment beliefs and practices.

GTAs' alternative assessment practices continued to develop from the Fall to the Spring semester. Several participants reported learning to provide more feedback on rough drafts than final drafts after they gained teaching experience. Collectively, over time, GTAs also reported using more spoken and oral feedback than written feedback. Implemented as a response to overwhelming workloads, GTAs used class time and conferences to discuss their feedback on student writing rather than spending more time to write feedback. Sage told a story in which they

shared, “I think because I was so busy with thesis stuff, I found it easy to provide verbal feedback, which I actually realized is a great thing” because it allowed for “having a discussion” and “tak[ing] the pressure off a lot of people, too.” With the influence of teaching experience, some GTAs felt that students would be more likely to implement verbal feedback “because they wouldn’t go through and read all of my comments” (Lainey). By the end of English 102, Lainey felt that “between 60% and 70%” of their feedback was delivered verbally. GTAs often felt that verbal feedback was more personable; “it’s like a conversation” (Grey). With an increase in verbal feedback, GTAs felt that feedback could be more individualized and immediate. The use of alternative assessment methods, coupled with more verbal and personable feedback, emphasizes the affective dimensions of writing assessment literacy development.

Key Takeaways

The narratives and thematic analysis presented over the last two chapters contribute to our understanding of how writing assessment literacy evolves over time, the extent to which prior experience impacts continuing literacy development, the conditions that facilitate or restrict literacy development, and the influence of assessment knowledge and beliefs on assessment practices. In Chapter 4, this study collected stories and composed narratives of graduate student instructors’ experiences with learning to assess writing and assessing writing during their first year as instructors of record at UTK. These stories join more than two decades of graduate students’ voices in writing studies (e.g., Clem, 2022; Good & Warshauer, 2000; Macauley et al., 2021) while contributing previously underexplored perspectives on writing assessment literacy, training, and practice. In addition to the presentation of narratives, thematic analysis generated insights about the complexity of writing assessment literacy.

This research study redefines the development of writing assessment literacy as *literacy labor* to draw attention to the physical, intellectual, material, and affective dimensions of GTA development. Moving the phenomenon beyond the products of assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices (e.g., Crusan et al., 2016; Crusan, 2021), I emphasize the processes, experiences, and labors of literacy development. Studying writing assessment literacy *narratively* and listening to graduate students' stories revealed that GTAs learned by doing through the experiential learning of being first-time teachers at UTK. Recursively, teaching and assessing writing provides a key mechanism by which GTAs learn to assess writing. Consequently, this study identifies the importance of experience, both past and present, in the development of writing assessment literacy. Thus, through the eyes of graduate student instructors, writing assessment literacy development is

- Affective (highly felt, emotional work);
- Experiential (shaped by prior and current lived experiences at work);
- Institutionally bound (determined by programmatic contexts and institutional boundaries that impact the practices and processes of work);
- Laborious (physical, intellectual, and affective work);
- Liminal (always in development and at work);
- Material (tangible, physical work); and
- Personal (dependent on positionality, knowledge, beliefs, and identity work).

I argue that the work of graduate student instructors *is* the labor of writing assessment literacy development, which should be integrated and prioritized alongside teacher development. GTAs devote significant time, effort, and physical, intellectual, and emotional energy not only to writing assessment but also to the continuation of their learning about writing assessment.

Literacy labor accounts for the strenuous, yet often invisible, labor it takes to continue developing and learning as a composition instructor. Understanding literacy development as labor intervenes in the perceived divides between training and teaching, apprenticeship and instructor of record, and theory and practice. The experience of labor accounts for the ways that novice instructors move nonlinearly between theory (classroom learning) and practice (classroom teaching) continuously and over time, and not all at once. Literacy labor includes the complexity of ongoing learning and development of GTAs, the inseparability of teaching and learning, and the connections between assessment and pedagogy. Although writing pedagogy education can be presented with only a glancing look toward writing assessment, writing assessment is a significant portion of the work of new writing instructors. The experiences of GTAs make it possible to identify the affective, material, personal, experiential, institutionally bound, liminal, and laborious dimensions of writing assessment literacy development.

The argument that literacy labor is a primary kind of work that GTAs do provides a new typology of writing assessment literacy. Rather than the products of knowledge, beliefs, and practices, this study calls attention to intellectual, physical, emotional, and literacy labor as sources of tension and complexity for GTAs. Writing assessment literacy is not just a *product* of teacher training; it is not an outcome to achieve, a threshold to cross, or a place to arrive where novice instructors can declare *I am assessment literate*; writing assessment literacy is a *process* that is ongoing, participatory, and experiential. In academia, “the boundary between work and product is difficult to define” (Pekkola, 2014, p. 12), and this is particularly salient for graduate student instructors. Research has established that the labor conditions for contingent instructors in higher education are poor working conditions (Brown, 2023) and the conditions for working-class students can be difficult, and GTAs are both students and instructors. As such, GTAs feel

the effects of their labor and laboring conditions in layered and intersectional ways. English Departments have struggled to reconcile what constitutes "work" (e.g., Dryer, 2015; Horner, 2000), one of the field's "contested term[s]" (Bartholomae, 1993, p. 8). The emphasis on lived experience in writing assessment literacy development reveals that GTAs are still learners when they enter their first year as instructor of record, and they need continued support as such.

The second research question—what prior writing assessment literacy do GTAs bring to the FYC classroom?—identified the presence and impact of prior knowledge and beliefs on present knowledge, beliefs, and practices. For GTAs in this research study, three main divisions of experience most influenced writing assessment literacy: early educational experiences, undergraduate educational experiences, and prior-present experiences as graduate students at UTK. Early educational experiences (from childhood through high school-age) seemed to impact GTAs' deeply held values and beliefs, while undergraduate educational experiences seemed to influence GTAs' assessment practices. Both positive and negative experiences with written feedback or writing courses shaped how GTAs assessed their students' writing. Graduate student instructors aimed to reproduce the positive experiences they had with assessment and actively resist the negative experiences they encountered with assessment for their own students. As such, prior knowledge, beliefs, and practices have a substantial, lasting influence on writing assessment literacy; so, too, do current experiences as graduate students. GTAs' ongoing experiences as graduate students affected the assessment approaches they used with their students, particularly in using their bad experiences in graduate courses at UTK to fuel their pedagogical approaches in their FYC courses. Attention to the phenomenon of writing assessment literacy development again reveals that although it is treated as such, there is not a

distinct division between learner and instructor. GTAs are always both. Participants in this study demonstrated the influence on ongoing, current experience on their development and learning.

The third research question—what conditions affect the development of writing assessment literacy?—found that the most impactful aspects of formal writing pedagogy education were teaching assistantship, tutoring, composition pedagogy coursework, and the Composition Office. Altogether, GTAs' preparation suffered from the tension that "preparatory work is not often designed to initiate the career-long development of graduate students, but to answer immediate program requirements. Consequently, teaching is often only addressed when it serves the needs of the university" (Stenberg, 2000, p. 7). Participants seemed to feel that tutoring overcame this tension, but their mentorship and teaching assistantships suffered from it. The GTAs needed preparation designed with them in mind, pressing back against institutional needs and pressures to instead safeguard and uplift GTAs. Despite the overall ranking of their formal training, there was no universally agreed upon aspect of writing pedagogy education that was most helpful. That affirms the individual and personal nature of writing assessment literacy development. In addition to the four elements of writing pedagogy education, GTAs' stories revealed the impact of the conditions of peer-to-peer influence, positionality, emotional work, and labor conditions. Peer-to-peer connection had a positive influence on writing assessment literacy development, affirming that, in writing pedagogy education, "new teachers need support, collegiality, and continuity" (Ebest, 2005, p. 212). However, individuals' positionality, emotional work, and response to their labor conditions impacted their development in ambiguous ways. Altogether, the biggest influences were peer influence, teaching experience, and prior knowledge/experience from their own educational backgrounds. These dimensions proved even

more impactful than their writing pedagogy education once they began teaching as instructors of record, calling to attention the need for training to connect and expand on existing knowledge.

The final research question—How and to what extent do GTAs' writing assessment knowledge and beliefs shape their writing assessment practices?—supported the disciplinary understanding that assessment knowledge and beliefs impact writing assessment practices. GTAs' stories revealed that assessment beliefs are most closely tied to prior experiences and conceptions of writing, while assessment knowledge and practices originate most often from writing pedagogy education. Assessment beliefs shape written commentary on student work; yet, because assessment beliefs have such bearing on assessment practices, writing pedagogy education programs need to incorporate prior beliefs and encourage GTAs to reflect and integrate prior and new beliefs, values, and attitudes. The GTAs in this study all used alternative assessment methods, which they learned primarily through composition pedagogy coursework and Composition Office workshops. GTAs turn to ungrading in a defiant response to their poor labor conditions, overworked nature, and negative prior educational experiences. Still, the assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices of graduate student instructors remained shaped and often constrained by programmatic requirements, institutional contexts, and their own positionality in the composition classroom.

Chapter 6

Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion

When I completed data collection for this research study in May 2024, there were still many stories to be told. The MA/MFA students graduated and left the university, some to permanent secondary and postsecondary teaching positions elsewhere. The PhD students continued into their second year of teaching and learning in the Department of English at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK), where we remained colleagues. Although I only came alongside participants as a narrative inquirer for one academic year, they stayed with me through the data analysis and writing of this dissertation, guiding the conclusions made in this study. And, still, their stories continue to live on the page, teaching me how to listen and think narratively about the development of writing assessment literacy.

In this research study, I investigated how eight Graduate Teaching Associates (GTAs) developed writing assessment literacy as first-time instructors of record at UTK. I began with the definition of *writing assessment literacy* as the sum of instructors' assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices (Crusan et al., 2016). Scholars across the disciplines of second language writing (Saenkhum, 2020; Weigle, 2007), education (DeLuca, 2012; Popham, 2009; Stiggins, 2009), and composition studies (Estrem & Reid, 2012; Restaino, 2012) agree that teachers receive insufficient preparation to assess writing. Consequently, I sought to understand how graduate student instructors learn about assessment and how their training impacts their assessment practices during their first year teaching first-year composition (FYC) courses at UTK. To do so, I used narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2023) as a research methodology to think narratively about the phenomenon of writing assessment literacy. My research questions guided the purpose of the study to uncover how writing assessment

literacy develops over time, the ways in which prior experience impacts literacy development, the formal and informal conditions that support or constrain literacy development, and the variable influence of assessment knowledge and beliefs on assessment practices. The eight participants included three MA students, two MFA students, and three PhD students, representing the English Department's three divisions of Creative Writing; Literature, Criticism, and Textual Studies; and Rhetoric, Writing, and Linguistics. I collected data during the 2023–2024 academic year primarily through three interviews with each participant (Seidman, 2006), collection of participants' assessment materials, and two focus group sessions. The second and third interviews utilized discourse-based interviewing techniques (Odell et al., 1983) to surface participants' prior knowledge and beliefs in our discussion of their assessment materials. I used inductive coding (Saldaña, 2021), categorical-content analysis (Lieblich et al., 1998), and thematic analysis (Riessman, 2005, 2008) to analyze interview data and assessment materials, layering these approaches to construct narratives of writing assessment literacy (Chapter 4) and identify themes across the narratives (Chapter 5).

So, how can we listen to these stories of graduate student instructors? Collectively, I found that experience is a key mechanism by which writing assessment literacy development occurs. It is primarily *through* teaching experience that new instructors develop assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices. Alongside classroom teaching experience, participants found peer support and prior knowledge and experiences more impactful than formal writing pedagogy education on the development of writing assessment literacy. GTAs often relied substantially on their own past experiences as students, rather than their formal preparation, to inform classroom assessment decisions. Overall, GTAs in this research study did not feel that they had enough preparation to assess student writing before they became instructors of record. In addition to peer

support, the factors that impacted writing assessment literacy that emerged from this study were positionality, working conditions, and embodied, affective labor. GTAs ranked the usefulness of their formal writing pedagogy education in order of teaching assistantship, tutoring, composition pedagogy coursework, and departmental workshops and support. Yet, GTAs' perceptions of their preparation were highly individualized and personal, emphasizing the role of individual prior knowledge and experience in writing assessment literacy development.

I found that GTAs' writing assessment beliefs and knowledge impacted writing assessment practices, though in variable ways. Assessment beliefs tended to derive from prior educational experiences and tacit conceptions of writing and assessment, while assessment knowledge originated from current educational experiences, classroom teaching experience, and formal training, such as coursework and workshops. As such, GTAs' assessment beliefs can reveal the impact and nature of past experiences, while assessment knowledge and practices often reflect both prior knowledge and the influence of writing pedagogy education. Participants' use of equitable assessment methods such as ungrading emerged as one area in which GTAs connected their formal training with prior experience, revealing opportunities for writing pedagogy education to better support writing assessment literacy development. Studying writing assessment literacy *narratively* revealed that GTAs learned by doing through the experiential learning of being first-time teachers at UTK. The study locates the work of graduate student instructors in the labor of writing assessment literacy development, which should be prioritized in the preparation provided by English Departments and writing programs.

Based on these findings, I argue the case for recalibrating writing pedagogy education to support GTAs to develop writing assessment literacy. Writing pedagogy education should guide and foster GTAs' writing assessment literacy to prepare them to assess writing confidently,

ethically, and equitably. In the following sections, I offer a theoretical discussion that interprets the significance of the narratives and thematic results from Chapters 4 and 5, with a particular focus on the writing assessment challenges that GTAs experienced. I reconceptualize writing assessment literacy to account for the impacts of labor, affect, positionality, and prior and current experience in teacher development. Informed by my findings, I recommend approaches for writing pedagogy education to enhance the development of writing assessment literacy. I conclude with limitations and suggestions for future research.

(Re)Conceptualizing Writing Assessment Literacy as Labor: A Theoretical Discussion

As I have attested throughout this dissertation, the persistent divide between intellectual labor and physical labor in English Departments maintains a hierarchy that values intellectual work (i.e., research) above physical work (i.e., teaching) (Miller, 1993; Samuels, 2017; Watkins, 1992). Pointedly, however, the narratives in this research study reveal that graduate student instructors experience the opposite: their physical work (teaching) is so highly valued that it eclipses the contributions of their intellectual labor, which includes their research, scholarship, and, primarily, their ongoing learning as graduate students and novice instructors. Following this division, English Departments often implicitly perpetuate the emphasis on physical labor because teaching first-year composition is framed as an institutional and degree program requirement rather than valuable and necessary professional development. Writing programs tend to focus on GTAs' role as instructors at the expense of their role as students. Relatedly, writing pedagogy education has tended to put more emphasis on teaching than assessment and, within assessment, greater focus on products (writing assessment practices) than processes (writing assessment beliefs and knowledge), replicating the over-valuation of physical labor and products and devaluation of intellectual labor and learning processes. Therefore, in multiple ways, across

teaching and assessment, GTAs have been "most harmed" (Porfilio et al., 2013) by the "economic materiality of the division of labor" in English Departments (Strickland, 2011, p. 47). The manifold dismissal of first-year composition, the GTAs who often teach it, and their teaching labor has led to negligence of writing assessment literacy development. GTAs' experiences offer a site to make sense of the labor demands of writing assessment *and* writing assessment literacy development.

The English Department as a workplace (Watkins, 1992) has rendered nearly invisible the substantial amounts of labor that graduate student instructors contribute to the teaching of first-year composition across two scales: the labor of their writing assessment practices *and* the labor of their writing assessment literacy development. Listening to the stories of the GTAs in this study, I mirror the question Julie Lindquist (2012) asked in her critique of the academic marketplace: "which knowledge-making practices are enabled, and which are constrained, within the labor economy of writing studies?" (p. 646). The division of labor risk GTAs' status as learners by implying a split between the knowledge-making practices of learning and teaching, one in which GTAs assumably learn all they need to learn about teaching and assessing writing *before* they become instructors of record. The participants, however, demonstrated the substantial influence of simultaneous teaching and learning. This study contends that writing assessment literacy development—a continuous, multilayered process of learning and growth that GTAs cultivate through experience, practice, and reflection—is a significant part of the work of new GTAs. In addition to and beyond "the contradictory unity of concrete labor and abstract labor" (Harvie, 2007, p. 235), I propose that *literacy labor* characterizes GTAs' first year as instructors of record in that their labor is productive of their own learning.

Literacy labor accounts for the effort invested into acquiring, practicing, and developing writing assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices, drawing attention to the physical, mental, emotional, and embodied labors that GTAs invest into their own learning. It features the role of experience in learning developing, highlighting the material, intellectual, and affective dimensions of writing assessment literacy development. Until now, the construct of writing assessment literacy has been taken up more in the field of second language writing/applied linguistics—to support training ESL/EFL teachers—and the field of education—to support training K-12 teachers—than in the discipline of rhetoric and composition (see Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion). The primary existing model of writing assessment literacy in second language acquisition/applied linguistics comes from Crusan et al. (2016), who defined *writing assessment literacy* as knowledge, beliefs, and practices. Attending to more specific dimensions of assessment knowledge in teacher education, Xu and Brown (2016) developed a model of teaching assessment literacy in practice (TALIP), defining a teacher's assessment ability as their knowledge base, conceptions of assessment, institutional and sociocultural contexts, assessment literacy in practice, teacher learning, and teacher identity (re)construction. However, these models minimize the literacy development fostered *through* teaching.

Moreso than these existing conceptualizations, this research study articulates *literacy labor* to point to the role of prior, lived, and classroom teaching experience in the phenomenon of writing assessment literacy. For graduate student instructors serving as first-time instructors of record, teaching is more than theoretical or intellectual work (Dryer, 2015); it is also literacy work. The *work* of writing assessment literacy consists of material products (written commentary on student work, grading papers, conferencing with students) and immaterial development of learning, processes, and practices. It also includes the *work*ing conditions of the program,

department, and institution. The *labor* of writing assessment literacy refers to the tremendous amount of time, effort, and energy that GTAs exert to do their work. Literacy labor constitutes the work of new graduate student instructors and characterizes GTAs' first year as instructors of record. This project demonstrates how studying writing assessment literacy narratively reveals the experiential and process-based nature of teacher learning, the affective and emotional dimensions of writing assessment, and the material and labor conditions of literacy development.

By understanding writing assessment literacy as labor, this study provides insight into the nature of writing assessment literacy and the experiences of novice composition instructors. This framing reveals that GTAs are often undersupported in their learning and underresourced in the composition classroom, and their ongoing literacy development has often been overlooked and unacknowledged. Examination of GTAs' experiences—prior educational experiences, current graduate educational experiences, and present experiences teaching as instructors of record for the first time at UTK—accounts for the ways that novice instructors move from theory (classroom learning) to practice (classroom teaching) while also speaking to the struggle that arises from the separation between writing pedagogy education and composition instruction. I have shown how GTAs' concrete and abstract labor has been devalued, especially given that, "unlike literary study, the value that counts in compositional work is rarely imagined as value 'intrinsic' to the work itself, but as the economic exchange value of the commodified literacy skills which composition is expected to produce" (Horner, 2000, p. 16). However, labor theories of value offer a lens through which to see the intrinsic worth of writing assessment literacy development. GTAs have worth inherent to their status as graduate students, instructors, and learners, and their literacy labor is innately valuable to themselves, their students, and their institutions. Beyond physical labor, abstract labor both has value and creates value (Harvie,

2007) because it is integral to GTA development, a process to which graduate students devote extensive invisible time and effort. GTAs have historically been disadvantaged in an "academic marketplace" that "rewards certain forms of knowledge"—and work, and labor, and bodies—"over others" (Lindquist, 2012, p. 645). But as the working class of the field of rhetoric and composition (Brown, 2023), GTAs' literacy labor must be recognized, valued, supported, and protected to advance equity in the teaching and learning of writing.

The Work of Writing Assessment Literacy Development: A Discussion

The development of assessment literacy has been identified as an integral competency and skill for teachers of all subjects, student populations, and levels across pre-service, secondary, and postsecondary teaching (Brookhart, 1999; Engelsen & Smith, 2014; Scarino, 2013; Stiggins, 1991). However, writing assessment literacy has received insufficient attention in the field of composition studies, particularly in the field's approaches to the training of graduate student instructors (Saenkhum, 2020). In this study, graduate student instructors developed their writing assessment literacy primarily through teaching experience that occurred after they entered the classroom as instructors of record. Therefore, writing assessment literacy development can be conceived as a process of experiential learning, with experience bridging the divide between theory and practice. Although experiential learning has not been typically theorized for the training of graduate student instructors, teacher education programs have studied the value of practical, field-based learning (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Jenset et al., 2018). Experiential learning in teacher professional development has been defined as a purposeful approach to the training of new teachers that centers "experimenting, reflecting, and adapting new theories, practices, and content while in the classroom" (Girvan et al., 2008, p. 129). For participants in this research study, much of the experimenting, reflecting, and adapting that

shaped their assessment practices occurred concurrently with the teaching of first-year composition. Yet, without much ongoing support from writing pedagogy education, GTAs struggled to reflect and adapt. Reflection is key to both teacher learning (e.g., Fischer, 2000; Girvan et al., 2016; Levin & Ammon, 2002; Wisniewski, 2018) *and*, as I found, writing assessment literacy development. GTAs' assessment practices and beliefs emerged at the interface between prior educational experiences and present teaching experiences. Since assessment knowledge and beliefs inform assessment practice, GTAs need to gain the capacity to reflect, identify, and adapt their knowledge and beliefs to teaching and assessment contexts.

This study identified several conditions that impact the development of writing assessment literacy. The aspects of formal writing pedagogy that most impacted GTAs were teaching assistantship, tutoring, composition pedagogy coursework, and Composition Office workshops and support. The usefulness of each dimension was highly individualized, further highlighting the role of personal prior experience and knowledge in writing assessment literacy development. GTAs in this study, for example, had highly divisive experiences with teaching assistantship, in which some received ample mentorship and others did not. Participants felt that the tutoring impacted their assessment practices, but not necessarily tutor training. GTAs often felt ambivalent about composition pedagogy coursework; while the MA/MFA students reported learning and practicing pedagogical concepts, they still felt unprepared to enter the classroom to teach and assess writing. The PhD students, who took composition pedagogy coursework at other institutions before coming to UTK, largely felt the same about the course's inability to adequately prepare them for the realities of the classroom. The Composition Office served as the main source of teaching and assessment support for GTAs immediately before and during their first year as instructor of record. Yet, because participants in this study tended to use the Office's

resources to “survive” their first year in the classroom (Restaino, 2012), the GTAs perceived a more instrumental function and limited usefulness in the support offered by the Comp Office.

Beyond the formal preparation, four conditions emerged as highly influential for writing assessment literacy development: peer-to-peer influence, positionality, emotional labor, and working conditions. During their first year as instructors of record, GTAs sought support, collegiality, and conversation with fellow graduate student instructors. Indeed, participants felt that peer influence provided more readily available, accessible, and actionable support than the lessons learned from their writing pedagogy education (Athnos et al., 2022; Bishop, 1997; Restaino, 2012; Wisniewski, 2014; Qualley, 2017), particularly with assessment practices (Reid & Estrem, 2012). Participants were also highly influenced by their positionality as graduate students, in which factors such as age and life experience, disciplinary identification, and learning disposition impacted how GTAs taught and assessed writing (Austin & Moreland, 2023; Clem, 2022). GTAs in this study reported that affective experience shaped assessment beliefs and practices (Cervantes & Inlow, 2022). The personal, emotional dimensions of writing assessment (e.g., Caswell, 2011, 2014) were amplified by graduate students’ tenuous positionality within the institution. Further, difficult working conditions and economic realities (Brown, 2023; Osorio et al., 2021) negatively impacted GTAs’ writing assessment literacy development. The economic and material struggles GTAs experienced limited, at times, their capacities to teach and assess writing in ways consistent with their assessment beliefs and knowledge.

This study also explored how writing assessment knowledge and beliefs impact writing assessment practice. The findings align with prior research that suggests that teachers’ values, beliefs, and conceptions shape their assessment practice (Barnes et al., 2014, 2017; Barrot, 2016; Ben Hedia, 2020; Brown & Bailey, 2008; Bucci, 2002; Fives & Buehl, 2012; James & Pedder,

2006; Latif & Wasim, 2022; Remesal, 2011). Assessment knowledge is inherent to all assessment practices; assessment practices can also reflect beliefs about assessment, writing, teaching, and learning. As the case of labor-based assessment demonstrates, GTAs in this study felt empowered by the Composition Office's culture of equitable assessment to choose methods and approaches consonant with their beliefs. While these beliefs about assessment connect to GTAs' formal writing pedagogy education, beliefs can also originate from prior experiences and conceptions of assessment and writing. Assessment beliefs indicate the significance of past experiences, while assessment knowledge and practices often reflect formal preparation and training.

Challenges of Writing Assessment

The stories collected in this research study cannot be understood separately from the graduate students who told them, the locations where they took place, and the circumstances in which they happened. In this study, assessment was the site of much of graduate students' learning, growth, and success as first-time instructors of record at UTK, yet it was also a place of many challenges. In this section, I review the collective challenges of participants in this study to present a more complete view of graduate student instructors' writing assessment literacy development. I summarize the individual, institutional, and disciplinary challenges that GTAs experienced in the development of writing assessment literacy. These challenges are particularly relevant to writing program administrators (WPAs) and writing pedagogy educators who aim to better anticipate the needs of GTAs. The many layers of challenges that GTAs experience—along individual, institutional, and disciplinary scales—identify opportunities for writing pedagogy educators to intervene to better support the development of writing assessment literacy.

It is well-documented that there is a lack of adequate teacher preparation in theories and practices of writing assessment (Mertler, 1999; Stiggins, 1999). Consequently, graduate student

instructors often struggle with writing assessment (Restaino, 2012). The exploratory study I conducted prior to my dissertation research identified graduate student instructors' greatest challenges with writing assessment as time management, ethical writing assessment, negotiating identity and authority, and providing and explaining feedback (Crozier, 2023). As a stipulation, the majority of participants in the prior exploratory study used conventional grading practices; in the present study, 100% of GTAs used alternative assessment practices. The use of alternative assessment methods mediated some challenges that GTAs have traditionally faced, particularly time management and ethical concerns. Yet, participants in this study still struggled consistently with assessment as novice instructors; "it wasn't all a bowl full of cherries," said Theresa.

High workload demands posed a significant challenge for GTAs in this study. Theresa, in sharing that "time would be my biggest worry just because it would take me so much time just to give comments to students," reflects a key concern for all GTAs in this study. In addition to requiring more preparation to assess writing, graduate student instructors need support to balance their teaching and assessment responsibilities with their coursework, scholarship, and personal lives. Not only does the act of reading and responding to student writing take time, but GTAs' efforts to tailor feedback to each student require even more time and effort, including emotional labor. Many participants in this study cared deeply about personalizing their feedback to each student. Grey shared by the end of the academic year, "I've continued to make sure certain students get certain feedback." For GTAs, feedback is very dependent on student personality, identity, background, experience; feedback is very tailored and personalized, which often requires a higher investment of time and labor. However, the lack of preparation leads to feelings of unpreparedness, doubtfulness, and anxiety. It also creates negative material effects, such as a lack of time management. The GTAs at UTK, like graduate student instructors elsewhere, feel

like "'donkeys in the department' because of their heavy workload, sizeable responsibility, and limited autonomy" (Park & Ramos, 2002, p. 47). High workloads create barriers to writing assessment literacy, shaping the ways GTAs approach assessment in their classrooms.

Participants in this study also experienced challenges associated with the structure of the program and the structures of the institution. Institutional environment is important to consider given that teaching context always impacts assessment literacy (Crusan et al., 2016). The difficulties of being a graduate student instructor surface in writing assessment, complicated by programmatic conditions such as course load, class size, and the nature and amount of training offered by the department. Novice instructors with "heavy teaching loads were more inclined to talk about assessment negatively" (Crusan et al., 2016, p. 63). Factors such as course load made GTAs worry about assessment; as Lainey shared, "it was just hard to do 42 students and give them all the same caliber feedback." Many MA/MFAs with a 2-2 load share this experience. Even though PhD students are generally perceived as more well-prepared to teach, PhD students at UTK taught a 1-1 load in their first year. But even for someone with three years of teaching experience, Scarlet felt the most challenging aspect was going to be "teaching a new course essentially," which will "keep you on your toes." Being an instructor of record for the first time at UTK brought a unique set of challenges related to learning a new curriculum, diverse student demographics, and localized institutional constraints. Programmatic conditions intertwined with positionality and workload to impact all participants, regardless of the training they received; Rose summarized, "I feel like there are really good resources out there. I feel like I didn't receive preparation for teaching this volume of students." The general sense of unpreparedness felt by participants in this study led to feelings of anxiety about teaching, a "tricky road" (Sage) for first-time instructors of record to navigate.

The narratives left by this study reveal that the individual and institutional challenges that GTAs experience are situated within broader disciplinary debates and divisions. Institutional tensions go beyond the structural dichotomy between English studies and composition studies. The assumed separation between the value of scholarship and the grunt work of teaching pervades GTAs' experiences in English graduate programs, including participants in this research study. Graduate students come to their writing pedagogy education with "content, mindsets, pedagogies, and skills and expertise from their home disciplines" (Reed, 2020, para. 19). English GTAs who do not see rhetoric and composition as their home discipline may view the teaching of FYC as serving a degree requirement rather than a genuine professional development opportunity. Such graduate students see that their "graduate programs more frequently offer preparation for teaching writing as opposed to teaching literature" (Carillo, 2019, para. 12). In this study, GTAs had strong disciplinary identifications with literature, creative writing, or rhetoric, writing, and linguistics. These identifications forged dispositions and attitudes about the teaching of FYC that impacted how GTAs teach and assess writing in the course. It is well-established that most writing pedagogy education programs do not devote enough attention to teaching new composition instructors about writing assessment (Saenkhum, 2020; Weigle, 2007). Because most writing pedagogy education happens within English Departments, surrounded by historical and disciplinary assumptions about FYC, change is slow to happen.

What Must Be Done? Implications for Writing Pedagogy Education

The findings of this research study can usefully inform writing pedagogy education for graduate students. Based on my reconceptualization of the development of writing assessment literacy as labor, I consider what adequate support, preparation, and training for GTAs can look

like. In this section, I suggest disciplinary recommendations for writing pedagogy education that introduce, in the following sub-sections, specific, local recommendations for UTK.

Recommendations for Writing Pedagogy Education

I make five overarching recommendations for English Departments and writing programs:

1. Articulate writing assessment literacy development as a learning outcome for writing pedagogy education.
2. Provide more training on writing assessment theory and practice.
3. Extend training into and beyond GTAs' first year as instructor of record.
4. Integrating metacognitive skills and reflective writing to inform literacy development.
5. Center experiential learning opportunities in writing pedagogy education.

Primarily, I believe that writing assessment literacy development should be clearly articulated and purposely pursued as a definitive goal for writing pedagogy education. The development of writing assessment literacy should be an explicit learning outcome for any training program that prepares GTAs to teach first-year composition courses. Following my recommendation to support writing assessment literacy in writing pedagogy education, GTAs need to receive more training on writing assessment theory and practice. English Departments have a responsibility to acknowledge that "assessment is intrinsic to effective instruction" (Wiliam, 2011, p. 3) and thus deserves equal weight as pedagogical preparation. Rather than tacitly assuming that assessment falls under the umbrella of composition pedagogy, English Departments should provide overt training and preparation for writing assessment theory and practice. Assessment theory accounts for underlying ideologies, historical contexts, and disciplinary frameworks that inform assessment practices. Relatedly, assessment practices may include responding to student writing, providing formative and summative feedback, leveraging

verbal assessment and writing conferences, creating rubrics, designing assessment materials, making decisions based on assessment results, and using equitable assessment methods.

Third, teacher training must continue during and beyond GTAs' first year as instructors of record (e.g., Reid & Estrem, 2012). GTAs need training structures that extend into and beyond their first experiences in the classroom so they can better connect their writing pedagogy education to practical teaching and assessment experiences. Bridging training and teaching, assessment literacy education should also include guided reflection (Girvan et al., 2016) that provides GTAs with the space and support to reflect on their prior assessment knowledge, beliefs, and experiences to usefully inform their developing assessment practices. Finally, writing pedagogy education needs to include experiential learning opportunities (Girvan et al., 2016), such as class observations, conferencing with students, interviewing experienced instructors, conducting teaching activities, and hearing from guest speakers. GTAs need active, experiential learning opportunities that connect theory with practice, integrate prior knowledge with values and beliefs, and support investment in writing assessment literacy development.

Necessarily so, teacher training is highly localized and contextualized to institutions and communities (Estrem & Reid, 2012; Finn, 2023); its idiosyncrasies account for one key reason that "there are no national standards that guide graduate assistantship training, which means that graduate students' preparation varies considerably" (Carillo, 2019, para. 9). The necessary localization of writing pedagogy education informed my choice to focus solely on the experiences of first-year GTAs in UTK's English Department; at the same time, I hope to provide a model that WPAs can apply to similar teacher training programs at comparable doctoral-granting universities in the U.S. that seek more integrative, active, and supportive models of teacher preparation. In GTA training, "the full complexity of the process by which

people move from being students toward being professors mitigates against programs designed around teaching tips or a series of quick workshops" (Nyquist & Sprague, 1998, pp. 61–62).

Below, I continue to explore the implications of the study for writing pedagogy education with a focus on the English Department at UTK and the hope that readers see the use of these recommendations beyond UTK. I classify these interrelated recommendations for the Department, Composition Office, and the Composition Pedagogy course to articulate how each unit can support the development of writing assessment literacy (see **Figure 20**).

Recommendations for the English Department

In researching the history of writing pedagogy education and listening to the stories of GTAs in this study, I identified some of the ways that UTK's English Department's teacher preparation program falls short of meeting the needs of new GTAs. Yancey (2001) stated that an effective training program "serves the needs of the [graduate] students," "prepares graduate students to teach both curriculum and individual students," and "encourages the developing faculty member to reflect upon and learn from practice" (p. 65). From my findings, I believe that many English GTAs at UTK feel that their writing pedagogy education serves the needs of the institution and its undergraduates rather than the professional development of GTAs. To the second point, GTAs in this study felt that their training provided valuable knowledge about teaching, but they did not feel prepared to actually enter the classroom and work with individual students. The training especially lacked preparation on assessing student writing. Although GTAs had opportunities for reflection during their training, the reflection seemed to end right when GTAs needed it most—during their first semester as instructors of record.

It is important to note that these points apply differently to second-year MA/MFAs, who reap the most benefits from the four-part teacher training program, and first-year PhDs, who only

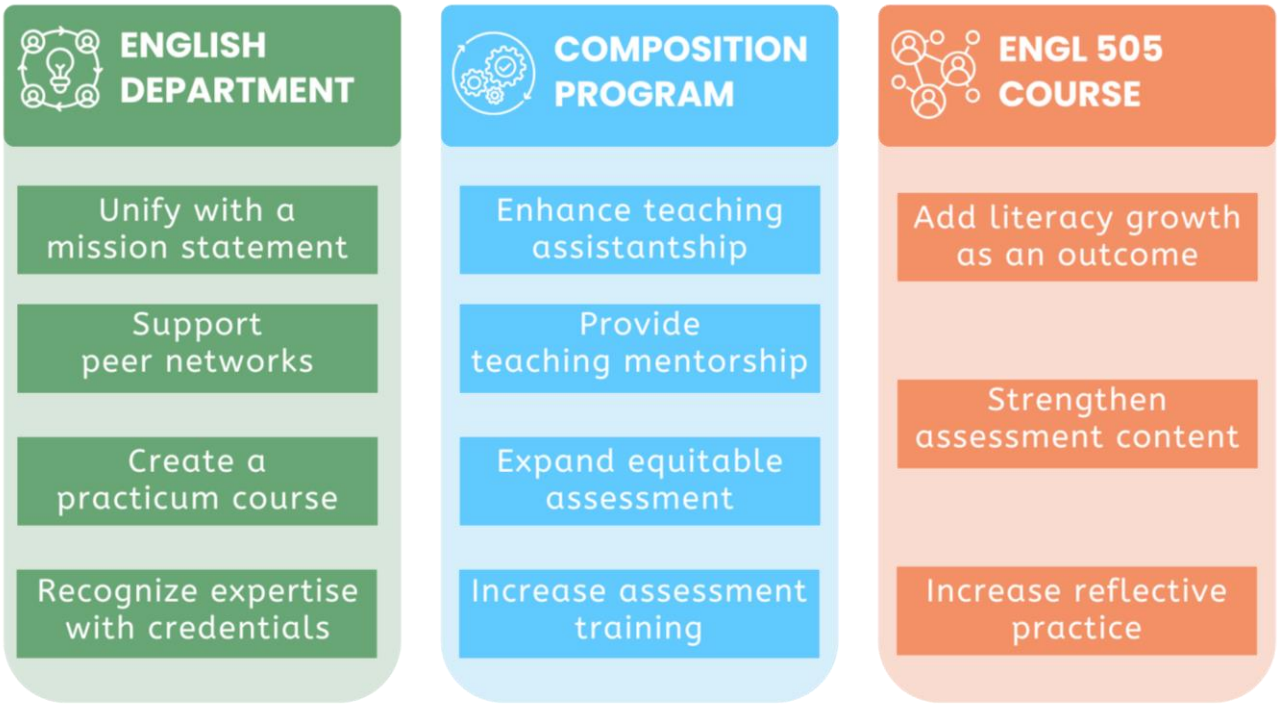


Figure 20. Recommendations for writing pedagogy education at UTK.

receive the Composition Office's August Workshops and resources before entering the classroom for the first time at UTK. I believe that the Department can address these concerns, better support GTAs, and alleviate discrepancies in support between MA/MFAs and PhDs by (a) composing a mission statement for writing pedagogy education that unites the facets of preparation and communicates a clear, consistent message about their value; (b) providing financial, material, and social support for peer networks so GTAs can receive collegial assistance and fellowship; (c) creating a credit-bearing practicum course that GTAs take alongside their first semester teaching; and (d) offering a credential in teaching first-year composition for GTAs who complete the composition pedagogy and practicum courses as well as one additional RWL course.

Unify Writing Pedagogy Education with a Mission Statement

The English Department at UTK needs a mission statement for its writing pedagogy education program, one that primarily champions the value of teacher training for GTAs. Mission statements are common in K-12 teacher preparation programs across the U.S. (Misco et al., 2023), but I assert that their value has not been considered in the context of writing pedagogy education programs. A mission statement can serve to unite GTAs' experiences across the facets of their preparation—teaching assistantship, tutoring, composition pedagogy coursework, and workshops—as well as unify GTA training and learning across degree coursework, scholarship, and teaching. The Department needs clear, consistent standards and learning outcomes for each dimension of teacher preparation to ensure alignment across preparation and between the Composition Office, English Department, and Judith Anderson Herbert Writing Center. The Department can use a mission statement to more explicitly frame GTA education "as a site for the professional formation of graduate students" (Latterell, 1996a, p. 24). Currently, the historic, institutional, and disciplinary rationales for the structure of the teacher preparation program are

largely tacit, underexplored, and invisible to new GTAs joining the department for a limited time. Since "messages [that] TAs receive about teaching and how they process them" significantly impact the development of GTAs (Nyquist & Sprague, 1998, p. 64), the Department needs to promote a more united, supportive, positive vision of the teaching of first-year writing. A mission statement supports overall literacy development and learning by encouraging GTAs toward a common goal, making the scaffolding of their training more explicit.

A mission statement offers three primary benefits for a teacher education program and, by extension, a writing pedagogy education program:

> First, it allows internal constituents to focus on aspects of the institution that should be important. This focus can ultimately help ensure resources are deployed and people are hired in line with particular aims and goals. Second, it creates a shared sense of purpose to communicate to the public the key values and goals of the institution. This can also help attract students who are interested in a particular institution because of its identity and the embodiment of its values. Third, it creates a clear measurement tool to judge the success of an institution . . . [and] the extent to which its aims and values are realized. (Misco et al., 2023, p. 201)

A mission statement can communicate to new GTAs that everyone in the Department is invested in their success, that their professional development and learning will be well-supported, and that their writing pedagogy education is designed to serve their needs.

The creation of a successful mission statement requires engagement and investment from all members of the department, including GTAs, lecturers, faculty, and administrators across the three divisions. It is precisely this collegiality that points to the value of a mission statement; each rank and division can contribute their perspectives on the value of writing pedagogy

education, understanding that it is the mission of everyone in the department—the whole of English studies as a discipline—to support developing instructors. Inviting everyone in the Department to contribute to the mission statement can generate buy-in from faculty and administrators who typically see teacher training as the domain of the Composition Office alone. The writing pedagogy education program in UTK's English Department can lead the way among doctoral-granting institutions in the U.S. to compose a mission statement for teacher training.

In Appendix D, I present a proposal to the Department's Composition Committee for the creation of a mission statement for writing pedagogy education. The proposal provides a workable framework as a starting place to begin conversations about how to create a mission statement. The vision for the mission statement articulates a framework with the purpose, learning outcomes, mission, key values, and support structures and resources of the writing pedagogy education program. With approval from the Composition Committee and the creation of a sub-committee to lead the mission statement efforts, I suggest first conducting anonymous surveys—one for each contingent (GTAs, lecturers, faculty)—to collect everyone's perspectives and ideas on the statement. A survey is a useful instrument because it allows people time to think and reflect while ensuring confidentiality. Then, with revisions based on feedback, the mission statement can be reviewed by the Admin Committee. With any needed revisions, the mission statement can encounter a vote at a Department meeting. Then, the mission statement could be published on the Department website, included in the Department's Graduate Student Handbook, and distributed to every new GTA who joins the department as part of their welcome packet.

Continue To Support Peer Support Networks

The second recommendation for the Department, in recognition of the role that GTAs have in supporting and training each other, is to create a formal structure for peer support.

Support systems impact teacher learning (e.g., Kurtts & Levin, 2002); in this research study, two of the conditions that most impacted GTAs' writing assessment literacy development, even more so than their formal training, were peer support (Nyquist & Sprague, 1998) and teaching experience. As I write this conclusion in Fall 2024, the Department has already started these efforts with the creation of a peer teacher professionalization group called STEER (Supporting Teaching Excellence Through Education and Reflection) approved for two years with $14,600 per year in support from the Hodges Fund.[13] STEER began in Fall 2024 in response to the concerns raised by the APR and GSE listening session in the 2023–2024 academic year and as a progression of the Pedagogy People group successfully started and led by Chris Mayer. While the creation of STEER moved the Department leagues in the right direction, the group had relatively low attendance in its first year. In part, low participation might stem from the fact that neither the Department nor the Composition Office has helped advertise the group or encouraged GTAs to attend. Peer-to-peer support and networking continues to happen in the Department; GTAs will always find moments to support each other, from passing hallway conversations to sharing lesson plans and class activities. However, the Department should formalize the efforts of STEER through an increase the material and financial resources allocated to peer support with ample and improved campus spaces, supplies, and sponsored social gatherings and networking.

Establish a Composition Practicum Course

I recommend that all first-year GTAs in the English Department be required, as part of their writing pedagogy education program, to take ENGL 505: Composition Pedagogy as well as

[13] As the AD of First-Year Composition at the time, I collaborated with Chris Mayer (at the time, a third-year PhD in Rhetoric, Writing, and Linguistics) on the STEER proposal by offering suggestions and ideas and co-authoring parts of the proposal as an invisible collaborator. Thus, my contributions to the proposal were informed by the insights I was starting to uncover during the data collection process of this research study. The STEER group was co-led in its inaugural 2024-2025 academic year by Chris Mayer and Sarah Yancey (a fifth-year PhD in Literature).

a Composition Practicum course. I define a *practicum* as a course that graduate students take *concurrently* with teaching, particularly during their first semester as instructors of record. A composition practicum course—often a one- or two-credit course in which GTAs meet weekly and discuss their ongoing teaching and assessment experiences—is a well-established method of support for graduate instructors (Cicchino, 2020; Dobrin; 2005). The participants in this study revealed that the first semester is such a pivotal experience for GTAs (e.g., Restaino, 2012), so writing pedagogy education cannot end before they step foot in the classroom. Further, a practicum responds to the need to bridge the ENGL 505: Composition Pedagogy course into the classroom. All first-year GTAs—MAs, MFAs, and PhDs—would be enrolled in the course. MA/MFAs would take ENGL 505 in the Spring and the practicum in the Fall, while PhDs would take the practicum in the Fall and ENGL 505 in the Spring. The course would be required for second-year MA/MFAs and first-year PhDs, regardless of any teaching experience they had prior to coming to UTK. Therefore, all graduate student instructors would take two courses focused on composition theory and pedagogy as well as writing assessment theory and practice, providing more training and preparation for teaching. Additionally, a two-course sequence that features a practicum helps GTAs connect their preparation to their own classroom teaching and addresses the impact of classroom teaching experience on writing assessment literacy development. It can also help instructors adapt to the challenges they experience, including balancing time management, ethical considerations, and emotional labor.

A one-credit practicum course, for example, could meet once per week, and students could submit classroom teaching materials and a reflection at the end of the semester.[14] As a one-

[14] The structure and requirements of the course will depend on the number of credit hours allocated to the class. An increase in credit hours correlates with an increase in work completed through the practicum. For example, a two-credit practicum could culminate with a revised teaching philosophy and written reflection.

credit course, it could potentially be taught by an experienced (fifth-year or higher) PhD candidate or trusted lecturer seeking the experience. Given that, in Fall 2024, the English Department instituted a 2-1 teaching load for fifth-year GTAs with a required professional development component, the opportunity to teach a practicum course might fulfil this need for experienced PhD candidates. The course could also be taught by a faculty member with expertise in composition pedagogy in exchange for banked hours or a stipend; the Department could also explore team teaching models.

Recognize Expertise in Composition Pedagogy with a Credential

To add value to the practicum course proposed above, I propose that the Department create a formal credential or specialization in the "Teaching of First-Year Composition" or a similar designation. GTAs could earn it by taking the proposed practicum, ENGL 505, and one additional RWL- or pedagogy-focused course. An optional credential can formally recognize GTAs' expertise and experience in composition pedagogy. I use the term *credential* because what I suggest does not meet UTK's requirements for a graduate certificate, which often includes 12+ hours of coursework (though such an option could be pursued). Among UTK's peer and aspirational institutions, Michigan State University's (MSU) English Department offers the closest program to what I describe—the Graduate Certificate in College Teaching—and provides a useful model for UTK.[15]

Figure 21 provides a screen capture of a brief description of the program from MSU's Graduate Student Handbook (2022). According to MSU (2022), earning the certificate in college

[15] As of December 2024, UTK's Institutional Research and Strategic Analysis identified aspirational institutions as Michigan State University, North Carolina State University, Penn State, Purdue University, University of Georgia, and the University of Illinois. Comparative peer institutions were Auburn University, Clemson University, Iowa State University, University of Colorado Boulder, University of Kentucky, University of Missouri, University of Nebraska- Lincoln, University of Oklahoma, University of South Carolina, and Virginia Tech.

College of Arts and Letters Graduate Certificate in College Teaching

Designed to provide background and training in teaching at the college level, the **Graduate Certificate in College Teaching** program includes course work, workshops and seminars that provide basic information on teaching and learning.
In addition, the program requires a mentored teaching experience and the development of a teaching portfolio. Part of the purpose of the program is to prepare graduate students to teach in a range of institutions such as community colleges, liberal arts colleges, research-intensive universities, etc. The program is designed to supplement the student's degree program, and it may be tailored to meet the needs and goals of individual participants. The program provides coherence for the varied teaching experiences TAs gain as part of their careers as graduate students. This certification program offers teaching assistants a way of documenting their developing expertise as teachers. The materials developed in the teaching portfolio, along with the certificate and designation on the student's transcript, may assist graduates seeking employment in an increasingly competitive job market.

Figure 21. Description of MSU's (2022) Graduate Certificate in College Teaching.

teaching requires evidence of five core competencies: (a) developing discipline-related teaching strategies; (b) creating effective learning environments; (c) incorporating technology in your teaching; (d) understanding the university context; and (e) assessing student learning. The first competency is satisfied by pedagogy coursework, while the next three are satisfied by attending professional development workshops or seminars offered by the Graduate School, Department, or other on- or off-campus organizations. The final competency is satisfied by completion of a mentored teaching project. For each of the five competencies, GTAs compose a project description, artifacts, materials, rationales, and an interpretation or reflection on what they learned and the impact on their teaching. Graduate students compile all these materials in a cumulative teaching portfolio, which both earns the certification and generates a meaningful collection of evidence of teaching effectiveness, which GTAs can use in applications for teaching awards, scholarships, internships, or jobs in an increasingly competitive job market.

I draw upon MSU's graduate certificate to show how UTK could develop a similar program, co-led by Graduate Studies *with* the RWL Division or the Composition Office, that fits the English Department's local context. For example, I suggested previously that GTAs earn a teaching credential by taking three pedagogy-focused courses; there could be alternate pathways to achieve the specialization that include participation in professional development events, observations, teaching workshops, teaching portfolio creation, and more. The opportunity to earn a credential creates a tangible way for GTAs to translate the value of their teaching experience for future careers, even for MA/MFA students who do not pursue PhDs or graduate students who do not pursue academic careers. To further support the interests of literature and creative writing graduate students, the Department could offer additional practicum or pedagogy courses in teaching literature and teaching creative writing, which could also count toward the credential.

Recommendations for the Composition Office

The Composition Office traditionally bears the sole responsibility for GTAs' ongoing pedagogical training during and beyond their first year teaching as instructors of record, particularly prior to the implementation of STEER in Fall 2024. Due to the structure of the program, GTAs receive little formal training during their first year as instructors of record. The MA/MFAs received most of their training during their first year as teaching apprentices; during the second year, they only received support from the Composition Office. Likewise, PhD students had August Workshops as the only formal intervention to support teaching and assessment before they became instructors of record. After August Workshops, the Comp Office provides ongoing assistance such as Winter Workshops, the FYC Canvas site's repository of resources, office hours, and occasional additional workshops. Yet, participants in this research study ranked the Composition Office's workshops and resources as least impactful for the development of writing assessment literacy. I surmise that most participants in this research study did not perceive the Comp Office as providing ongoing support other than the August Workshops (before the Fall semester begins) and Winter Workshops (over winter break). Further, participants did not often feel that the workshops, resources, and training provided by the Comp Office supported their writing assessment literacy.

The Composition Office can lead the charge for the more integrative approach to writing pedagogy education I propose. The Composition Office, as the face of continuing teaching support in the Department, can intervene to improve writing pedagogy education (with support from the broader department administration) by (a) concurrently improving teaching assistantship experiences for MA/MFAs and creating new mentorship structures for PhDs; (b)

expand its support for labor-based assessment approaches, including ungrading and equitable assessment; and (c) enhancing workshops and support for writing assessment.

Develop Teaching Assistantship and Mentorship for MAs, MFAs, and PhDs

I found in this study that first-year MA/MFAs had highly variable teaching assistantship experiences and first-year PhDs came to UTK with different levels of preparation. The current preparation model assumes that PhDs enter the program with some teaching experience and former training, relying on the idea that students with degrees already have enough knowledge and writing skill to teach FYC courses. Thus, the Composition Office should work to improve the teaching assistantship experiences for MA/MFAs and create mentorship structures for PhDs.

Again, as I write this chapter in Fall 2024, the Composition Office is implementing a new mentorship framework that pays teaching mentees, institutes clearer requirements, and creates new avenues for feedback and support for mentors and mentees.[16] Yet, programmatic structures historically exclude PhD students from the benefits of teaching assistantship. The Composition Office should work with the Department to create what I call *teaching mentorship* for first-year PhD students. Mentoring programs, which can follow a range of formats, enhance engagement, retention, and satisfaction (Verlinden, n.d.). Incoming PhD students can be paired with an experienced PhD student, lecturer, or faculty member who has taught FYC courses at UTK for at least two years. The Composition Office can similarly offer a stipend to mentors to meet with their mentee before the semester begins and at regular intervals throughout the semester. PhD mentor/mentee pairs can also do peer course observations, grading sessions, and review lesson plans. A group of mentors designated for PhD students can help these first-time instructors of

[16] When I was AD of First-Year Composition, I led the Composition Office in revising the previous mentor-mentee program guidelines to create new, clearer requirements and pay mentors for their labor. I wrote a Hodges Proposal and received $11,000 in funding to pay mentors as the cornerstone of the improved program.

record enculturate to the department and provided more immediate, personalized support for PhDs, especially those who bring no prior teaching experience. Thus, MA/MFAs should receive more structured teaching assistantship, while first-year PhDs and second-year MA/MAs should receive teaching mentorship, with support and stewardship from the Composition Office.

Expand Equitable Assessment

The fact that all GTAs in this research study used equitable assessment approaches speaks to one tangible way that the Composition Office positively impacted and supported writing assessment literacy development in the 2023–2024 academic year. Participants felt that they had agency and confidence to choose assessment approaches that best aligned with their beliefs and values. I identify the use of labor-based assessment, and the Comp Office's support for it, as one material support structure that helped GTAs move beyond their prior educational experiences as students (Stygall, 2002) and "begin to develop the perspective of a teacher" (Grossman, 1990, p. 138) with more theoretically and disciplinarily informed assessment practices. At the time this study ended, more than one-third of FYC instructors in the English Department used some form of equitable assessment, according to internal program assessment data.

As a result, the Composition Office should continue and expand its efforts in promoting and protecting the use of labor-based assessment approaches such as equitable assessment and ungrading. The FYC Canvas site already houses sample materials, including collaborative rubric activities, grading matrices/contracts, sample activities, and reflection prompts, which I added to the site. However, these materials may be difficult for GTAs to access. As such, the Comp Office should host brown bag lunches or create a video series in which instructors discuss their approaches to assessment. New instructors can read and view these approaches in action and hear from colleagues the benefits of their assessment methods. In partnership with the

Composition Pedagogy course, GTAs can understand the full repertoire of assessment practices available to them so they can make purposeful choices. Workshops, videos, or resources on equitable assessment should be shared and updated regularly throughout the semester instead of all taking place before the first semester of teaching. The Composition Office can maintain a visible, active presence in providing workshops and resources on writing assessment.

Increase Training and Workshops on Writing Assessment

The Composition Office can expand its offerings of workshops, trainings, and resources around writing assessment. New GTAs require training in writing assessment theory and practice (Saenkhum, 2020). Historically, to my knowledge, the Composition Office has offered one August Workshop session on writing assessment focused around using rubrics or giving feedback on student work. In recent years, the Composition Office has integrated discussions of assessment in a few sessions, including using and creating rubrics, writing comments on student work, and preserving time management with assessment. The Comp Office has also developed more robust offerings on the FYC Canvas site of sample rubrics, labor-based grading tools, and scholarship on writing assessment. However, some participants indicated that they found the resources difficult to find or they did not seek out the resources even when they needed them.

I believe that the Composition Office should continue its most recent trend of providing two full August workshop sessions focused on writing assessment—"Basics of Assessment, Feedback, and Response" and a "Rubric Development" session—as well as invoke assessment as a topic of conversation in sessions such as "Creating a Classroom Community," "Common Classroom Concerns," and "Developing a Teaching Persona." Then, throughout the semester, the Composition Office should offer workshops twice each semester (to parallel the two major projects in each course) at which instructors can learn more about best assessment theory and

practice and apply it to their own work. There should also be an assessment-focused session at Winter Workshops. The addition of regular workshops on writing assessment can increase the visibility of support that the Composition Office provides to both new and experienced instructors. These additional workshops can also create support structures that allow for ongoing teacher development and learning (Stenberg, 2002).

Recommendations for the Composition Pedagogy Course

As I arrive at the ENGL 505: Composition Pedagogy course, I come to the aspect of their training that GTAs perhaps engaged with most consistently. If nothing else, almost all graduate student instructors take a course in composition pedagogy (Dobrin, 2005). Yet, GTAs often enter the course with some apprehension and ambivalence (e.g., Dobrin, 2005; Dryer, 2012; Restaino, 2012). The course, like most formal preparation, is often framed as a programmatic requirement, meaning that it serves the department, institution, and future ungraduated students rather than the graduate students themselves. At UTK, the course has historically suffered because "once the teaching seminar course has been justified as 'job training,' it can also be dismissed on the same grounds it's not worth the same amount of attention from students as other graduate courses" (Marshall, 2004, p. 128). ENGL 505, however, can play a pivotal role in recalibrating writing pedagogy education around writing assessment literacy development and promoting the value of preparation for GTAs, serving both the immediate needs of the learners in the course *in addition* to the future imagined needs of their FYC students.

To articulate the implications of my findings for composition pedagogy coursework, I specifically draw on the experiences of the five MA/MFA participants, who all took ENGL 505 at UTK. The MA/MFA students had the most consistent experiences in ENGL 505, far more so than their teaching assistantship and tutoring. I also acknowledge the experiences of the PhD

students, who had previous composition pedagogy coursework at prior institutions. To begin, I advocate that the course should be required for all graduate students at UTK, including first-year PhD students; however, I recognize that such a change requires departmental support and alignment with other support structures outlined in these recommendations. Based on the findings in this research study, the Composition Pedagogy course can best facilitate the development of writing assessment literacy by (a) reframing learning outcomes around writing assessment literacy development and teacher learning; (b) dedicating equal class time to writing assessment knowledge and beliefs (processes) as well as practices (products); and (c) guiding new teachers to create a reflective journal that can continue into their first year teaching.

Articulate Literacy Development as a Course Learning Outcome

The ENGL 505 course should add new curriculum objectives that advocate for the development of writing assessment literacy and for GTAs to learn writing assessment theory and practice. As part of my research study, I reviewed prior ENGL 505 syllabi from Spring 2014, 2018, 2023, and 2024 semesters; participants in this research study took the course in Spring 2023. While the Spring 2018 syllabus has a section labeled “Course Goals” (see **Figure 22**), learning outcomes were absent from the more recent Spring 2023 and 2024 syllabi. However, graduate students enrolled in the course may benefit from clear, explicit course outcomes that provide more detail than the course description about specific skills and capacities that GTAs can gain through engagement in the course.

Course goals. This course is designed to help you:

- Develop a working understanding of how and why people learn to write and how writing may best be taught at the university level;
- Understand the goals, curricular design, and knowledge base that inform UTK's award-winning First-Year Composition program;
- Learn and practice evidence-based best practices for the teaching of writing, including how to place student writing at the center of your composition classes;
- Develop your confidence and skill as a writing teacher and your habits of reflective practice;
- Identify and investigate compelling questions related to writing instruction; and
- Produce a variety of teaching resources you can draw upon in ENGL 101/102 and beyond.

Figure 22. ENGL 505 course goals, Spring 2018 syllabus.

I recommend amending the outcomes listed above to include the following revisions (italicized) and additions (bolded):

- Develop a working understanding of how and why people learn to write and how writing may best be taught *and assessed* at the university level;
- **Develop your writing assessment literacy, including your assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices, to expand your understanding of various assessment theories and practices;**
- Understand the goals, curricular design, and knowledge base that inform UTK's award-winning First-Year Composition program;
- **Learn theory-informed approaches to writing assessment, including providing constructive written feedback on drafts, assessing writing formatively and summatively, practicing equitable assessment, creating rubrics, leveraging verbal feedback and writing conferences, and working with diverse learners;**

- Learn and practice evidence-based practices for the teaching *and assessing* of writing, including how to place student writing at the center of your composition classes;
- **Reflect on your prior educational experiences, background, and identity to curate your habits of reflective practice and unique approaches to teaching that inform your confidence and skills as a composition instructor;**
- Identify and investigate compelling questions related to the teaching *and assessing* of writing; and
- Produce a variety of teaching *and assessment* resources you can draw upon in ENGL 101/102 and beyond.

Developing the course goals to explicitly support professional development, enhance ongoing learning, and grow writing assessment literacy further supports the need for PhD students to be required to take the course. Similar to the composition practicum course I suggested, ENGL 505 is only strengthened by including GTAs with a variety of backgrounds, experiences, and beliefs, so those with teaching experience add to the peer support in the course.

Expand Course Content and Activities on Writing Assessment

The ENGL 505 course should endeavor to support GTAs across assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices. I have argued throughout this dissertation that writing pedagogy education should incorporate more training on theories and practices of writing assessment. The Composition Pedagogy course is well-placed to support writing assessment literacy development as an ongoing process. As I discussed in Chapter 5, the Spring 2023 ENGL 505 course primarily had two class sessions on respond to student writing and developing assessment materials. It's not unusual for a composition pedagogy syllabus to focus assessment around one or two weeks or class sessions, although it may be discussed regularly throughout the semester. Although the

MA/MFA participants enjoyed much about the course—especially the opportunity to connect with fellow GTAs and discuss teaching—they often struggled to recall specific lessons or approaches that they learned about assessment from the course. Participants ranked the ENGL 505 course below teaching assistantship and tutoring for its contributions to their writing assessment literacy development.

Following the suggestion to make literacy development an explicit course outcome, however, the ENGL 505 course could more fully support the development of writing assessment literacy by explicitly scaffolding the course calendar around weekly engagement with writing assessment. Weekly course readings, content, discussions, and/or activities should support GTAs to develop their assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices. Pedagogy and assessment should be considered in tandem, alongside each other, rather than prioritizing pedagogical knowledge at the expense of assessment knowledge. For example, pedagogical or disciplinary readings can pair with assessment-focused readings or supplementary materials. Ensuring that assessment never leaves the minds of GTAs in the class can also support them to integrate new knowledge from the course with their prior knowledge, experience, and values. Such an approach might help create the conditions in which GTAs begin to envision themselves as writing instructors with theorized and realized approaches to the teaching and assessing of writing. Additional assessment-centered activities and assignments should include assessing sample student papers, including in-process and final drafts, that need varying levels of revision so that GTAs can learn how to assess writing through active, reflective practice.

I understand that composition pedagogy courses already carry impossible expectations in the breadth of material covered, so suggestions to add content might come at the expense of other pedagogical knowledge. Certainly, the additional learning objectives, content, and activities

proposed for ENGL 505 could also be addressed in a separate graduate course, such as "Writing Assessment: History, Theory, and Practice," that prepares GTAs to assess writing. The RWL Division offered a graduate special topics seminar, ENGL 680: Issues in Writing Assessment, in Spring 2023, demonstrating graduate students' interest in such a course.

Focus on Reflection

Due to the lack of training during the first year teaching as instructors of record at UTK, participants in this study lacked opportunities for purposeful, meaningful reflection. While teacher preparation largely recognizes the importance of active learning and self-reflection (Clark & Hollingsworth, 2002; Desimone, 2011), programs often rely on techniques such as lectures and observations (Girvan et al., 2016). Further, teacher preparation programs often assume that teachers can reproduce the approaches they learned or saw; however, professional development is an ongoing process, and it is difficult for teachers to adapt what they know to specific contexts (Datnow et al., 2002). Composition scholars have recently emphasized the value of writing and reflection in the composition pedagogy or practicum course (Jankens & Lataweic, 2021; Reid, 2009). Reflective writing, in composition pedagogy for graduate and undergraduate students alike, offers a way for writers to uncover and explore their tacit and prior knowledge (Rice, 2015; Robertson et al., 2012). While each dimension of participants' tutor training involved some level of reflection, that reflection did not continue alongside teaching. More structured, purposeful reflection on their assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices could have led to further development of writing assessment literacy. Although there is often a schism between GTAs' training year and teaching year, participants in this study demonstrate that the first year as instructor of record is an extremely pivotal process of experiential learning. New GTAs need continued training and support alongside their teaching.

ENGL 505 can respond to this study's finding of the role of prior knowledge and experience by promoting guided refection that teaches GTAs reflective habits of mind and prepares them to continue critical reflective practice in their teaching. Effective pedagogy courses help new teachers develop "an analytical and reflective perspective toward practice" (Grossman, 1990, p. 135). Writing pedagogy educators know that it is essential to know who GTAs are in order to provide productive training. Therefore, each aspect of preparation should consider GTAs' prior knowledge, histories, and educational experiences (Bishop, 1997; Reid & Estrem, 2012; Stenberg, 2005; Weiser, 1999; Yancey, 2001). The recommendation to incorporate more reflective activities works in tandem with the suggestion to expand course content around writing assessment given that what GTAs learn from their training becomes useful only after graduate instructors can align the practices with their knowledge and beliefs (Brewer, 2020). The participants in this research study needed more opportunities to reflect on their teaching and assessment practices so they could continue to learn and develop during their first year as instructor of record. Reflective practice is often one of the main factors that influences instructors to change their classroom teaching and assessment practices (Hillocks, 1999). Prior iterations of ENGL 505 implemented several reflective writing activities as well as regular discussion board posts to analyze course readings. The Spring 2024 ENGL 505 course had a teaching journal used throughout the semester "as a repository" for informal reflective writing and in-class writing and notes; however, my study did not identify that MA/MFA students who took ENGL 505 continued reflective writing as instructors of record.

I suggest replacing discussion board posts and expanding the teaching journal assignment with a reflective teaching journal—one that develops metacognitive dispositions that GTAs feel empowered to continue into their first semester teaching. Graduate students can write in the

teaching journal throughout the course and begin a reflective practice that continues into their first year as instructors of record at UTK. Prompts can help GTAs uncover their tacit and prior knowledge, beliefs, values, and conceptions of writing, assessment, and literacy (e.g., Brewer, 2020). Once GTAs enter the classroom, they need reflection more than ever to support their continued learning and growth. GTAs often encounter new, sometimes confusing experiences when they teach for the first time, and the role of writing pedagogy education is to help them reflect, interpret, and (re)act based on those experiences. I suggest using a key text or framework such as *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher* (Brookfield, 2017), which employs four lenses for critical reflection: the autobiographical (self-reflection), the students' eyes (student feedback), colleagues' perceptions (peer assessment), and theoretical literature (scholarly engagement). The Composition Pedagogy course can hone GTAs' practices in reflection through autobiographical and scholarship-engaged modes, while the Composition Practicum course also supports reflection through student and peer assessment. Writing pedagogy educators need to understand the prior experiences and beliefs that inform GTAs' assessment knowledge and practice, so the reflective journal also supports the educator to offer more personalized, meaningful instruction.

Limitations & Future Research

While I have attempted to justify the design of the research study at every turn, several limitations warrant attention. Each limitation offers directions for future research. This study took place at one institution, UTK—a large public four-year land-grant institution in the southeastern United States—which limits the generalizability of the findings to other university contexts. However, the four aspects of writing pedagogy education explored in this research study—teaching assistantship, tutoring, composition pedagogy coursework, and departmental workshops—reflect the most common forms of training provided to GTAs (Cicchino, 2020),

ensuring relevant implications for similar peer institutions. Further, depth at one institution rather than breadth across institutions is consistent with other studies of GTAs' experiences with writing pedagogy education (e.g., Bishop, 1990; Ebest, 2005; Farris, 1996; Restaino, 2012). To capture a broader, more holistic view of writing pedagogy education, future studies could collaborate with co-researchers to collect narratives across multiple institutions to find generative commonalities across GTAs' experiences. Moreover, while this study followed GTAs for one academic year, more insight into the *development* of writing assessment literacy could be gained by interviewing participants again in their second, third, or final year teaching as graduate student instructors of record. A longitudinal approach could study transfer of learning (e.g., Driscoll, 2013; Nowacek, 2012), identifying whether and how teacher preparation and other conditions impact writing assessment literacy *over time*.

This research study collected only a limited sample of assessment materials from GTAs. I invited participants to self-select the assessment materials that they wanted to share with me, which may have provided an incomplete picture of their assessment practices. Despite a limited view of instructors' practices, the materials that I collected served their purpose because they guided participants to tell stories of their experiences in the discourse-based portions of Interviews #2 and #3. Analysis of a much larger, more representative corpus of assessment tools may have produced different results. Future research could collect *all* assessment materials created by instructors in one semester, rather than a small sample, to provide a more complete portrait of assessment practices.

Additionally, the sample size of eight participants means that some perspectives were excluded from the research study. Although a smaller sample size is not methodologically unsound within a narrative inquiry study or many other qualitative research methodologies, I

cannot claim generalizability from the findings. Yet, I would not want to. Most narrative inquirers “attend to time and place of narration and, by historicizing a narrative account, reject the idea of generic explanations” (Riessman, 2008, p. 74). Although the small sample size fits in the narrative inquiry tradition, it is worth stating that the participants do not represent the thoughts, feelings, or experiences of all GTAs. Future research can carefully attend to more fully highlighting perspectives not often explored in published research, including those of graduate students who are multilingual, people of color, Indigenous, LBTQIA+ community members, people with disabilities, and/or neurodiverse. By honoring and listening to a chorus of voices, faculty and program administrators can sustain writing pedagogy education as an ever-changing story, collectively told and retold by graduate student instructors as they grow and learn.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Prior UTK Dissertations About Graduate Student Instructors

Dissertations About Graduate Student Instructors at UTK by PhD Candidates in English

Year	Author	Title	Summary
2011	Casie Janelle Fedukovich[+]	Definitions of Labor: A Study of Working-Class Graduate Student Writing Instructors	This study "presents six narratives of self-identified working-class graduate student writing instructors. Broadly, it explores their individual definitions of class and the pedagogical import of these definitions."
2014	Carolyn Anne Wisniewski[+]	Graduate Teaching Assistants' Development of Expertise in Teaching First-Year Composition	"The purpose of this study was to learn about the processes by which novice college composition teachers develop pedagogical thinking, including how graduate teaching assistants respond to new teaching challenges."
2018	Kali Alexis Finn[+]	What Do GTAs Transfer into Their Pedagogical Practices?: A Qualitative Study about PhD Graduate Teaching Associates and the Transferability of Writing Pedagogy Education	"The purpose of this dissertation is to provide rich data about the extent to which experienced, first-year PhD graduate teaching associates reused or adapted their prior teaching experiences and writing pedagogy education into their pedagogical practices for a new teaching context."
2020	Kimberly A. Turner*	Dispositions of Shame: The Case for Transfer Pedagogy in the University of Tennessee's Graduate Studies Programs	"In this study, I examine how the shame UT graduate students feel about their writing is both intrinsically linked to the support and instruction they receive and how that shame impacts their ability to transfer prior writing knowledge to current writing tasks. I ask how rethinking graduate support structures across UT through the lens of transfer theory might better equip graduate students for the highly-situated, genre-specific tasks required of graduate-level writing."
2023	Megan Von Bergen[+]	(Un)Grading as Institutional Ecology: How (Alternative) Assessment Choices Shape Writing Classrooms	"A longitudinal case study of grades and grading in the 1920s and 30s and the turn towards ungrading (2020-2022) in the First-Year Composition program at UTK, this project argues that institutional architecture structures classroom writing assessment and that the outcomes of ungrading (an umbrella term for a range of alternative assessment practices, including labor-based grading) vary based on teachers' values/beliefs about writing."

* This dissertation is under embargo until August 15, 2026.
[+] Denotes a graduate student who was Assistant Director of First-Year Composition during their dissertation process.
Note. The table excludes thesis projects and dissertations about graduate student writers or multilingual graduate students outside of English.

Appendix B: Three-Interview Series Protocol

Interview Protocol #1: Summer 2023

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. This conversation is being recorded for research purposes. Please let me know if you do not agree to being recorded. You may request that the recording stop at any time. At that point, I will turn off the recorder and take notes by hand.

We'll start with questions about your educational experiences and background to give you an opportunity to tell me more about yourself.

1. Tell me about the writing that you did in your undergraduate classes.
    a. What types of writing classes did you take?
    b. What types of writing did you enjoy?
    c. What types of writing were challenging to you?

2. Did you take an FYC course or equivalent as an undergraduate?
    a. What do you remember about that class?

3. I'd like to know more about how you were taught to write. Can you tell me about one of your previous writing courses?
    a. What kinds of feedback did you get on your writing in that class?
    b. How would you describe the approach to assessment in the class?
    c. Can you tell a story about how this course impacted your development as a writer?
    d. Who are some people in your life who have acted as literacy sponsors—those people or organizations who taught you how to read or write (or withheld literacy from you)?

4. Do you remember any other specific feedback you have received on your writing?

5. Can you tell me about the tutoring experience you have had before coming to UT?
    a. *If yes: Ho*w have your experiences as a writing tutor impacted your approach to teaching?
    b. *If MA/MFA:* Tell me about the tutoring experiences you have had here at UT.

6. Can you tell me about the teaching experience you have had before coming to UT?
    a. *If yes:* What courses have you previously taught?
    b. Did you have any teaching experience before you came to UT?

7. What was your introduction to teaching at UT?
    a. What training, coursework, or mentorship experiences have prepared you to teach at UT?
    b. What other experiences have formed your approach to teaching?
    c. *If PhD:* What do you think your roles and responsibilities will be for the upcoming year?

8. How would you describe your teaching philosophy?
    a. What is your approach to teaching?

b. How do you see yourself in the classroom?
c. What role does assessment play in your teaching philosophy?

9. *If MA/MFA:* What are some of the roles and responsibilities that you had as a GTA last year?
   a. What do you think your roles and responsibilities will be for the upcoming year?

10. *If MA/MFA:* Did you take ENGL 505: Composition Pedagogy at UT?
   a. *If yes:* How did this course prepare you to teach FYC at UT?
   b. *If no:* What coursework did you take to prepare you to teach FYC at UT?

11. *If MA/MFA:* Tell me about your experiences in the mentoring program here.
   a. How were your experiences as a teaching assistant?
   b. Tell me about any class periods you taught last semester: What did you do?
   c. Did you assess any student writing in the courses? How so? What was your approach to grading and giving feedback?
   d. How do you plan on teaching your own courses in the Fall?

Thank you. Now, we're going to transition to discussing writing assessment. This portion of the interview focuses on your writing assessment literacy, which refers to your knowledge, beliefs, and practices of writing assessment.

12. How do you define *writing*?
   a. Where does that definition of writing come from?
   b. What has influenced your definition of writing?

13. How has your understanding of writing changed from your undergraduate studies to now?

14. How do you define *writing assessment*?
   a. Where does that definition come from?
   b. What has influenced your definition of writing assessment?

15. How has your understanding of writing assessment changed from your undergraduate studies to now?

16. What would you say you *believe* about writing assessment?
   a. What would you say you *know* about writing assessment?
   b. What makes writing assessment *effective?*

17. How did you learn to assess writing?
   a. Where did you learn to assess writing?
   b. When did you learn to assess writing?
   c. Who taught you to assess writing?

18. What do you see as the purpose of writing assessment?

   a. How does this purpose inform how you assess student writing?
   b. What else influences your attitude toward assessment?

19. How would you describe your approach to writing assessment?
   a. What specific practices or approaches do you use to assess writing?

20. What from your own educational experiences informed how you assess writing?
   a. What are your biggest influences in the way that you assess writing today?

Thank you. Now, we're going to transition to discussing writing assessment specifically within the first-year composition program at UT. Let's think about the class(es) that you are going to teach in the upcoming academic year.

21. How would you explain the FYC curriculum at UT to an incoming graduate student?
   a. What do you see as the goals of the curriculum?
   b. What is the role of assessment in FYC courses?

22. How are you feeling about teaching English 101 this Fall?
   a. What are you most excited about with teaching English 101?
   b. What feels most challenging about teaching English 101?

23. Can you tell me about how you plan to assess writing in the course?
   a. How do you plan to provide feedback to students?
   b. How do you plan to grade students?
   c. Why do you plan to assess writing in these ways?

24. What more would you like to tell me about writing assessment?

Interview Protocol #2: Fall Semester 2023

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this research study. This conversation is being recorded for research purposes. Please let me know if you do not agree to being recorded. You may request that the recording stop at any time. At that point, I will turn off the recorder and take notes by hand.

Let's begin by reflecting on the training you've received so far at UT.

1. What did you learn from August Workshops?
   a. What workshop sessions did you attend?
   b. Tell me about what you learned from these sessions.
   c. Tell me a story about something you learned during August workshops that you have used in your own classes.

2. How do you think August Workshops guided your teaching?

a. How do you think August Workshops shaped your approach to writing assessment? Your writing assessment (knowledge, beliefs, practices)?
b. If PhD: How did your previous training/teaching experiences impact your teaching this semester?

3. What other trainings, materials, or workshops from the Composition Office have impacted your teaching?
a. Tell me a story about how you have applied these trainings or materials to your own classroom.

4. How do you feel about the preparation you have received so far to teach English 101?
a. What additional preparation do you feel like you needed to teach English 101?

5. *If MA/MFA:* How do you think your mentorship experiences from last year have impacted your teaching?
a. How did they impact your writing assessment (knowledge, beliefs, practices)?

6. *If MA/MFA:* How do you think your English 505 class from last year has impacted your teaching?
a. How did it impact your writing assessment (knowledge, beliefs, practices)?

Thank you. I asked you to bring with you to the interview three different examples of anonymized student work with your assessment, so now, I'd like to ask you some questions about these documents.

7—9. [For each of the three examples]: Tell me about the assignment prompt this student was responding to.
a. Tell me about your approach to assessing this student's work.
b. [For specific comments]: Why did you say this?
c. Where did you learn to assess writing that way?
d. How does that assessment practice connect to your beliefs about writing assessment?
e. How do you showcase your identity as a writing instructor through writing assessment?

Thank you. Now, I'd like to ask you some questions about writing assessment more broadly.

10. How do you define *writing*?
a. Where does that definition of writing come from?
b. What has influenced your definition of writing?

11. How has your understanding of *writing* changed over time?

12. After teaching this semester, how do you define *writing assessment*?
a. Where does that definition come from?
b. What has influenced your definition of writing assessment?

13. How has your understanding of writing assessment changed over time?

14. What is the purpose of writing assessment?
    a. How does this perception inform how you assess student writing?
    b. What influences your attitude toward assessment?

15. How would you describe your approach to writing assessment?
    a. What specific practices or approaches do you use to assess writing?
    b. Why do you use those specific practices or approaches?
    c. What have you learned this semester about writing assessment?

16. Describe your typical approach to assessing students' major projects.
    a. In general, how do you assess homework activities?
    b. In general, how do you assess classroom work?
    c. In general, how do you assess informal/reflective writing?
    d. Why do you assess these types of writing in this way?

17. What tools do you use to assess student writing?
    a. Why do you use these tools?
    b. How do you choose which tools to use?

18. What would you say you believe about writing assessment?
    a. How do these beliefs inform your assessment practices?

29. What would you say you know about writing assessment?
    a. How does this knowledge inform your assessment practices?

20. What makes writing assessment *effective?*

Thank you. Now, we're going to transition to discussing writing assessment specifically within the first-year composition program at UT. Let's think about the class(es) that you are going to teach in the upcoming academic year.

21. After teaching for one semester, how has your understanding of the FYC curriculum changed?
    a. What do you see as the goals of the curriculum?
    b. What is the role of assessment in FYC courses?

22. How are you feeling about teaching English 102 this Spring?
    a. What are you most excited about with teaching English 102?
    b. What feels most challenging about teaching English 102?

23. Can you tell me about how you plan to assess writing in the course?

a. How do you plan to provide feedback to students?
b. How do you plan to grade students?
c. What changes to your approach to writing assessment do you plan to make from English 101 to English 102? Why?

24. What more would you like to tell me about writing assessment?

Interview Protocol #2: Spring Semester 2024

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this research study. This conversation is being recorded for research purposes. Please let me know if you do not agree to being recorded. You may request that the recording stop at any time. At that point, I will turn off the recorder and take notes by hand.

Let's begin by reflecting on the training you've received so far at UT.

1. What did you learn from Winter Workshops?
   a. What workshop sessions did you attend?
   b. Tell me about what you learned from these sessions.
   c. Tell me a story about something you learned during Winter workshops that you have used in your own classes.

2. How do you think Winter Workshops impacted your teaching?
   a. How did the workshops impact your writing assessment (knowledge, beliefs, practices)?
   b. *If PhD:* How did your previous training/teaching experiences impact your teaching this semester?

3. What other trainings, materials, or workshops from the Composition Office have impacted your teaching?
   a. Tell me a story about how you have applied these trainings or materials to your own classroom.

4. What are some of the things you have learned about UT's FYC curriculum?
   a. Where did you learn those things?
   b. What did you learn about writing assessment that impacts how you plan to teach this year?

5. How do you feel about the preparation you received so far to teach English 101 and English 102?
   a. What additional preparation do you feel like you needed to teach English 102?
   b. *If PhD:* Did you take English 505 this semester? If so, how do you think it has impacted your teaching and your writing assessment (knowledge, beliefs, practices)?

Thank you. I asked you to bring with you to the interview three examples of anonymized student work with your assessment, so now, I'd like to ask you some questions about these documents.

6—8. [For each of the three examples]: Tell me about the assignment prompt this student was responding to.

a. Tell me about your approach to assessing this student's work.
b. [For specific comments]: Why did you say this?
c. Where did you learn to assess writing that way?
d. How does that assessment practice connect to your beliefs about writing assessment?
e. How do you showcase your identity as a writing instructor through writing assessment?

9. How do you feel like your approach to assessment changed from last semester to this semester?

Thank you. Now, I'd like to ask you some questions about writing assessment more broadly.

After teaching this year, how do you define *writing*?

a. Where does that definition of writing come from?
b. What has influenced your definition of writing?

11. How has teaching over the last year changed your definition of writing?

12. After teaching this year, how do you define *writing assessment*?

a. Where does that definition come from?
b. What has influenced your definition of writing assessment?
c. How has teaching over the last year changed your definition of writing assessment?

13. How has your understanding of writing assessment changed over time?

14. What is the purpose of writing assessment?

a. How does this perception inform how you assess student writing?
b. What influences your attitude toward assessment?

15. How would you describe your approach to writing assessment?

a. What specific practices or approaches do you use to assess writing?
b. Why do you use those specific practices or approaches?
c. What have you learned this semester about writing assessment?

16. Describe your typical approach to assessing students' major projects.

a. In general, how do you assess homework activities?
b. In general, how do you assess classroom work?
c. In general, how do you assess informal/reflective writing?
d. Why do you assess these types of writing in this way?

17. What tools do you use to assess student writing?
    a. Why do you use these tools?
    b. How do you choose which tools to use?

18. What would you say you believe about writing assessment?
    a. How do these beliefs inform your assessment practices?

19. What would you say you know about writing assessment?
    a. How does this knowledge inform your assessment practices?

20. What makes writing assessment *effective?*

Thank you. Now, we're going to transition to discussing writing assessment specifically within the first-year composition program at UT. Let's think about the class(es) that you are going to teach in the upcoming academic year.

21. After teaching for two semesters, how has your understanding of the FYC curriculum changed?
    c. What do you see as the goals of the curriculum?
    d. What is the role of assessment in FYC courses?
    e. Has teaching over the last year changed how you see yourself?

22. What do you wish you knew about writing assessment before you started teaching?
    a. Thinking back to the first writing course you taught, what do you wish you had known before you started assessing writing?

23. What do you perceive as some of the greatest changes to your writing assessment knowledge and beliefs over the last year?

24. What lessons, experiences, or knowledge did you find useful during your first year of teaching?

25. What more would you like to tell me about writing assessment?

Appendix C: Detailed Breakdown of Assessment Materials Shared by Each GTA

Assessment Materials from Each GTA By Project Type

Participant	Interview #2 Materials	Interview #3 Materials	Total
Rose	• CRA • DAAB • MPA grading contract	• SSRP + reflection • SSRP + reflection • VME research question • QRP research plan	7
Camden	• APP rubric • CRA • CRA reflection	• QRP draft • QRP draft • QRP grading contract	6
Lainey	• APP draft • CRA final paper • DAAB draft	• MPA transcript • MPA transcript • SSRP summary paragraph	6
Sage	• CRA • CRA • CRA • APP	• SSRP • SSRP • QRP research plan • QRP research plan	8
Grey	• APP rubric • APP • CRA	• QRP rubric • SSRP • VME	6
Theresa	• CRA • APP • APP • CRA Rubric	• SSRP • VME rubric • QRP rubric	7
Keegan	• CRA • DAAB • APP draft	• SSRP proposal • SSRP draft • QRP research plan	6
Scarlet	• MPA rubric • APP • APP • APP Proposal	• SSRP rough draft • SSRP final + reflection • SSRP rubric • QRP final + reflection	8
Total Assessment Materials by Project			

• 12 CRA • 3 DAAB • 11 APP • 2 MPA	• 12 SSRP • 3 VME • 2 MPA • 10 QRP	54

Note. The projects for English 101 were a comparative rhetorical analysis essay (CRA), debate analysis annotated bibliography (DAAB), academic position paper (APP), and multimodal public argument (MPA). The projects for English 102 were a secondary source research paper (SSRP), virtual museum exhibit (VME), and qualitative research paper (QRP).

Appendix D: Proposal to the Composition Committee to Develop a Mission Statement

TO: Composition Committee
FROM: Madeline Crozier Sutton, PhD Candidate in English
DATE: 30 March 2025
RE: Proposal to Create a Mission Statement

Executive Summary

Objective: This proposal outlines a framework for the Composition Committee to lead the Department in the creation of a mission statement for its writing pedagogy education program.

Department Need: The Department of English provides training to first-year MA/MFA students that includes teaching assistantship, tutoring/tutor training, composition pedagogy coursework, and the Composition Office's workshops and resources. However, the Department's 2023-2024 annual review and related GSE listening session demonstrated that GTAs receive inconsistent, reduced benefits from their preparation. My dissertation research found that GTAs do not often see how their training supports their professional development; consequently, GTAs often feel dissatisfaction with their preparation, fostering negative engagement and discontent. In turn, GTAs enter the classroom with uneven preparation and struggle during their first semester as instructors of record. To increase GTA support, satisfaction, and engagement, the Department needs to clearly communicate the value, purpose, and structure of its training program.

Proposed Solution: The Composition Office should establish a mission statement sub-committee to adapt the framework outlined in this proposal to lead the Department to create a mission statement. The mission statement can identify the shared vision, learning outcomes, and structure of the writing pedagogy education program, uniting the Department's divisions, ranks, and programs toward a common goal.

Statement of the Problem

Background: Writing pedagogy education refers broadly to the different types of training, mentorship, instruction, and preparation that GTAs receive to prepare them to teach composition courses (Estrem & Reid, 2012). UTK's writing pedagogy education program for MA/MFAs includes four main components, while first-year PhD students primarily receive training from the Composition Office. The Department has developed a strong teacher training program to prepare first-year MA/MFA students to teach FYC courses. UTK's FYC program was awarded the Writing Program Certificate of Excellence, a national award from the Conference on College Composition and Communication, in part because of our strong mentoring for master's students.

During the 2023-2024 academic year, I conducted a narrative inquiry study that closely followed eight first-year GTAs to better understand how they learned to assess writing. In my study, and from insights gained during my prior experience as Assistant Director of FYC, I found that many GTAs felt negatively about the training they received from the Department. GTAs did not fully understand the purpose behind each dimension of the training program; the institutional and disciplinary rationales for the structure of the preparation program were largely invisible to new

GTAs. While many perceived that their training provided valuable knowledge about teaching, they did not feel prepared to enter the classroom. Consequently, some GTAs did not see the training as contributing to their own professional development but rather solely existing to meet a degree requirement. However, research in teacher education and rhetoric/composition has shown that an effective training program must center and meet the needs of GTAs (CCCC, 2015; Finn, 2023; Reid & Estrem, 2012; Schwaller & Miller-Cochran, 2020; Yancey, 2001).

The Department can resolve GTA concerns and provide stronger support by composing a mission statement that unites the facets of writing pedagogy education. A mission statement can more explicitly frame GTA education "as a site for the professional formation of graduate students" (Latterell, 1996, p. 24). Mission statements are common in K-12 teacher preparation programs across the U.S. (Misco et al., 2023), but their value has not been considered in the context of writing pedagogy education programs. A mission statement can serve to unite GTAs' experiences across the facets of their preparation as well as unify GTA training and learning across their degree coursework, scholarship, and teaching. The Department needs clear, consistent standards and learning outcomes for each dimension of teacher preparation to ensure alignment across preparation and between the English Department, Composition Office, and Judith Anderson Herbert Writing Center. Since "messages [that] TAs receive about teaching and how they process them" significantly impact their development (Nyquist & Sprague, 1998, p. 64), the Department needs to promote a more collective, supportive, and positive vision for training GTAs to teach first-year writing. A mission statement supports overall literacy development and learning by encouraging GTAs toward a common goal, making the scaffolding of the training more explicit and communicating a clear, consistent message about its value.

Benefits: The creation of a mission statement offers numerous interrelated benefits to the Department, our graduate student instructors, and our undergraduate students.

Benefits to the Department of English

- **Alignment between goals and outcomes.** A mission statement offers three primary benefits: "first, it allows internal constituents to focus on aspects of the institution that should be important. This focus can ultimately help ensure resources are deployed and people are hired in line with particular aims and goals. Second, it creates a shared sense of purpose to communicate to the public the key values and goals of the institution. This can also help attract students who are interested in a particular institution because of its identity and the embodiment of its values. Third, it creates a clear measurement tool to judge the success of an institution, and in the case of teacher education, determine the extent to which its aims and values are realized" (Misco et al., 2023, p. 201).
- **Enhanced Department unity.** A mission statement can communicate to new GTAs that everyone in the Department is invested in their success, their professional development and learning will be well-supported, and their writing pedagogy education is primarily for them. The creation of a mission statement requires, to be successful, engagement and investment from all members of the department, including GTAs, lecturers, faculty, and administrators across the divisions of Creative Writing; Literature, Criticism, and Textual Studies; and Rhetoric, Writing, and Linguistics.

- **Role model for other Departments and Composition Programs**. The writing pedagogy education in UTK's English Department can lead the way among doctoral-granting institutions in the U.S. in composing a mission statement for teacher training.
- **Increased GTA satisfaction and success.** With the support of a mission statement, GTAs can understand the purpose and goals of their training, leading to increased motivation, engagement, self-efficacy, and sense of belonging, which can enhance their teaching effectiveness.

Benefits to Graduate Student Instructors

- **More visible support.** A mission statement makes the Department's dedication to graduate students more visible, strengthening GTAs' connection to their training and understanding their preparation as a vital component of their graduate education.
- **Increased investment.** A mission statement also signals the Department's commitment to the training and professional development of graduate student instructors, leading to increased investment and engagement in their preparation from GTAs.
- **Interdisciplinary learning.** A mission statement can encourage collaboration, support, and an exchange of ideas across the divisions of Creative Writing, Literature, and Rhetoric, Writing, and Linguistics, enhancing the versatility and adaptability of GTAs.

Benefits to FYC Students

- **Improved instruction.** With a mission statement, the Department increases its investment in GTA preparation. More support for GTAs can lead to enhanced development of teaching approaches, ensuring higher-quality instruction for students.
- **Improved student retention.** Undergraduate students have been found more likely to major in a discipline when a GTA teaches their first course in the subject (Bettinger et al., 2016), which makes GTAs engines for recruitment and retention. A mission statement better supports GTAs and can lead to improved teaching experiences for FYC students.
- **Cultivating a more inclusive teaching environment.** GTAs teach a significant number of FYC courses, so an investment in GTA preparation reflects a commitment to undergraduate student success.

Tentative Framework: The vision for the mission statement articulates a framework with the purpose, shared values, key beliefs, and learning outcomes of the writing pedagogy education program. I present the following draft that I composed as a tentative framework that the Composition Committee can use as an example or starting point.

Mission Statement

The mission of the English Department's writing pedagogy education program is to facilitate the development of effective, reflective, and confident graduate student instructors well-equipped to meet the needs of all UTK students. The Department collectively aims to fulfil this mission through a shared responsibility for the personal and professional well-being of all GTAs. In pursuit of this mission, the Department holds itself to a high standard of professional excellence and integrity to provide an innovative preparation program with experiential learning, supportive mentorship, and dynamic workshops. The Department's training program shares the university's commitment to fostering the Volunteer spirit of leadership by cultivating academic excellence, cultural inclusion, and lifelong learning.

The Department's four-part training program for first-year MA/MFA students includes 1.) teaching assistantship, 2.) tutoring and tutor training in the Judith Anderson Herbert Writing Center, 3.) coursework in ENGL 505: Composition Pedagogy, and 4.) workshops and resources from the Composition Office. First-year PhD students, second-year MA/MFA students, and all instructors receive ongoing training from the Comp Office through its workshops and resources.

Our Shared Values

- **Communication.** We endeavor to communicate proactively, consistently, and transparently with GTAs about their training, and we invite GTAs to communicate with us about how we can improve their experiences at UTK.
- **Collaboration.** We collaborate across each aspect of the training program to support GTAs. The Department, Composition Office, Judith Anderson Herbert Writing Center, mentors, peers, and all faculty across divisions believe in strengthening GTA preparation.
- **Inclusion.** We honor our diverse global community with a shared commitment to inclusivity in GTA learning. We uplift diverse perspectives, highlight underrepresented voices, and provide high-quality learning opportunities that align with GTA needs.
- **Respect.** We respect all GTAs as scholars, learners, and instructors. We acknowledge and value the prior knowledge, experiences, and perspectives that GTAs bring to UTK, and we actively seek ways to build upon and complement existing expertise.

Our Key Beliefs

- **We believe** that graduate students deserve professional development opportunities. We believe that teacher training contributes to graduate students' holistic learning and growth, preparing them for a wide range of academic and non-academic pathways.
- **We believe** that each aspect of the teacher preparation program complements the others. Each training dimension contributes equally to GTA learning and growth.
- **We believe** that GTAs learn best by integrating learning experiences *across* dimensions of the program, reflecting on how their learning will inform their classroom approaches.

- **We believe** that teacher learning is an ongoing process, one that does not end when formal training concludes. We commit to supporting ongoing learning and growth.
- **We believe** in a reflective teaching model that cultivates inquiry in teaching, promotes an ethic of care, and ensures learning for each learner.
- **We believe** in integrating theory and practice through dynamic experiential learning.
- **We believe** that the teaching of FYC requires purposeful, theoretically informed approaches rooted in disciplinary knowledge from the field of rhetoric and composition.

Learning Outcomes

Each aspect of the writing pedagogy education program is designed to support your professional development in complementary, yet distinct, ways. The preparation program:

Expands Pedagogical Skills & Approaches, including

- Pedagogically sound best practices for the teaching of writing, including (but not limited to) planning lessons, designing activities, teaching content, working with students one-on-one and in small groups, and supporting writers
- Theoretically informed best practices for the assessment of writing, including (but not limited to) providing summative/formative feedback, using equitable methods, verbal/written feedback, ethical grading, and supporting writers through revision
- Evidence-based skills and approaches in the tutoring of writing, including (but not limited to) non-directive tutoring strategies, asking questions, and working with first-generation, multilingual, neurodiverse, and working-class students

Develops Disciplinary & Professional Competence, including

- A working understanding of how and why people learn to write, including historical, theoretical, and pedagogical development of first-year composition as a course, informing the design, purpose, and structure of UTK's FYC curriculum
- Ability to analyze connections between composition theory, research, and practice, grounding teaching/assessment approaches in a well-developed pedagogical framework
- Capacity to promote and achieve FYC learning outcomes for all students
- Gaining confidence in decision-making processes as a college composition instructor, including developing a unique teaching philosophy and fostering a teacherly identity

Sustains Lifelong Inquiry & Reflective Habits of Mind, including

- Using critical self-reflection to learn from direct experience and continuously improve effectiveness and growth as a composition instructor
- Expanding the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to perform roles and responsibilities of teaching and assessing writing at the postsecondary level
- Sustain curiosity to invest time and effort in the developing approaches to the teaching and learning of writing that align with professional and personal values

Supplemental Materials: Proposed Process & Timeline

Process: With approval from the Composition Committee and the creation of a sub-committee to lead the mission statement efforts, I suggest adhering to the following process.

- **First,** discuss the mission statement among the Composition Committee to gather initial perspectives from the Composition Office, Judith Anderson Herbert Writing Center, and representatives from GTAs, lecturers, and faculty.
- **Then,** conduct anonymous surveys to gather Department input. Conduct three separate surveys —one for each contingent (GTAs, lecturers, faculty)—to collect everyone's perspectives and ideas on the statement. A survey is a useful instrument because it allows people time to think and reflect while ensuring confidentiality in the responses. This leads to the creation of the first draft of the mission statement.
- **Third,** review the input and feedback from department constituencies, revising the mission statement accordingly. Bring the revised mission statement to the Composition Committee for discussion. Revision can repeat iteratively as needed.
- **Fourth,** send the mission statement to the Admin Committee for review. Revise the statement based on feedback and bring it to another discussion for the full Composition Committee if needed.
- **Finally,** submit the mission statement for a vote at a Department meeting. After approval, the mission statement could be published on the Department website, included in the Department's Graduate Student Handbook, and distributed to every new GTA who joins the department as part of their welcome packet. It should be discussed during August Workshops and throughout GTA's training.

Timeline: I suggest that the process could follow a timeline:

- **Phase 1:** August/September 2025: Discuss the creation and content of the mission statement among the Composition Committee. Establish a mission statement sub-committee to draft initial mission statement and survey protocols.
- **Phase 2:** September/October 2025: Distribute anonymous surveys to department constituencies to seek feedback on the mission statement draft and solicit additional ideas. Consider small group meetings with the Graduate Office, JAHWC, or Admin Committee to discuss ideas if needed.
- **Phase 3:** October/November 2025: Revise mission statement based on feedback received through the survey. Discuss revisions with full Composition Committee if needed.
- **Phase 4:** November/December 2025 (by end of Fall 2025 semester): Send the mission statement to the Admin Committee for review.
- **Phase 5:** January 2026: Revise mission statement based on feedback received from Admin Committee. Phase 4/5 may be repeated as needed.
- **Phase 6:** February/March 2026 (by Spring Break 2026): Submit the final mission statement to the Department for a vote at the next Department meeting.
- **Phase 7:** Publish the mission statement on the Department website, FYC Canvas site, and Graduate Student Handbook. Implement mission statement across dimensions of the writing pedagogy education program.

Supplemental Materials: References & Additional Reading

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Vita

Madeline grew up in Indianapolis, Indiana, where she attended Perry Meridian High School. She went to DePaul University in Chicago, Illinois and earned a BA (2018) and MA (2020) in Writing, Rhetoric, and Discourse. She then attended the University of Tennessee, Knoxville to pursue a PhD in English with a concentration in Rhetoric, Writing, and Linguistics. Madeline married her high school sweetheart, Jared Sutton, in October 2024. At UTK, Madeline worked as an Assistant Director of First-Year Composition and a Graduate Assistant Director of the Judith Anderson Herbert Writing Center. Her research seeks to advance equity in the teaching and learning of writing through the study of writing assessment; her research interests include composition pedagogy, writing program and writing center administration, and writing pedagogy education. Upon graduation, she joins Duke University as an Assistant Professor of the Practice of Writing Studies and Assistant Director of the Thompson Writing Program Writing Studio.