

The IBC-Why Model:
Juggling structure and rhetorical theory in the first-year composition classroom

A Thesis Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee

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December 2020

Dedication

Dedicated Dr. Jan Haluska (1941-2015), for lighting the way.

Dedicated also to my father, for everything.

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the support of so many people. I will be forever indebted to my advisor, Dr. Lisa King. Thank you for your time, your patience, and your wisdom. Thank you also for your enthusiasm. It is because of teachers like you that I have wanted to become a teacher myself.

Thank you also to my committee members, Dr. Jeff Ringer and Dr. Kirsten Benson. Your guidance and insight have been invaluable in the creation of this project.

I would also like to thank my Composition 101 and 102 students. You cheered me on this past year, as I cheered for you, and reminded me what all of this is for.

Abstract

This thesis addresses the issue of structure in the composition classroom. In particular, it looks at the history of the five-paragraph essay and the scholarly debate that has surrounded it for more than fifty years. By doing a stasis analysis, the author discovers that scholars have been talking past each other at the level of definition. Based on this finding, the author proposes the development of a new organizational model—the Introduction-Body-Conclusion Why (IBC Why) model—by which student can improve their understanding of structure across genres. In addition, by applying the IBC-Why model to the Composition 101 program at the University of Tennessee, the author demonstrates how the IBC-Why model can assist with transfer between genres, including multimodal genres. It does this by acting as a baseline by which students can compare both the similarities and differences among genres.

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Introduction

By keeping the model simple, we can focus on teaching basic principles of rhetoric, the actual qualities that make for good essays of all shapes and sizes. — Dr. Jan Haluska

My experience with the five-paragraph essay is perhaps atypical. Unlike many students who learned the five-paragraph format in middle or high school, I had never heard of the five-paragraph formula until I started work as a teaching assistant for Dr. Jan Haluska, a professor of English at Southern Adventist University, in college. Dr. Haluska taught freshman English as well as general and upper division literature courses at Southern. I adored his classes—he made literature come alive—but it was by grading his students' Composition 101 papers that I became familiar with what I later learned was a controversial teaching tool, the five-paragraph essay.

Dr. Haluska was something of a formalist. He was a graduate of San Rafael Military Academy and served three years in Germany with the United States Army. He earned his PhD at the University of Tennessee in 1987 and, by the time I became his student in 2002, he'd been teaching at Southern for more than twenty years. Dr. Haluska believed the five-paragraph essay was a good foundation for student writers, and over the two years I worked for him, I came to agree. By following the five-paragraph format, I often saw his students' essays move from barely coherent to clear and well-developed over the course of a semester. Interestingly, Dr. Haluska never limited his students to *only* five paragraphs, but the five-paragraph outline—a strong introduction with a clear thesis, a body of reasons backed by evidence to support that thesis, and a conclusion that summed up the argument and returned to the main claim—was in his mind a critical building block for students' writing success.

Imagine my surprise then, when several years later I started graduate school at the University of Tennessee and learned that not everyone felt similarly to Dr. Haluska about the five-paragraph essay. The five-paragraph essay was too rigid, people said—students couldn't move beyond it. And imagine my surprise

even more when, in the particular composition classroom where I was an assistant, I saw very little attention being given to structure. U.T.'s Composition 101 was focused largely on rhetoric and genre—which I found useful and saw that the students did, too—but when it came to helping students think through the actual writing process, neither the course material nor the teacher I was working with spent much time discussing structure. This isn't the case with all composition teachers at U.T., of course—some do include explicit discussion of structure in their classrooms—but in this class in particular I noticed its lack, and I know the students did, too. It was evident in their writing.

So... what was missing? Based on these experiences I decided I wanted to know more about the debate surrounding the five-paragraph essay. I wondered if, somewhere in the middle, something hadn't been lost. Sure, the five-paragraph essay is a tool students learn to get through standardized testing in their early lives. Yes, despite its usefulness in test settings, we don't want our students to think the five-paragraph essay is an end-all be-all and to be unable to move beyond it. But on the other hand, *not* discussing structure, or only touching on it lightly, clearly isn't working either. As Dr. Haluska used to say, the majority of students will not become professional writers, and even those who do usually need help organizing their thoughts. The five-paragraph outline—introduction, body, and conclusion—*is* that help.

And this is where my work comes in. In sorting through the debate surrounding the five-paragraph essay for this project, I realized that, actually, scholars on both sides have quite a bit in common. Scholars on both sides value structure. Scholars on both sides have a problem with a rigid, five-paragraph formula. While scholars on both sides dislike the five-paragraph essay's rigid structure, however, something they *do* like is its introduction-body-conclusion outline. Additionally, scholars on both sides recognize that this general introduction-body-conclusion outline appears in texts across many genres, both in and outside of academia, including multimodal texts.

Interesting.

As a result of these findings, then, I had an idea. What if I developed a new tool to help students with not only the structure of their writing, but also to help with another big concern in the composition

classroom—the facilitation of transfer? What if this tool took the good parts of the five-paragraph essay—the introduction, body, and conclusion—and left the rigidity behind?

And thus was born the Introduction-Body-Conclusion Why (IBC-Why) model.

In the IBC-Why model, students learn that many texts are comprised of introductions, bodies, and conclusions and that these sections may vary in length and scope depending on the genre and rhetorical situation. These sections can be found in most genres they encounter, and, by identifying them in others' work, students can unlock important insight on the reasons an author makes the decisions they do—both structurally and rhetorically. Additionally, students can begin to apply the model to their own writing, including in their work with multimodal texts.

How so? In teaching students to identify the introduction, body, and conclusion in written texts, the IBC-Why model also emphasizes that each these sections generally appear in some form or fashion in multimodal texts. Due to the differences in conventions and semiotic resources available in each, these sections may appear differently in different genres, but usually they're all there. And when they're not? When a text lacks an introduction, body, or a conclusion, the IBC-Why model can act as a baseline by which students can analyze a genre. A meme, for example, does not have an introduction, body, or conclusion. But it does have an image and a caption (or a few). So how can a text's introduction, body, and conclusion be conveyed using these semiotic resources? *Can* they?

Important to note is that, as with any teaching tool, the IBC-Why model does of course have limitations. The IBC-Why model has been designed to specifically address structure and transfer challenges in first-year and other composition classrooms. It does *not* purport to address structure in genres one might find in, say, a business or biology classroom. Obviously resumes and lab reports or other area-specific documents have very specific layouts for very specific purposes. The IBC-Why model is a tool designed to help students identify the various parts of texts that do not follow such rigid formats, in which the reasoning behind these different sections may be less clear.

In what follows, then, I will attempt to demonstrate in detail the answer to this question and how I believe the IBC-Why model can be a tool to help students with both organization and transfer work in the composition classroom. Before I get there, though, I will walk through the research that led me to my conclusions and the development of this point. A note on the text is that my work does not follow the IMRaD or intro-lit review-methods-analysis-conclusion formats typical for this genre. Instead, I have designed a more bibliographic analysis in order to provide the larger context for the debate. In so doing, my contribution to the field *is* this bibliographic round-up, the stasis analysis, and the application of the IBC to the material I know best—the Composition 101 curriculum at the University of Tennessee—as a result of that work.

In Part One, I will look in-depth at the history and origins of the five-paragraph essay. Scholars have generally attributed the formula's creation to the current-traditional period of the 20th century, but a more thorough dig demonstrates that, actually, its roots extend back much further. These roots will I hope bring to light the principles the five-paragraph essay was intended to teach, as well as help explain the formula's longevity despite the controversy surrounding it.

Part Two dives into the scholarship surrounding the five-paragraph essay over the last several decades. Here, I will look at the arguments on both sides of five-paragraph essay and, by doing a stasis analysis, uncover at least part of the reason this debate has been going in circles for so long: scholars have been talking past each other at the level of definition. I will then consider what this difference in definition means in the greater context of composition instruction today, and this is where I will propose my new model as a way to help scholarship turn over a new page in the discussion of structure in the composition classroom.

In Part Three I will move onto genre theory and tackle the very real problem of teaching structure across genres. All genres have different conventions, of course, and genre theory highlights the fact that a text's structure is always connected not only to its particular conventions but also to its rhetorical situation. In multimodal contexts, this structure is complicated even further by an author's use of not only written text but also whatever semiotic resources are available in a given genre. Unit 4 of Composition 101 at the

University of Tennessee asks students to re-genre an Academic Position Paper into a multimodal project for a public audience. For many students, this is a daunting task. So how can we help students here?

I address this question in Part Four where, by applying my IBC-Why model, I demonstrate how thinking through a text in any genre in terms of its rhetorical parts—introduction, body, and conclusion—we can help students both with their written academic texts and with transfer work. This transfer work can be extended to large upper-division level papers students write or with transferring a written text to a multimodal format, like a blog post or meme. Although not all multimodal genres contain clear-cut introductions, bodies, and conclusions, by looking at what semiotic resources are available in each, and what each genre's conventions generally are, we can help students with transfer both by contrast and similarity.

Part One – Origins of the Five-Paragraph Essay

“In the midst of this circular and decidedly static conversation, there is something missing from the discussion. No one has adequately answered the simple but puzzling question, where does the five-paragraph essay come from?”
—Matthew Nunes

As I noted in the introduction, the value of the five-paragraph essay has been hotly contested for many years. In the midst of this conversation, however, one thing that hasn’t been discussed—in fact, has been almost entirely overlooked—is the question, “Where does the five-paragraph theme come from?” Many scholars have posited that the five-paragraph essay began with current-traditionalism. David Labaree traces the form to a “series of formalisms,” which he says has dominated the U.S. education system for many years (“Fetish” par. 2). While the five-paragraph essay certainly *does* exhibit qualities associated with formalism, a deeper dig reveals that the five-paragraph essay’s roots actually extend much farther back. In the following chapter, I trace the five-paragraph essay’s origin to theme-writing, which has deep roots in English education and classical rhetoric. Understanding these origins can help inform our understanding of the intended principles behind the formula and why it has persisted for so long.

(A Lack of) Histories of the Five-Paragraph Essay

Composition histories have given little attention to the five-paragraph essay. In his defense of the five-paragraph essay, Jan Haluska states, “A quick survey of books outlining the history of writing in American schools turns up an... unwillingness to address the [form]” (47). Haluska goes on to list several well-known histories—Arthur N. Applebee’s *Tradition and Reform in the Teaching of English: A History* (1942); James A. Berlin’s *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1911-1985* (1987); James J. Murphy’s *A Short History of Writing Instruction from Ancient Greece to Twentieth Century America* (1990); and Maureen Daly

Goggin's *Inventing a Discipline: Rhetoric Scholarship in Honor of Richard E. Young* (2000)—all of which, he says, “exclude any mention whatsoever of the five-paragraph essay” (47).

To Haluska's list I would add two more—Albert Kitzhaber's *Rhetoric in American Colleges, 1850-1900* (1990) and Robert Connors' *Composition-Rhetoric: Backgrounds, Theory, and Pedagogy* (1997). In Martin Nystrand et al.'s “Where Did Composition Studies Come From?: An Intellectual History” (1993), the authors mention the five-paragraph essay, but only briefly. Like Labaree, they call it an “emblematic innovation [of formalism]” that “came to define the essay genre for a generation of American students”; of its origin, however, they say only that it's “unclear” (275). Another composition scholar, Sharon Crowley, also discusses the five-paragraph essay, and yet she too provides no clear explanation of its origins. In *The Methodical Memory: Invention in Current-Traditional Rhetoric* (1990), Crowley says:

The five-paragraph theme was the most thoroughgoing scheme for spatializing discourse that had appeared in rhetorical theory since Peter Ramus' method of dichotomizing division rendered all the world divisible by halves. Indeed, it is no doubt indebted to method, as this entered traditional composition theory via Bain's paragraph principles and Day's laws of amplification, and was translated to twentieth-century textbook authors in the guise of Wendell's three principles of discourse. The five-paragraph theme was prescribed to students in the absence of a historical context; it was simply touted as the way things are done. (135)

Crowley then, like the others, sees the five-paragraph essay as a staple of current-traditionalism, which Berlin tells us is a mode of thinking that dominated the American education system from about 1870 to 1960 (*Nineteenth-Century* 1984). Richard Young popularized the term after the mindset had passed in his 1978 essay “Paradigms and Problems: Needed Research in Rhetorical Invention.” In the essay, he described current traditionalism as being focused on product over process; analyzing “discourse into words, sentences, and paragraphs”; classifying discourse into different parts; emphasizing usage and style; and being preoccupied with “the informal essay and the research paper” (31).

Now, certainly the five-paragraph essay *does* fit well with current-traditional pedagogy, but just because a concept fits a certain thought process does not mean it started there. In his 2013 article “The Five-Paragraph Essay: Its Evolution and Roots in Theme-Writing,” Matthew J. Nunes highlights the work of Jean Donovan Sanborn, who discusses his own bafflement at the lack of scholarship on the subject. Sanborn states that “the academic essay, particularly the five-paragraph essay, did not have a clear moment of birth in academia” (297). He says:

It would seem that a form so solidly ensconced in academia would have been discussed as composition was establishing a place in the curriculum, its merits extolled, its shortcomings lamented. It may be that such discussions can be found in the archives of colleges and universities all over the country, and such searches would be worth undertaking by those who have access to those records. In the texts, the professional journals, and popular journals appearing from roughly 1870 to 1920, however, justification for the form of the essay so familiar to us was rarely mentioned. The form slipped into place has remained largely unchallenged. We complain about it, but it does not abdicate its controlling position. (123)

What’s interesting about Sanborn’s observations, though, is that he thought only to look in the window between 1870 and 1920, during which major changes were happening in American colleges and when current-traditionalism took hold. Michelle Tremmel, in fact, is one of the only scholars who looks further into the past. In “What to Make of the Five-Paragraph Theme: History of the Genre and Implications” (2011), she connects the five-paragraph model to theme-writing, such as was practiced in some late nineteenth-century colleges and was advocated by Barrett Wendell in 1884:

Wendell’s daily theme and other loosely conceived versions of the “school theme,” used primarily for writing practice and examination . . . evolved over the next fifty years into the reified five-paragraph template circa 1959 when Victor Pudlowski articulated its components in the *English Journal* article “Compositions—Write ‘Em Right.” This “right” way of writing fit perfectly into the C-T pedagogy of the time and continues to do so fifty years later.” (31)

For his part, researcher Nunes applauds Tremmel's connection between the five-paragraph model and theme-writing but says she doesn't take her search far enough (298). And I agree. In what follows, we'll take a look at the origins of theme-writing, which traces its roots all the way back to classical rhetoric.

The Five-Paragraph Essay, or Theme

Another thing one quickly notices about this conversation is that scholars use the terms “five-paragraph essay” and “five-paragraph theme” interchangeably when referencing the five-paragraph essay's basic structure. Will Desmond reminds us of the essay/theme's simple yet effective outline in his 2015 essay “The Five-Paragraph Essay”: “Say what you are going to say, say it, and say what you have said again. State your thesis and three supporting points, develop these points with relevant sub-points, and conclude with an obvious or subtle rehash” (187). A brief Google search would lead one to believe that this “Say what you're going to say...” concept came from Dale Carnegie, or, wait... Was that Cicero?

Theme Writing 1600 – 1801

Theme-writing has a long history in English education. In *The English Grammar Schools to 1660: Their Curriculum and Practice*, Foster Watson traces theme-writing to John Brinsley's 1627 textbook, entitled *Ludus Literarius or The Grammar Schoole*, which he says draws directly from the *Progymnasmata* of Aphthonius (429-30). Aphthonius was a fourth-century Greek rhetorician, and the *Progymnasmata* functioned as a textbook of writing exercises for Greek students and, later, Renaissance students, and many of the exercises correlated directly with the parts of classical oration as described in Cicero's *De Inventione*. Around 85 B.C., Cicero had delineated the six parts of discourse described in *De Inventione*—the *exordium*, *narratio*, *partitio*, *confirmatio*, *refutatio*, and *peroration*—and at the beginning of the sixth century, these were adopted and adapted for the English grammar school at the suggestion of Erasmus (Abbott 147-47). (Chapter 8 of *Rhetorical Choices*, the Composition 101 textbook at the University of Tennessee, mentions these parts of discourse, as well as the

rhetorical appeals of *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos*.) A London edition of the *Progymnasmata* was published 1583 (Watson 429-30), and the connection between it and Brinsley's 1627 work isn't difficult to see. Brinsley's theme contains five parts: the *exordium*, the *narratio*, the *confirmatio*, the *confutatio*, and the *conclusio*.

It is important to note that the themes proscribed in the *Progymnasmata* and Brinsley's *The Grammar Schoole* were designed to build skills and habits in new writers rather than for their own sake. Nunes says of Brinsley's theme: "It was a structured, rule-based form of writing, about the same length as the five-paragraph essay, that was used for elementary writers to learn and practice basic skills" (309). The parts are not identical to today's five-paragraph theme, but enough similarities exist between the themes (and what was perhaps their original purpose) that to ignore them would be to turn a blind eye to a clue about the five-paragraph essay's origins.

It didn't take long for Brinsley's form to take hold in English education. In 1739, John Holmes published *The Art of Rhetoric Made Easy*, in which he describes in Latin the parts of the theme students should follow. These parts are similar to Brinsley's and nearly identical to ones proscribed in what is "[p]erhaps the most influential textbooks advocating themes in the early nineteenth century," John Walker's *The Teacher's Assistant in English Composition*, which was published in 1801 (Nunes 306). Walker lamented in the preface that he was writing because composition textbooks were scarce, which may help to explain its pedagogical significance and why it took hold. In *Composition-Rhetoric: Backgrounds, Theory, and Pedagogy* (1997), Robert Connors highlights that Walker's biggest contributions to English curriculum was "the division of compositions into two general sorts, which he called 'themes' (this seems to be the first use of this term in vernacular composition rather than translation) and 'regular subjects'" (218).

Although not identical to today's five-paragraph essay, Walker's statutes regarding themes are worth examining:

A Theme is the proving of some truth. After the Theme or Truth is laid down, the proof consists of the following parts:

1st, The Proposition, or Narrative; where we shew the meaning of the Theme, by amplifying, paraphrasing, or explaining it more at large.

2d, The Reason; where we prove the truth of the Theme by some reason or argument.

3d, The Confirmation; where we shew the unreasonableness of the contrary opinion; or if we cannot do that, we try to bring some other reason in support of the former.

4th, The Simile; where we bring in something in Nature or Art similar to what is affirmed in our Theme, for illustrating the truth of it.

5th, The Example; where we bring instances from History to corroborate the truth of our Theme.

6th, The Testimony, or Quotation; where we bring in proverbial sentences, or passages from good authors, which shew that others think as we do.

7th, The Conclusion; when we sum up the whole, and shew the practical use of the Theme, by concluding with some pertinent observations. (112)

Obviously these rules are not the same as the five-paragraph essay we know today, but many of the five-paragraph's themes are clearly present. "The proposition (thesis) comes in the first part, reasons are then given for the proposition, and the conclusion provides a summary" (Nunes 307). In Walker's model the Reason might also be an extension of the Proposition, making a more detailed thesis, and the Confirmation, Simile, Example, and Testimony could all easily fit in the body of a five-paragraph theme.

Theme Writing 1800 – 1870

From 1801, we move to B. H. Smart's 1823 textbook, *Practical Logic: or Hints to Young Theme Writers*, which describes essentially the same elements of a theme as Walker. In 1853, two more important textbooks that addressed themes appeared: Ebenezer Cobham Brewer's *A Guide to English Composition* and Robert and

Thomas Armstrong's *A Practical Introduction to English Composition, Part II*. (*Part I*, which did not address themes, was published in 1851.) Brewer's *Guide* is dedicated wholly to themes for secondary students and offers samples that contain striking similarities to today's five-paragraph theme. "Theme VII, 'Lying is a Bad Trade,' is a good example" (Nunes 303):

Introduction.—Many persons seek to obtain petty advantages by deceit and falsehood; but such practices are as impolitic as they are sinful.

1st Reason.—Lying is a bad trade for our *Master*, who is dishonoured by so gross a misappropriation of the talent of speech committed to us.

2nd Reason.—It is bad for our *neighbours*; not only because they are subject to misrepresentations, but also because it breaks up that mutual confidence without which society cannot subsist.

3rd Reason.—It is bad for the *liar himself*:

(1) Because it is very *hard work*; inasmuch as it requires constant invention, an unfailing memory, and unremitted caution:

(2) Because it is *very unprofitable*; inasmuch as he is not believed "even when he speaks the truth":

(3) Because it has a *bad name*. Almost all other sins are tolerated by the world, and often even admired; but a liar is always contemptible, and always despised:

(4) Because it *carries its own punishment*, in the dread of detection, the consciousness of sin, and the conviction of universal obloquy:

(5) Because it will not be better but worse, when he changes his present abode, to dwell in everlasting burnings.—*Rev. xxi. 8.* (Brewer 19)

After the reasons, students are instructed to incorporate an example or simile, such as from *Aesop's Fables*, followed by a historical illustration and quotation (both often biblical) and a conclusion.

Robert and Thomas Armstrong's *Practical Introduction* was actually published in Edinburgh, Scotland, where Robert was a teacher at the time. The text was widely distributed in the States—Connors notes that “Britain [and Europe at large] continued to dominate American language instruction long after she had ceased to dominate America politically” (71)—and its influence is notable in other later textbooks, such as William Swinton’s from 1874. In their textbook, Armstrong and Armstrong provide four different methods for writing themes depending on a student’s chosen subject and purpose. For instance, a student writing an informational historical piece would choose the theme that included an Introduction, Definition, Origin, Progress (development), Present Condition, Effects (influence), and Conclusion. The most similar method to the five-paragraph essay is described in Method IV. It includes the Proposition or Statement, the Reason or Proof, the Confirmation, the Analogy or Simile, the Example, the Testimony, and the Conclusion (122).

Importantly, while some later texts defined themes and essays synonymously, Armstrong and Armstrong make a clear distinction between the two. They say:

A Theme is an exercise in which the subject is treated according to a Set of Heads methodically arranged. In this respect it differs from the Essay, wherein the writer is at liberty to follow his own inclination as to the arrangement of his ideas. It is desirable, however, that the pupil, before he attempts the writing of Essays, should be trained to habits of consecutive thinking; and to this end the Theme, as experience has shown, is admirably adapted. (103)

In this way, the authors indicate that the theme is not an end in itself, but, rather, is meant to provide training for young writers before they move on to more difficult and complex types of writing. This is, of course, quite similar to arguments made by proponents of the five-paragraph essay today, which is why it’s interesting to note what happened in the later part of the Current-Traditional Period.

Theme Writing from 1870—1960s

In both Berlin's *Writing Instruction in Nineteenth-Century American Colleges* (1984) and Sharon Crowley's *Composition in the University* (1998), the authors discuss major changes that were happening in the American University in the nineteenth century. Prior to the Civil War, men (and only men) went to college to become ministers or teachers. Most early American colleges were affiliated with major Protestant religions, and the purpose of a classical education was to develop citizens' character and prepare them for public duty (Crowley 46-48). After the Civil War, all of this changed. "In 1862, the United States Congress passed the Morrill Act, which enticed states to erect colleges that included agricultural and mechanical instruction in their curricula" (Crowley 54). Equally or perhaps even more important was an emerging American interest in research. According to Berlin, "the American college became transformed, moving increasingly toward . . . an encouragement of learning and free inquiry" (58). More of the middle class now entered college, and this, in addition to the decline of classical education, "profoundly affected the teaching of writing" (60).

To meet the needs of the changing college population and curriculum, new textbooks were needed at both the secondary and college levels, and textbook writers relied heavily on structured forms and themes from the past. For instance, in 1884, T. Whiting Bancroft published *A Method of English Composition*, in which he describes several different types of themes—including partial exposition, narration and description, explication, comparison, argumentation, and persuasion—and offers different instructions and outlines for each. The sample outlines vary because of their subject matters and purpose, but most are outlined to be roughly five paragraphs, and the persuasion theme in particular resembles the five-paragraph quite closely. It includes: "an introduction and conclusion, and three parts to the Discussion or body of the theme: (A) Explanatory Motives, (B) Convincing Motives, and (C) Inducing Motives. The conclusion should summarize" (44).

William Williams's *Composition and Rhetoric* (1890) gives an example of what may be the first five-paragraph essay in an English composition textbook. In his section on themes, he describes the current formula almost exactly and offers the essay "Cheerfulness is Productive of Happiness" as an example:

Cheerfulness is like a sunny day; it sheds brightness on everything around us. No trait of character is more valuable or more productive of happiness than is cheerfulness; it lightens our burdens, multiplies our friends, and promotes our health.

First, cheerfulness may do much to lighten our burdens and thereby make life happy. Times may be hard, but wearing a sad and gloomy countenance will make them no easier. It is not clouds, but sunshine that brings out the flowers. Sorrows will surely come, but, brightened by the hopeful views of a cheerful disposition, they appear less fearful and depressing. Cheerfulness makes the air seem more balmy, the sky clearer, and even the sunshine more beautiful; while gloominess is a mildew that blights our talents, blasts our happiness, and beclouds our life.

Again, social intercourse is one of the chief sources of our earthly happiness; and nothing so well fits us for the enjoyment of that intercourse as cheerfulness. The possessor of this frame of mind is not only free and easy in his conversation and manner, but has his imagination clear and his judgment undisturbed. He is disposed to be polite and obliging, and naturally awakens similar feelings in those with whom he comes in contact. As the soft rain, falling gently on the earth, penetrates the soil and endues all nature with freshness and beauty, so the influence of his genial disposition permeates all hearts and fills them with joy and gladness. In this atmosphere of happiness that he has created he breathes the sweetest joys of life.

Cheerfulness not only lightens the burdens of life and increases social pleasures, but it also promotes health. Cheerfulness affects beneficially not the mind alone, but likewise the body. If in ill-health, we give way to repining, we encourage the malady; while if we brace up, we banish our fretful passions and with them a large part of our trouble. If we continually worry over our sorrows, we cause our mental faculties to become dull and languid; so, if we keep in mind our bodily afflictions, we imperceptibly injure the delicate fibres of which our bodies are composed. On the contrary, if we banish all thoughts of our ailments, or troubles, we raise our spirits and promote our health.

Seeing, then, that cheerfulness is productive of so much happiness, let us all endeavor, no matter how dark the gloom may be, to help to brighten it by our smiles. (280–81)

Although Williams does not call his theme a five-paragraph theme, the elements of the five-paragraph theme are clearly all there. The only minor difference is that the conclusion is only one sentence and does not sum up the essay's three major points.

In the 1900 textbook *A Modern Composition and Rhetoric*, Lewis Worthington Smith and James E Thomas provide devote the first section to themes. This is different from most theme-oriented books at the time, which usually began with grammar and usage, and in it they offer detailed directions and assignments, which they say are essentially exercises to practice writing (15). The themes Smith and Thomas provide are on general or specific subjects; example themes in their appendix include “Why We Should Study Mythology,” “The Druids,” and “The Cotton Gin” (302). Interestingly, they say that, depending on the course and context, students may need to do some outside research for their essays but that “the great source of material is our own experience and observation” (30).

The structure of Smith and Thomas's themes is quite similar to the five-paragraph essay structure we know today. The introduction should grab the reader's attention, “created a favorable impression,” and help him “understand what we intend to write about” (34). The body paragraphs of the theme should all have topic sentences (49), and the conclusion should summarize the arguments' main points (36). This form took a strong hold in freshman composition classrooms after 1900 with the establishment of what is now known as “current-traditional rhetoric.” In *Composition in the University* (1998), Crowley says that “By 1910 the standard materials for the course were a collection of readings (either expository essays or literary texts), a handbook, and a rhetoric that expounded the supposedly universal current-traditional principles of unity, coherence, and emphasis” (94). Crowley goes on to highlight that, in current-traditional pedagogy, what mattered what form. Correct words, sentences, paragraphs—these were what mattered in current-traditionalism. Rhetoric itself or the rhetorical situation of a text wasn't considered at all.

The Five-Paragraph Essay Today

The current-traditional period is generally said to have lasted in the American education system until the late 1960s or early 1970s. The existence of the five-paragraph theme in composition classrooms, however, has continued even to this day. In particular, it is often taught in middle school and high school settings in preparation for standardized tests.

In Part Two, we will examine the arguments that scholars have been making for and against the five-paragraph essay over the last fifty or so years, and we'll discover that, in fact, these scholars actually agree. (They've been talking past each other.) The *reason* they agree links directly to the history we've examined here in Part One. As we have seen, far from starting during the current-traditional period, the five-paragraph essay actually traces its roots back to the theme-writing of the 1600s, which traces *its* roots back to classic rhetoric. The reason the formula has lasted for that long is that it's served a valuable purpose: the five-paragraph theme teaches students basic writing skills and important structural principles.

Part Two – A Review of the Literature

“The five-paragraph approach—the formula introduction, the three ‘support’ paragraphs, and the summary conclusion—instead of generating thinking...deters it.” —Marie Foley (1989)

*“Far from marking the terminus of the thinking process, the five-paragraph essay is a structure, a format, a plan, no more, no less.”
—Chauncey Parker (1990)*

“The five-paragraph essay is a tried-and-true and (dare I say) traditional formula that may be as good as anything, with some tweaking. Say what you are going to say, say it, and say what you have said again... Despite its simplicity and potential crudity, the form can have marvelous depths...” —Will D. Desmond (2015)

If one wants to start an argument amongst English professors, he need only drop one phrase—“five-paragraph essay.” Michael Ruegg took advantage of this when he chose to title his 2015 *California English* article “Five Paragraph Essays are Awesome.” In the opening line, Ruegg unapologetically states: “What I’m really talking about is the introduction-body-conclusion organizational structure. Five-paragraph essay just sounds better and gets people to gnash their teeth” (13).

Robert Perrin joked about the formula’s divisiveness, too, in “10:00 and 2:00: A Ten-Paragraph Defense of the Five-Paragraph Theme” (2000). Perrin says:

I want you to think of things terrible. Think of the Spanish Inquisition. Think of the Salem Witch Trials. Think of Child Labor. Think of Watergate. Think of the Hostage Crisis. Think of Cher’s new facelift. Think of Steven Seagal’s movies. Think of the five-paragraph theme.

Indeed, the five-paragraph essay has long been a topic of controversy among educators in American classrooms. Is it a useful tool meant to help students organize their thoughts and teach principles of good writing across genres, or is it mindless formula that limits student thinking by putting them in an impractical

academic box? A search across journal articles over the last several decades locates dozens of articles arguing both sides. Interestingly, however, the further one dives into these discussions, the more obvious it becomes that the difference in opinions about the five-paragraph essays stems from something very different.

The Five-Paragraph Theme/Essay/Formula

One of the first things one notices about arguments for and against the five-paragraph essay is that the five-paragraph essay has more than one name. Is it a theme? An essay? A formula? Is there a difference?

In truth, there seems to be no distinction between the terms. Scholars use them interchangeably, choosing one over the other only as all good writers do—for variety. In the following, I will use these terms synonymously, too, as I first look at how various scholars have defined the five-paragraph essay over the years and then at how their arguments for or against the theme correlate with those definitions. I will then search out the commonalities between these concerns and seek to identify what has been missing from these conversations for all these years.

A note about the text: Because most scholars' opinions about the five-paragraph essay are directly tied to the way they define it and the context in which they've used it, and because it is difficult to demonstrate either of these things without looking directly at the language of the scholars themselves, I include more quotes in the following than might be typical for a literature review.

The Five-Paragraph Essay: What is it?

In the Composition 101 classroom at the University of Tennessee, students learn the basic elements of rhetoric and about how it applies to writing they see in the “real world,” and how they can apply it to their own writing. U.T.'s textbook, *Rhetorical Choices*, goes over concepts such as how writers establish and use *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* in their writing, and covers the different levels of *stases* at which writers may or may not

be arguing about a topic (or arguing past each other). These levels include conjecture (does it exist?); definition (how do we define it?); quality (is it good or bad?); and policy (what should be done about it?). “Without an agreement on any one of the first three levels,” we tell our students, “nothing can actually be *done* about anything. Everyone involved has to agree that a thing exists, and about how to define it, and if it’s a good thing or a bad thing first.”

It is somewhat ironic, then, that in analyzing conversations about the five-paragraph essay, it quickly becomes evident that educators have been talking past each other about the form—for *years*. While there can be no argument that the five-paragraph essay exists—Part One traced similar techniques originating from the ancient Greek textbook *Progymnasmata* to its current form in the American school system—conversations about how to define the five-paragraph essay divide themselves into two very different camps from there forward. As would be expected, the subsequent opinions about the quality or value of the five-paragraph essay depend almost entirely upon the way it is defined.

The Five-Paragraph Essay has five paragraphs.

The first camp of scholars are those who see the formula as rigid. For this group, the five-paragraph-essay always follows a particular format—“the formula introduction, the three ‘support’ paragraphs, and the summary conclusion” (Foley 231). Thomas Nunnally (1991) laid out the specifics this way:

As it is usually taught, the five-paragraph theme (FPT) requires (1) an introductory paragraph moving from a generality to an explicit thesis statement and announcement of three points in support of that thesis, (2) three middle paragraphs, each of which begins with a topic sentence restating one of the major ideas supporting the thesis and then develops the topic sentence (with a minimum of three sentences in most models), and (3) a concluding paragraph restating the thesis and points. (67)

As noted in the introduction, most American middle and high school students today are quite familiar with this outline. For those who need a little more step-by-step guidance, though, David Labaree (2018) offers some “helpful tips” he found online:

The first paragraph of the body should contain the strongest argument, most significant example, cleverest illustration, or an obvious beginning point. The first sentence of this paragraph should include the 'reverse hook' which ties in with the transitional hook at the end of the introductory paragraph. The topic for this paragraph should be in the first or second sentence. This topic should relate to the thesis statement in the introductory paragraph. The last sentence in this paragraph should include a transitional hook to tie into the second paragraph of the body.

Labaree goes on to tell the reader, "You probably won't be surprised that the second paragraph 'should contain the second strongest argument, second most significant example, second cleverest illustration, or obvious follow-up to the first paragraph...' And that the third paragraph 'should contain the third strongest argument...' Well, you get the picture."

The point is that, for Labaree and many others, the formula is exact. It always contains five paragraphs, which always contain five sentences, which always come in a particular order, which bores students to tears. Because of this rigidity, the five-paragraph theme for this group is an end in itself and a barrier (rather than an aid) for student writing.

The Five-Paragraph Essay has five paragraphs. Or ten. Or 22.

The second camp of scholars envision the five-paragraph essay quite differently. These scholars share the first group's definition of the form, but, rather than see it as an end-all-be-all, they see it as a starting point for students who are learning to organize their thoughts.

"What is the five-paragraph essay?" Kerri Smith asks in her oft-quoted article, "Speaking My Mind: In Defense of the Five-Paragraph Essay" (2006). "It is a way of organizing ideas into an introduction with a main argument, three body paragraphs that develop that argument, and a conclusion that advances the argument a step further by way of application or tantalizing suggestion." Smith, like others in this group, feels that the five paragraphs are really "just a guideline" (16) because the outline "can be expanded or contracted and applied to almost any kind of exposition or argumentation" (Nichols 904-905; see also Rob Jenkins). Because of this flexibility, this group feels the five-paragraph theme can actually foster creativity by

giving them a set of conventions to break away from. After all, “creativity emerges when artists, musicians, writers, and others (including student writers) begin to modify rules, manipulate rules, reinterpret rules, create new rules, ignore rules. Interestingly, though, they do need to know the rules first” (Perrin 312).

The striking difference between this group and the first, then, is that for this group, the five-paragraph format mainly has value as a point of departure. “The number five is not sacred or magic... [Student] writers readily can improvise upon this theme and should” (Nichols 904-908). As Ruegg plainly stated: “It can be three, or four, or seven or ten [paragraphs]. The point is that there is a clear introduction, body and conclusion” (13).

Keeping in mind these differences, let us now turn our attention to the two camps’ conversations about and experiences teaching the five-paragraph essay, and how the differences in definition pertain to each.

Arguments Against the Five-Paragraph Essay

It deters thinking.

One of the most frequent concerns about the five-paragraph essay is that it deters student thinking. Marie Foley commented on this in her well-known article “Unteaching the Five-Paragraph Essay” (1989). At the time of writing, Foley had been teaching composition and literature at Santa Barbara City College and the University of California for almost 15 years, and, in her experience, students who’d been taught the five-paragraph essay regarded essay writing as “an alien, unnatural enterprise” (232). Part of the reason for this was that, she said, was that instead of generating thinking, the formula itself became students’ focus. “As soon as students meet their quota...they are free to stop thinking about their topic... thus depriving them of the pleasure of discovering new ideas” (233).

Mark Wiley voiced his concern about this, too, in “The Popularity of Formulaic Writing (And Why We Need to Resist)” (2000). At the time of writing, Wiley was the composition coordinator at California State University (CSU), Long Beach and was frustrated with what he felt was many teachers’ search for a quick fix for student writing. “In attempting to take the mystery away from writing and make it more accessible, the formulaic approach winds up hindering students from exploring their ideas, reactions, and interpretations—the rich chaotic mess from which true insight and thoughtfulness can emerge” (64). According to Wiley, this is because the formula “reduces a complex, messy process to a step-by-step, follow-the-recipe procedure” and thus “short-circuits [the] discovery process” (65-66).

Deterring thinking and short-circuiting the discovery process is, of course, *not* what we as writing teachers want to do. In *On Writing Well* (1976), William Zinsser equated clear thinking with clear writing, noting that “one can’t exist without the other” (9). If a student is limited to five formulaic paragraphs, scholars in this group feel they’re being taught to *avoid* thinking, except maybe at a minimal level. “This structure isn’t about thinking at all,” said David L. Finkle in “Escape from the Five-Paragraph Essay” (2009). “It is about filling in the blanks” (33).

It undermines rather than promotes coherence.

The second concern about the five-paragraph essay ties closely to the first. If students are focusing on the formula rather than their ideas, their essays may actually be *less* coherent rather than more. Foley puts the issue this way:

The problem is not that the five-paragraph formula produces incoherence but rather that it limits students to a superficial, predictable level of coherence. For the body of their essays, students tend to tack any three loosely related ideas onto the prefabricated scaffolding. These three ideas cohere only in the sense that they are three aspects of the chosen topic—three reasons why I have decided to become a dentist, three advantages to joining ROTC, three examples of hypocrisy in *Huckleberry* Finn. As long as students construct a thesis sentence that accounts for their three ideas and they

insert transitions between the paragraphs (*‘Another example of prejudice against Asian Americans is...’*), they feel they have mastered structure. (232)

Gabrielle L. Rico (1988) argued a similar point when she compared the five-paragraph method in writing to a paint-by-numbers kit in painting. “You may get a realistic horse’s head or an identifiable landscape, but something is missing: that something is an emerging pattern unique to both writer and content, which evolves as writers become involved in discovering what they want to say and how they want to say it” (57). Like Wiley, Rico says that the writing process is “neither crisp nor orderly” because

The human mind is not a straight thinker. It makes associative leaps, responds to the rhythms and patterns of language, and takes deep pleasure in shaping wholes meaningful to the writing self; for writing is first and foremost an act of self-definition, and the shape it takes is part of that self-defining process. If we superimpose a formula on this indeterminate process, we will hobble this innate mental capability and block diversity of expression. The standardized shape of the essay cannot be super-imposed like a grid into which the writer's thoughts are placed. On the contrary, the thoughts, the reaching for ideas, the searching for words, often suggest the shape of the essay to come. (57)

David L. Finkle’s (2009) thoughts are similar Rico’s. Finkle, a longtime language arts middle school teacher in Daytona Beach Florida, says he teaches his students that there are many ways to organize their papers. He gives them numerous options for order—stand-up comedy, chronological, spatial, cause and effect, problem-solution, and more—and explains that, depending on their topic, some of these orders will work, and some won’t. “Abandoning the [five-paragraph] formula is not simply giving students license to write freeform essays,” says Finkle. “To the contrary, abandoning the formula means students will have to think hard about the structure and flow of their writing, and the total impact of their essays. This thinking will not occur as they draft, but before they even start writing” (33).

Students can't move beyond it, or negative transfer.

A third worry about the five-paragraph essay is that students can't move beyond it. In academia we call this negative transfer. The American Psychological Association (APA) defines negative transfer as “a process in which previous learning obstructs or interferes with present learning.” The APA gives the example of how a tennis player who wants to play racquetball must “unlearn [his or her] tendency to take huge, muscular swings with the shoulder and upper arm.” In the composition classroom, we see negative transfer when students versed in the five-paragraph formula turn in twenty-page research papers that only contain five paragraphs.

Thomas Nunnally discusses negative transfer in his 1991 article “Breaking the Five-Paragraph Theme Barrier.” Unlike some of his colleagues, Nunnally doesn't feel the five-paragraph theme is *all* bad. In fact, he feels it's a good thing as long as one understands its purpose. “This highly structured format for essay writing provides for effective inculcation of concepts such as unity, coherence, and development” (67). The problem for Nunnally is when composition instructors present the formula as an end in itself. “Students need to understand that they practice on the five-paragraph-theme to learn the *principles* of effective composition, principles that can be applied to any writing task, not to master a single format that will answer all their writing needs” (71). Nunnally goes on to suggest that, towards the end of their classes, writing teachers should encourage students to help students see the five-paragraph theme for what it really is: “a helpful but contrived exercise useful in developing solid principles of composition” (71).

Mark Wiley says something similar based on his experience at CSU Long Beach. In “The Popularity of Formulaic Writing (And Why We Need to Resist)” (2000), after listing a number of reasons teachers may rely on the five-paragraph essay, he then states: “But don't worry, I am not about to rehash diatribes against the five-paragraph essay. In fact, I do not believe formulaic writing is the actual villain in this classroom drama. Rather it is the pedagogical blindness that formulaic writing leads to that disturbs me...” (61). Wiley feels that the formula's appeal to harried teachers creates “inevitable blind spots” in their instruction because they don't realize it's teaching students that “each writing task, each writing problem, is essentially the same”

(66). To prevent this, he says composition teachers need to recognize that writing tasks and contexts vary and that, in order for students to grow and succeed as writers, they must develop a repertoire of strategies for identifying and then handling the differences of each situation.

It reinforces a deficit model of education.

In “Beyond the Five-Paragraph Essay” (2014), Kimberly Hill Campbell agrees with many of her peers’ concerns. Like Foley, Campbell feels the formulaic approach becomes a “stopping point instead of a starting point” because “its emphasis on organization over content squelches complex ideas that do not fit neatly into three boxes” (Wesley 64). Adding to the argument, however, Campbell presents the deficit model of education, a concept she garnered from Lil Brannon et al.’s 2008 article from *The English Journal*. According to Brannon et al.:

When students are considered lacking—lacking organization, lacking ideas to write about, lacking understanding—writing in an arbitrary formula merely sustains the deficit perception. Students learn that writing means following a set of instructions, filling in the blanks. Such writing mirrors working-class life, which requires little individual thinking and creativity combined with lots of monotony and following orders. It’s obvious what training the five-paragraph essay is really practice for. Writing, we argue, should not be yet another way to train students to be obedient citizens, but rather provide them with opportunities to develop their thinking as individuals, making meaning through the act of composing. (18)

Brannon et al. go on to connect the formula to students who end up hating writing and believing they don’t measure up. “[They’ve] learned that writing has nothing to do with them or their ideas. [Their] place is to shut up and follow the rules, confine their ideas to three, write five sentences in each paragraph whether you need them or not, and do as you are told” (20). Marie Foley (1989) commented on this, too, when she said, “The formula reinforces the writing-to-please-the-teacher syndrome that turns students against the system” (232).

It doesn't acknowledge the rhetorical situation.

A fifth concern about the five-paragraph model is that it doesn't acknowledge the rhetorical situation. In "The Rise and Fall of the Modes of Discourse" (1981), Robert J. Connors argues that, because of this lack, structures such as the five-paragraph theme are outdated and impractical. Using Albert Kitzhaber's 1953 claim, he says: "[The five-paragraph essay represents] an unrealistic view of the writing process, a view that assumes writing is done by formula and in a social vacuum. They turn the attention of both the teacher and student toward an academic exercise instead of toward a meaningful act of communication in a social context" (454).

Kimberly Wesley (2000), an English teacher at a private secondary school, agrees with Connors and Kitzhaber. Taught as a rigid structure, she says, the five-paragraph theme gives no thought to rhetorical situation. Instead, it "force[s] students to continue as copiers of memorized form, denying them the freedom to think for themselves" (60). For this reason, Wesley believes that composition instructors should teach the essay as a rhetorical form with three units—an introduction, a body, and a conclusion.

By treating each of these parts as a rhetorical unit instead of a set number of paragraphs, we can approach student texts as records of their rhetorical problem-solving ability... Instead of teaching students to memorize a format and then manipulate every teacher-given topic to fit that format, we should ask students to reflect on what format best enables them to voice their concerns and meet the needs of their audience. (60)

One way in which Wesley suggests teachers can help students understand the purpose of each of an essay's rhetorical units is to analyze and critique papers written by high school or college students, or articles written by journalists (60). In "Breaking the Five-Paragraph Theme Barrier" (1991), Nunnally also mentioned that doing rhetorical analysis of contemporary, professionally-written essays is a good way of giving students choices beyond the five-paragraph theme (71). Moreover, Wesley says critiquing these essays teaches students to be critical readers and to understand that the criteria for good writing are subjective and contextual (60).

It deepens the divide between high school and college.

Two longtime problems teachers have identified in high school composition classroom are workload and standardized testing. American classrooms have been crowded for years, and most if not all high school teachers feel compelled to “teach to the test.” For this reason, in her argument, Foley pointed to “teacher survival” as a possible reason the five-paragraph essay continues to “defy extinction.” “[T]he essay by its very nature requires personalized instruction,” but every teacher knows that’s not possible when you’ve got as many as 150 students (231). Faced with the challenge of numbers, reliance on a formula makes sense—at least, in *theory*.

In actuality, scholars have found that “the five-paragraph essay does not ensure success on either standardized tests or in college” (Campbell 62). In fact, in a study on the differences in expectations in high school and college composition classrooms, Susan Fanetti et al. (2010) found that “First-year writing courses often focus on *un*teaching the formula”; after all, most college writing assignments require far more than five paragraphs (62). In the study, the authors interviewed writing instructors at a large metropolitan university, as well as middle school and high school teachers in the surrounding community. From these, they uncovered two main concerns: “secondary teachers feel compelled to teach to the test, and college instructors wish students hadn’t learned so well in high school that an essay is five paragraphs and a thesis statement can appear only as the first or last sentence in the first of those five paragraphs” (79). Instructors also spoke of being challenged to prove that many of the rules students learned in high school are truly unimportant in college. Students feel like they’re being “tricked,” they said, when their instructor suddenly tells them they can write in first person and start sentences with conjunctions. One professor explained, “I end up feeling like I am arguing with the students... for the first part of the semester and [have to] make them feel that I am not trying to pull one over them by saying this this is not how we do things here” (81).

Ultimately Fanetti et al. blame not the five-paragraph essay for this deficit but the current standardized testing model. “All of the educators with whom we spoke, and the great bulk of the related literature, assess the blame where it belongs: in the fundamental incompatibility between the product model

of standardized testing as quality control and the process model of student-centered learning. In short, standardized testing is antithetical to real learning, lifelong or otherwise” (81).

It doesn’t exist outside the classroom.

One of the last concerns frequently voiced regarding the five-paragraph essay is that a form of its exact kind cannot be found outside of the composition classroom. In *The Composing Processes of 12th Graders* (1971), Janet Emig says that the five-paragraph theme (she calls it the “Fifty-Star Theme” because it’s so “indigenously American”) says:

If one takes a constellation of writers whose current critical judgment would agree are among the best American writers of the sixties—Norman Mailer, Truman Capote, Philip Roth, Saul Bellow; and their juniors, Gloria Steinman and Tom Wolfe—where, even in their earliest extensive writings, can one find a single example of any variation of the Fifty-Star Theme? (97)

Foley (1989) made this argument, too, saying that the five-paragraph essay ill-prepared students for both academic and “real-world” writing and did them a disservice in the long run (233). This argument in part ties back to the negative transfer concept discussed earlier, wherein students were turning in five-paragraph, 20-page research papers. But also, when looking for writing examples in the “real world,” where else is the five-paragraph essay found except in academia?

Praise for the Five-Paragraph Essay

Now that we’ve identified some of the arguments made by those who define the five-paragraph rigidly, let us turn our attention to those who view the five-paragraph formula as a flexible format and, as such, in a more positive light.

It's a good foundation.

In “In Defense of the Formula Essay” (2007), Jan Haluska describes his first encounter as a student with the five-paragraph theme. The year was 1970, and he and his college advisor were looking at his “bungled attempt to answer a final exam question for another teacher’s literature class” (46). His advisor asked him if he’d ever heard of the five-paragraph theme (he had not) and then drew what appeared to be a frontal view of the Parthenon. “The roof is the thesis—what you are trying to prove. The columns are paragraphs giving explanation and evidence for your idea, and the floor is the conclusion that reaffirms the thesis...” (46). Haluska says:

It was as if a lightbulb had gone off, the concept was instantly, joyfully, obvious. So that was how you did it! Make your claim, support it in steps with evidence, and declare victory. The structure was as straight-forwardly effective as a left jab and right cross. I'd been writing essays that tried to get by on creative razzle-dazzle rather than rhetorical power. Why had none of my former English teachers ever shown me that simple drawing, or the fundamental rhetorical pattern it represented? (46)

In the essay, Haluska goes on to say that his advisor’s hesitancy before drawing the sketch was a clue to why he’d never heard of it—his advisor knew all of the arguments against the five-paragraph essay. Haluska says of his own experience, though: “After 35 years of using that diagram with secondary and college students, I still have no satisfactory answer as to why it inspires such fear and loathing” (46).

Haluska’s views on the five-paragraph theme are very much in line with Herb Thompson’s, which Thompson expressed in *The Virginia English Journal* in 2015. Thompson acknowledges the argument that the five-paragraph essay stunts student thinking, but says:

I don’t want to stifle creativity. I don’t want to be prescriptive. I don’t want to teach children a formula that has to be followed in a lock-step fashion. However, most of us crawl before we walk. We learn to ride a bicycle by being supported by the person teaching us or by using training wheels that are adjusted over time to allow us to gradually take on more responsibility. Jerome Bruner described the cognitive importance of using scaffolding when we are first learning to do something.

We need assistance initially, but the assisting structures need to disappear as we gain confidence, power, experience, and success at whatever it is we are doing—in this instance writing. (4)

Byung-In Seo is another scholar who feels the five-paragraph formula useful. In “Defending the Five-Paragraph Essay” (2007), Seo discusses an epiphany she had about the five-paragraph theme while watching *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* after grading papers one Sunday. Seo has spent the majority of her career working with at-risk students and second language learners. Most of these students have “little concept of a complete sentence and... believed that a paragraph consisted of a long, run-on sentence that took up for or five lines on the page” (15). Seo realized this particular Sunday how similar building homes—or Parthenons—were to creating solid essays. She said, “Every house was built in the same fashion every time: a foundation is poured, walls are constructed and raised, and a room is framed and attached. After that, the creativity crew sets in... [to add] all of the characteristics that make a house a home” (15).

Like Haluska and Seo, Kerri Smith also feels strongly about the five-paragraph essay. In “In Defense of the Five-Paragraph Essay” (2006), she says that as a first-year composition instructor she would be “thrilled if, every September, more students could put their ideas together in the coherent form demanded by the [five-paragraph theme]” (16). Contrary to what Fanetti et al. found in their study, Smith feels that students who know the five-paragraph form well are *more* prepared to take on college-level writing than those who do not. For her, “The tragedy happens when students can’t organize their thoughts at all” (16). Smith then goes on to point out that the essential structures of the formula essay—introduction, body, conclusion—are present in all great expository writing. She takes it even a step further, though, and points out the similarities between the five-paragraph structure and scientific writing. “It’s no coincidence that the scientific method demands a similar process: hypothesize, test, conclude...” (16). Smith ends her article by emphasizing that it’s a “great mistake of modern education is the assumption that students can jump to the ‘fun’ stuff before they have learned the ‘boring’ stuff” and highlighting the fact that teachers only need to worry about the five-paragraph form if they’re teaching it as “an inviolable form, an unstormable castle” rather than the “flexible, functional building block that it is” (17).

It promotes (and organizes) student thinking.

In response to Marie Foley's 1989 argument against the formula essay, Chauncey G. Parker published "Jettisoning the Five-Paragraph Essay: Mistaking the Cure for the Disease," in which, one by one, he countered Foley's claims. Parker says:

The five-paragraph essay confuses students? (Foley 231). "Of course students will be confused. Confusion is as indispensable to the learning process as eating is to satisfying hunger. Indeed, show me an unconfused student and I will show you a scholastic somnambulist." (81).

The five-paragraph essay alienates students? (Foley 232). "Why limit it to the five-paragraph essay? Would it not be closer to the mark to say that for the vast majority of students writing an essay is 'an alien, unnatural enterprise,' irrespective of its length or format, and, I might add, whatever the level of education? Grappling with writing this essay, for instance, has given me fits for days (81).

One of his biggest beefs with Foley's thesis, however, is her belief that the five-paragraph essay stifles student thinking. In his own experience, Parker says, while students may have "displayed an utterly breathtaking *bouillabaisse* of excuses" for not understanding something, "never has one pointed at the five-paragraph essay structure as being the culprit for choking off the ability to think" (81). On the contrary, he feels that the five-paragraph essay something concrete teachers can offer their students, something students can hold onto, to help them expand their writing competencies and actually *prevent* intellectual paralysis:

Flatly put, essays are a pain because they require thinking before speaking... Being held accountable for our thinking by the printed word threatens the psyche wonderfully... The self-discipline imposed by having to adhere to the five-paragraph essay gives them at least a sporting chance of fulfilling such a demanding task... Far from marking the terminus of the thinking process, the five-paragraph essay is a structure, a format, a plan, no more, no less. (81-82)

Ruegg shares Parker's sense of humor and agrees with his assessment of the formula's use in "Five Paragraphs are Awesome" (2015). In the article, Ruegg, a high school English teacher in the Bay Area,

compares the five-paragraph essay to a good, reliable friend. “You aren’t going to go to the Niner game with it. It won’t stay out late to see Florence and the Machine at the Fox, but when you’re sick, it prints your sub plans. The most basic essay structure around is there for you when the chips are down and the going gets tough” (13) Thus, in Ruegg’s mind, the five-paragraph essay is not the problem. The problem is ¹bad writing. “Bad writing comes in a whole slew of varieties: lazy, disorganized, sloppy, overwrought, ironically clichéd” (13).

Pointedly, Ruegg then highlights the fact that, to him, good writing doesn’t necessarily mean following all the rules. He’s not much of a rule follower himself, he says—he starts sentences with “and” and “sprinkles a trope or four into the mix”—but he’s organized, and that “lets [him] get away with all kinds of screwy idiosyncrasies...” For Ruegg, then, like the others in this group, the five-paragraph form is useful because it teaches students how to frame their arguments. He says:

Don’t have [students] write five-paragraph narratives. Don’t have them write five-paragraph reflective journals. But when it’s time to break out the analytical muscle, have them frame it in simple terms. If the frame is basic, the ideas expressed will be the star of the show. The five-paragraph essay keeps the organization simple, not the thoughts. (13)

Rob Jenkins is another believer in the formula essay. In “A Return to the Five-Paragraph Theme” (2010), Jenkins describes his journey as a grad student and teacher, in which, inculcated by the teachings of Janet Emig (1971) who argued the five-paragraph theme was a “redundant form, devoid or duplicating of content” (97), he moved away from teaching the formula, despite its foundational usefulness to him when he was an undergrad.

[B]ecause everyone else—from the scholars whose works we studied to my professors and fellow students—seemed convinced that my attitudes were bourgeois and my experiences atypical, I concluded that I must be mistaken. The five-paragraph theme really was evil.

¹ I do not intend to make an argument about what constitutes good or bad writing. This is all Ruegg.

And so, for years, I didn't teach it. Not in my freshman composition courses or anywhere else. In fact, I refused to teach it, even when students practically begged for a handy rubric to help them organize their thoughts. Instead, I attempted to lead them on a journey of self-discovery, or at least a discovery of what they were trying to say and how. To say that approach had mixed results would be to put the best possible spin on it.

Jenkins avoided the formula essay, in fact, until he took a state job that had a mandatory proficiency exam, requiring his sophomores to (among other things) write a 500-word essay in an hour. “So much for organization arising organically from content. In that kind of intensely stressful rhetorical situation, a crutch is exactly what most writers need.” Around that same time, Jenkins also took a side job as a technical editor to make a little extra cash. Jenkins found that, “[P]eople with graduate degrees don’t necessarily write much better than college freshmen, but instead display many of the same problems. Moreover, I found that the most time-consuming part of turning something poorly written into something effective is reorganizing the material so the reader can follow the writer’s train of thought.” These experiences led Jenkins to three conclusions: “[F]irst, organization is a more important aspect of writing than I had realized; second, few people are naturally good at organizing their ideas in writing; and third, they’re not going to magically become good at it over time, even if they’re highly intelligent and well educated.”

The magic is in the structure, not the number five.

Having come to the conclusions about the five-paragraph theme’s foundational and organizational usefulness listed above, Jenkins and the other approving scholars recognize that the five-paragraph essay as a formula *does* have its limits. The danger, as Nunnally (1991) pointed out in the previous section, is that students will come to see the five-paragraph essay as an end in itself (71). To avoid this, Jenkins employs two metaphors for the formula essay: the accordion and the frog.

The accordion metaphor explains how the five-paragraph theme must expand or contract to suit the writer’s purpose and fit the rhetorical situation. For instance, a significant writing assignment for an upper-division course won’t be five paragraphs in length; it might be 25 paragraphs or more... On

the surface, that seems a far cry from the five-paragraph theme taught in freshman comp... [b]ut in reality, the format is the same, only expanded: more points, more development of each (the result, perhaps, of more research and in-depth thinking), and thus more paragraphs.

The point, Jenkins says, is that the five-paragraph theme is merely a beginning, not an end in itself—and that's where his second metaphor of the frog comes in. Jenkins says he tells his students that if a person want to become a surgeon, they don't start out by cutting people open; they begin in a biology class with a frog. As time goes on, they work their way through college and medical school and eventually perform surgery on live patients, but only *after* they've mastered their surgical techniques in lower-stakes situations. "For student writers, [then]," says Jenkins, "the five-paragraph theme is their frog. It's not a 10-page term paper, much less a 50-page business proposal. But the lessons learned about organization from writing in the five-paragraph format make it possible, later on, to put together longer documents that are more logical and coherent."

Duane Nichols made a very similar case for the five-paragraph essay 54 years earlier. In "The Five-Paragraph Essay: An Attempt to Articulate" (1966), Nichols stated his concern that often "...English teachers find that after reading introductions to the first papers, they have no clear idea of the purpose of the papers. Sometimes [they] can't even see that the purpose was to fulfill the assignment" (904). In the article, then, Nichols essentially spells out the components of a good essay and demonstrates how the various parts of the five-paragraph essay fulfill each of these components. These, he says, "can be expanded or contracted and applied to almost any kind of exposition or argumentation" (904-905).

It *does* acknowledge the rhetorical situation.

In his essay, and in response to the argument that the five-paragraph essay is dry and formulaic and inapplicable in "real life," Haluska (2007) like Seo brings up the fact that, "Actually, 'cookie-cutter' designs are indispensable to many practical activities, including the very realistic task of persuasion" (48). Haluska uses the example of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* in which Aristotle walked the reader step-by-step through a model argument one might expect to deliver before a court or legislative assembly.

“Romans like Cicero or Quintilian crafted their own work with the same purpose of preparing people for persuasive skills in political, legal, religious, and philosophical arenas. The idea of rhetorical structure as an aid in convincing others—and its corollary that writing must take a position for a reader/audience—went unchallenged for centuries. (48)

In “Re-Conceiving the Five-Paragraph Essay in an Era of Uncertainty” (1995), Tom Speer says the reason critics feel the five-paragraph model ignores the rhetorical situation is because they define it too narrowly. Although not entirely on board with the five-paragraph theme himself—at the time of writing, Speer used the formula essay in conjunction with a workshop and portfolio method in his classroom—Speer says scholars should move away from “convenient explanations” about why the five-paragraph essay is bad and instead use it as an example of rhetoric itself. To do this, Speer asks his students to discuss the pros and cons of the five-paragraph essay and then brings to their attention the rhetorical strategies Foley, Parker, and Kuehner employed in their arguments for and against the formula in the late ‘80s and early ‘90s. Speer says,

[This] process... presents an opportunity for me to discuss some basic theoretical and philosophical issues on writing in a context that is decidedly concrete and “real.” Going over the arguments pro and con in class, we discuss such ideas as the writer’s purpose and the importance of audience. We also consider the writing strategies of Foley and her critics. While I believe that—at least in some contexts of academic discourse—the five-paragraph model has value in itself, I find it doubly valuable when taken as an opportunity to reflect on what we do as writers, and the social and historical foundation of many of our ideas about writing. (22)

Kurt Schick, in his article “A Five-Paragraph Defense of the Five-Paragraph Essay” (2008), takes issue not with current-traditional rhetoric but with the postformal pedagogies that focus more on process than the end result. “Postformal pedagogies typically leave students with few if any rigorous means of thinking deliberately through their composing process, nor any methodical way of revising and restructuring their drafts... [The postformal approach makes] the same mistakes that John Dewey warned about, namely placing too much emphasis on the individual” (41). Schick then goes on to say that by giving way to

“freewheeling expression and discovery” and ignoring such things as form and audience is a violation of the most basic premises of rhetoric. In his mind, it’s flat out irresponsible to teach novice writers that they and not their audiences should be the ones to judge the value of their text (41-42).

Most importantly, though, Schick like Speer emphasizes the five-paragraph essay’s ability to teach students to be sensitive to real world constraints like audience, occasion, and purpose. This, he hopes, will enable them to become more effective writers and “may provide the added bonus of accelerating their sociocognitive development, i.e. their capacity and inclination to consider alternatives to their own naïve, biased, often ignorant positions” (42).

It *is* real-world writing.

In response to the argument that five-paragraph essay can’t be found in the “real world,” scholars in favor of the essay have several responses. Parker (1990) said in response to Foley’s essay, “As for ‘real-world writing’ I am not altogether certain where ‘real world’ stops and ‘not real world’ begins... Were I to ask my students, who are after all who matter here, I have not the least doubt that they would say that for them the essays they are assigned are ‘real world writing’ aplenty at this stage” (82). Alison Kuehner agreed with Chauncey (1990) in her response to the same. Kuehner said that “The argument that ‘professional writers do not use it’ seems weak since we are not teaching students to be professional writers but to write for their classes” (83).

A second point scholars bring up is that, actually, the five-paragraph formula *does* help with “real world” writing. In his argument, Haluska (2007) points out that when students are freed from trying to invent a new, creative pattern with every essay, they can “concentrate on learning the real fundamentals of good persuasion, principles they can apply to any kind of writing they need for the rest of their lives, formula-controlled or not. By keeping the model simple, we can focus on teaching the basic principles of rhetoric, the actual qualities that make good essays of all shapes and sizes” (51).

Ruegg (2015) touches on this topic, too, when he asks his reader to “[t]hink about the last presentation you made, whether it was a lesson in front of students or a workshop at staff development”:

I bet you I bet you introduced the topic and your specific thoughts on the topic's importance. Then, I bet you supported the ideas you introduced with some examples. I bet you even explained those examples. And correct me if I'm wrong, but you probably concluded by summarizing your points. You know why you did that? You did that because it makes sense. You did that because it organized your ideas. And you know what? When you did that, you were writing a five-paragraph essay. (13)

It's measurable.

A last but not least important argument in favor of the five-paragraph essay is that it is measurable. In my Composition Pedagogy class at the University of Tennessee, we spent several class periods discussing grading and various grading techniques. Many teachers today use a process pedagogy to assign student grades, but Kurt Schick (2008) feels that, actually, "[f]ormalism enables us to measure student learning better than any other approach" (42). Kuehner (1990) and Haluska (2007) commented on this value of the formalist approach, too, when they argued that taking away the five-paragraph essay's very clear expectations would reinforce some students' belief that English is subject to the whim of the teacher (Kuehner 83). After all,

How does a teacher assign anything less than an A to an honest account of a student's thought process, however disjointed it may be on paper? If that's how the student's imagination has worked, anything else would be an inaccurate report of the experience. Thus a teacher in that situation tends to fall back on fairly narrow grading criteria, evaluating grammar and creative wording while largely ignoring the question of substance apart from emotional appeal... By contrast, if the assignment is inductive persuasion [using the formula essay], then the grade rests on objectivity, that is, the paper's effectiveness in clarifying and supporting a point of view whether the teacher actually empathizes with the student's opinion or not. (Haluska 49)

Summing Things Up

As I have just demonstrated, depending on how it's defined and the context in which it's used, the five-paragraph essay can be a valuable tool in the composition classroom—or not. Defined rigidly, the theme can be said to deter student thinking, undermine coherence, create negative transfer, reinforce the deficit model of education, ignore the rhetorical situation, deepen the divide between high school and college, and be inapplicable in “real life.” Seen flexibly, however, the theme can be a good foundation, help students organize their thoughts, and be expanded or contracted to fit almost any writing need. In addition, it *does* acknowledge the rhetorical situation (and can be used to teach students about rhetorical situations), *is* real-world writing (its basic elements can be found across numerous writing genres), and is measurable.

What I find most interesting about this discussion is that both critics and advocates of the formula seem to agree that the format's basic elements—or the introduction, body, and conclusion—is a good starting point for student writers. In fact, the main problem critics of the formula seem to have with the formula is its rigidity, which is what its advocates also reject. Take these quotes from Thomas Nunnally (1991) and Kimberly Wesley (2000) as examples:

- The [five-paragraph theme] is a valuable teaching tool; composition teachers just need to be sure that their students don't perceive it as an end in itself. (Nunnally 70)
- I am not suggesting that we abandon the principles of unity, coherence, and development that the five-paragraph theme purports to teach. Rather, I suggest that we should continue to teach the essay as a rhetorical form with three units—an introduction, a body, and a conclusion—instead of a set number of paragraphs. (Wesley 60)

Now compare those ideas to these quotes from advocates of the five-paragraph essay:

- [The theme] is nothing more than a plan for a five-paragraph essay that can be expanded or contracted and applied to almost any kind of exposition or argumentation. The number five is not sacred or magic. (Nichols 905)

- Five paragraph essays are awesome. Okay, that title is misleading. What I'm really talking about is the introduction-body-conclusion organizational structure. (Ruegg 13)
- [I]f students can learn to organize their ideas into five paragraphs, they should be able later on to expand or contract the format as necessary—especially if they understand that the five-paragraph theme is merely a beginning, not an end unto itself. (Jenkins)

Could it be that critics and advocates of the five-paragraph essay actually agree with one another?

Could it be that they've been promoting the same thing all along, just referencing it by different names?

Additionally, how and when does teaching context matter? Does it matter?

The truth is, no matter which camp scholars are in or in what context they teach, they all share similar goals. They all want their students to think deeply and write coherently about their subjects. They all want their students to be aware of the rhetorical situation and genre expectations. Of *course* they want students to apply the things they learn in the classroom in “real life.”

The problem, then, has been that because educators have been talking past each other, they've made little progress in identifying how best to accomplish these goals. Scholars are saying the same things about the five-paragraph essay today that they were sixty years ago.

Time to Reframe and Rename

Because of this inability to reach stasis, I feel the time has come to reframe and rename the five-paragraph essay. I argue that, instead of defining it as either a rigid formula *or* a flexible foundation, the formula should become a metacognitive tool I call the Introduction-Body-Conclusion Why (IBC-Why) model, which is designed to help explain the primary concepts of an essay and the reasoning behind them. In this, the formula would become a set of rhetorical units—an introduction, body, and conclusion—that could be expanded or contracted and exhibited in a variety of ways depending on the context. These rhetorical

units could then act as a baseline to help students identify what is happening and why in sample texts, and then help them transfer that to their own work. For example, an essay's introduction alone might cover two or three paragraphs, depending on how much information the author's target audience already knows about the topic and what exactly the author hopes to accomplish with their paper. Charting texts in this way could help students understand that their own introductions might be several paragraphs long, and that the thesis statement might come *not* come at the end of the first paragraph. Rather than follow a set-in-stone formula, students would see that an essay's structure depends on its context.

Not only that, because of this tool's flexibility, I believe that the IBC-Why model could be used for genres of all kinds, including many different multimodal genres. After all, as Michael Ruegg (2015) pointed out, even a PowerPoint presentation usually has an introduction, body, and conclusion, and these elements exist in various semiotic forms across many other multimodal genres, too. Using the IBC-Why model as a starting point, students will be able to chart what each part of a multimodal project is doing rhetorically and thus get a better handle on transfer work themselves.

To explain what the IBC-Why model would *really* look like, though, I will first need to look at where the field has gone in recent years—to genre theory. In the following chapter, I offer an overview of genre-based pedagogies and explore the ways in which they examine how texts are situationally-based. I will look at the upsides of teaching students to examine and write texts rhetorically, as well as possible gaps in these pedagogies that the IBC-Why model could help fill.

Part Three – Genre Theory

“To communicate effectively we need to know what kind of situation we are in, what kinds of things are being said, and what kinds of things we want to accomplish.”
– Charles Bazerman

Chapter 6 of U.T.’s Composition 101 textbook, *Rhetorical Choices*, begins by asking students to imagine that they work in a driver’s license office—only there is no application form. Instead, every time someone needs a license, the student worker has to say, “Please write down the necessary information.” “How many different sizes and shapes of paper would you receive,” the authors ask, “...and what would each person consider to be ‘necessary information?’” (97).

In other words, what a nightmare!

The textbook then goes on to explain that driver’s license application forms were created to save both time and energy for applicants and DMV workers, and that application forms themselves are, in fact, a kind of genre. Most incoming college students are of course familiar with various fiction, movie, and music categories, but the idea that an application form is a writing genre—or what scholars actually mean when they say “genre”—may be less familiar.

That is where genre pedagogies come in.

Over the past forty years, researchers working across a wide range of disciplines and contexts have transformed the way we think about genre. Instead of viewing genres as simple categories of texts, scholars like Anis Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff posit that genres are directly tied to social actions and are “ways of recognizing, responding to, acting meaningfully and consequentially within, and helping to reproduce” social situations (*Genre* 3). What has come out of this research is a genre-based pedagogical approach that seeks to do more than just teach students how to write a particular kind of text. Instead, genre-based courses make writing genres come alive by demonstrating that they are rhetorical acts rather than just textual conventions.

As Charles Bazerman stated in the preface to Bawarshi and Reiff's *Genre: An Introduction to History, Theory, Research, and Pedagogy* (2010): "To communicate effectively we need to know what kind of situation we are in, what kinds of things are being said, and what kinds of things we want to accomplish" (xi).

What makes a writing genre a genre, of course, is when a particular kind of writing is done over and over again. Carolyn Miller pointed this out when she defined genres as "typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations" in her 1984 article "Genre as Social Action" (159). In simpler terms, Miller is saying that, when writers write similar kinds of texts, and when they end up making similar strategic choices because of the nature of those texts, readers come to expect those choices when reading that particular kind of writing. When *that* happens, a genre is generated. In the case of the driver's license application, for example, the recurring situation is that someone is applying for a driver's license, and the information applicants expect are things like their name, address, date of birth, and so on. In other genres, genre-based courses teach students to look at the rhetorical situations and strategic choices behind various writing samples, and then teach them to think rhetorically when they write in those genres on their own.

One of the unexpected benefits of showing students how texts are rhetorical is that doing so demonstrates the power of writing to enact real change. In "Genre Pedagogies" (2014), Amy Devitt says: "If genres are rhetorical actions, then genre pedagogies can help students learn to act rhetorically, and if genres are based in situations, then genre pedagogies can help students perceive, understand, and even change situations" (146). This is important because, if students see their assignments as more than "a matter of correctness and fulfillment of a few school-based tasks" (Bazerman xii), they can become much more invested in their work and are much more likely to see its value. This may also lead to increased positive writing transfer.

But wait, how does any of this connect to the IBC-Why model I suggested in the previous chapter? In the following section I will look at the different approaches genre theory has used to teach genre and consider how they talk about organization—or if they do at all. I will also consider the practical implications of genre-based writing courses, and the ways in which the IBC-Why model might help fill in the gap between

current traditional approaches to teaching writing and genre pedagogies. Unlike the externally-imposed structure of the five-paragraph theme, genre pedagogies look at the way texts function from the inside out and in network with other genres (genre systems). This approach highlights the rhetorical and very organic nature of texts—the “why someone wrote this thing in this particular way at this particular time”—and, in this way, offers another way to reframe the way we look at structure. Thus, when a student asks about a genre-based assignment, “Wait, *how* should I structure this?,” we as teachers say, “Well, it depends...” Which is true.

Sometimes, though, our students need a little more help than “It depends”—particularly when faced with a multimodal project or the act of regenreing one kind of text into another. Regenre takes the question of structure to a whole new level and asks our first-year composition students to do metacognitive work many of them haven’t attempted before. This is where the IBC-Why model could prove its value—as a tool to make this extrapolative work more explicit.

Teaching Genres: Three Approaches

As with many pedagogies, Ann M. Johns notes in her edited collection *Genre in the Classroom: Multiple Perspectives* (2002), there is no “one ‘true way’ to approach genre theory or practice” (i). Instead, genre pedagogies “developed from multiple traditions distinct in theory and institutional practice” and have been largely influenced by “different student populations and cultural and institutional contexts” (Devitt 147). As the field has progressed, these pedagogies have culminated in three basic approaches—teaching particular genres, teaching genre awareness, and teaching genre critique. These approaches are not mutually exclusive but can actually be combined because of their complementary goals. Devitt summarizes these goals in this way:

- to give students access to and control of particular genres

- to help students learn how to learn any unfamiliar genres they might encounter, whatever the medium or context
- to help students see the cultural and ideological nature of genres in order to make their own choices and gain critical understanding. (147)

In her essay, Devitt goes onto say that each of these approaches has different values and limitations and, thus, may be more or less effective depending on the student population and institutional setting. One of the benefits of genre pedagogies, though, is that because of their similar schema, they can be combined in a variety of ways to create pedagogies that will work well in any academic situation. Additionally, by approaching the teaching of genre in this way, teachers can do far more than teach their students about genre. Instead, one of the most important goals of genre pedagogies is to teach students how to think and act rhetorically in situations they will encounter throughout their lives.

Teaching Particular Genres

The most obvious type of genre pedagogy is teaching students to write in a particular genre. This approach seeks to make visible all of the rules and tricks of each genre, so that students know exactly what is expected when they attempt to write in the genre on their own. In the classroom, teaching particular genres employs an “explicit teaching method,” in which teachers essentially say: “For this assignment, you will need to do this; I will teach it to you and then you can do it on your own.” Explicit instruction teaches the various features of a genre directly and has been around for many years in many genre-based teaching contexts, including in new media and multimodal contexts.

The challenge with teaching particular genres is that, because genres are rhetorically and situationally based, they do not actually have static sets of formal rules. The correct way to write business forms such as memos, resumes, and cover letters, for example, is entirely contingent upon the company you work for or the position you’re applying for. The same could be said for creative writing, such as poetry, or public writing like blog posts. Thus, when teaching particular genres, teachers may ask students to investigate where a

certain kind of writing appears, who reads and produces it, what subjects and styles are usual, and what writers do to attract readers.

An approach Anne Freadman has taken to teaching the rhetorical nature of genres is to compare genres to games and genre rules to “rules for play.” In her essay “Anyone for Tennis?” (1994), Freadman says, “[K]nowing the rules is know much play the rules allow and how to play with them” (47). In this way, she says, learning the rules of a genre is really about learning the etiquette of that genre. Students must learn to look not only at the text or texts themselves, but also the context, time, place, audience’s expectations, and strategies available to a writer.

One of the most common ways to teach particular genres is to give students model texts to analyze as a class. This process, as described by Macken et al., often takes a three-step approach: First, the teacher leads the students in analyzing a text’s social function, organizational structure, and linguistic features; second, the class works collaboratively to create a new text in that genre; and third, students work to create text in the genre on their own (see Macken et al.’s diagram in Cope and Kalantzis 11). By first embedding the assignment in a meaningful task—analyzing real texts—teachers can help make students aware that there are general structures but no set rules for a particular genre. Rather, each genre has a set of conventions and constraints within which a writer must work, but which can be played with depending on a text’s rhetorical situation.

Teaching Genre Awareness

The second type of genre pedagogy aims not to teach students particular genres, but instead to give students greater access to any genre they may encounter in the future. Anne Beaufort highlighted the importance of this in *College Writing and Beyond: A New Framework for University Writing Instruction* (2007) when she said that our goal as teachers in higher education institutions should be to produce “students who are expert at learning writing skills in multiple social contexts, rather than expert writers in a single context” (8).

Similar to teaching particular genres, teaching genre awareness attempts to “teach genres in ways that maintain their complexity and their status as more than just typified rhetorical features” (Bawarshi and Reiff

189). It does this by treating genres as “meaningful social actions” and analyzing the contexts and features of a new genre to provide “an inroad to understanding all genres” (Devitt 152). An example of how a teacher might accomplish this is a process Devitt et al. describe in their textbook *Scenes of Writing: Strategies for Composing with Genres* (2004). “For genre awareness,” explains Devitt in her 2014 essay, “we teach students a process for understanding, contextually any genre they might encounter” (152). This process includes:

- Collecting samples of the genre.
- Identifying the larger context and the rhetorical situation in which the genre is used (including setting, subject, participants, and purposes).
- Identifying and describing patterns in the genre’s features (including its content, rhetorical appeals, structure, format, and sentence and word style).
- Analyzing what these patterns reveal about the situation and larger context (*Scenes* 93-94)

Another way to teach genre awareness is one Richard M. Coe describes in “Teaching Genre as a Process” (1994). In his class, Coe asks his students to analyze a genre and then write a “mini-manual” for others on how to write that genre (164). In some settings, teachers may also ask students to analyze writing prompts or research a genre they find challenging and write a reflective letter about their work.

Perhaps the most important difference to highlight between teaching particular genres and teaching genre awareness is that the goal of teaching genre awareness is not for students to master a particular genre or genres. Instead, this pedagogy encourages metacognitive reflection and tries to instill in students skills that are transferrable to writing tasks and contexts outside the composition classroom. As Devitt emphasizes in her essay, “For students in college writing courses, a successful genre awareness pedagogy that understands how to help students transfer their knowledge can create lifelong learners who can write strategically and knowingly in any context they might encounter” (154). This transfer might occur in the form of a well-executed resume and cover letter that help a student land a job after college, a well-written engineering report at work, or even a well thought-out letter to a politician in response to a social situation later in life. The

point is that, because of their improved genre awareness, students can engage more successfully in a meaningful way with the world around them.

Teaching Genre Critique

The last type of genre pedagogy is teaching genre critique. Unlike teaching particular genres or strategies for learning new genres, genre critique teaches students to think critically about current genres and their cultures. This is important, Aviva Freedman and Peter Medway tell us in *Learning and Teaching Genre and Genre and the New Rhetoric* (1994), because it does more than just give students access to understanding genres; instead, it demonstrates for them their own power to “subvert, legitimize, or revise genres” (“Locating” 15). In this way, genre critique can show students that, just because things are this way now doesn’t mean that’s the way they’ve always been or the way they always have to be.

One of the biggest reasons proponents of genre critique give for the pedagogy is that, for them, making genres visible is not enough. J. R. Martin and David Rose highlight genre critique’s ability to be “interventionist rather than critical” (20) by addressing who in society has access to genres of power. Susan Feez, in her 2001 essay, points out that, by “making the literacy practices and literacy demands of different types of texts in English-speaking cultures more visible,” genre critique also “makes more visible the values and worldviews embodied in those texts” (57). And Bill Green and Alison Lee point out that genre critique can help students “acquire a critical dimension to literacy, one which allows them to adopt various authoritative positions within a discourse or subject area field, yet not to assume ‘identity’ with these positions” (221). Most of these facets of a genre’s power are not concepts students have previously explored in the classroom, but is knowledge and an awareness they can take with them throughout their lives.

Because of their complementary goals, genre critique is most often taught alongside genre awareness. Teaching strategies generally include questions that ask students to think about the “big picture.” In their collection, *The Rhetoric and Ideology of Genre*, Richard Coe, Lorelei Lingard, and Tatiana Teslenko give this list of “critical, metaphorical questions” about genre as a way to help students get started:

- What sorts of communication does the genre encourage, what sorts does it constrain against?

- Who can—and who cannot—use this genre? Does it empower some people by silencing others?
- Are this genre's effects dysfunctional beyond their immediate context?
- What values and beliefs are substantiated within this set of practices?
- What are the political and ethical implications of the rhetorical situation constructed, personal embodied, audience invoked, and context of situation assumed by a particular genre?

("Introduction" 6-7)

Assignments in genre critique tend to be very creative. In "Teaching Genre as a Process" (1994), Coe has his students "reinvent a genre" by tackling a task with purposes, audiences, and contexts similar to an existing genre, as well as to analyze different genres with similar functions (*Learning* 163-165). Doing so, Coe posits, leads students to "notice genres, to make sense of genres, even to renovate genres" ("Teaching" 165). In *Scenes of Writing* (2004), Devitt, Reiff, and Bawarshi created assignments that asked students to do critique and analysis work hand-in-hand. In one assignment, for example, they asked students to analyze the course syllabi they received at the start of the semester, "looking for expectations and roles, and then to critique the syllabus genre for what it enables and limits, for both teachers and students" (Devitt 155). Another example of an assignment of the genre critique method is when teachers ask students to evaluate genres from cultures and times not their own, like World War II posters or advertisements from other countries. By removing students from familiar settings, Heather Bastian argues in "The Genre Effect: Exploring the Unfamiliar" (2010), we can make them more aware of their own culture and more capable of critique.

When the Rubber Meets the Road

As I discussed at the end of Part Two, one of the main goals all teachers of all pedagogies share is that we want our students to be able to transfer what they learn in our classrooms to other contexts throughout their lives. D. N. Perkins and Gavriel Solomon, in their well-known research on knowledge transfer, discuss two types of transfer: "low road" and "high road." Low road transfer "reflects the automatic triggering of well-practiced routines in circumstances where there is considerable perceptual similarity to the

original learning context” (25). Low road transfer is when a student turns in a 20-page research paper that contains only five paragraphs. Low-road transfer is what we *don’t* want. High-road transfer, on the other hand, “depends on deliberate, mindful abstraction of skill or knowledge from one context for application to another” (25). High-road transfer is when a student takes the principles they learned from the formula essay—the introduction, body, and conclusion—and applies them broadly to their 20-page research paper.

But what about genre pedagogies? How effective are they, really, in creating the lifelong transfer we hope they do? What are some of the challenges of genre pedagogies just discussed, and is there a way that the IBC-Why model might help fill the gap, if there is one?

Genre Pedagogies: How do we assess knowledge transfer?

In “Genre Pedagogies” (2014), Amy Devitt discusses one of the most challenging parts about teaching in any writing course—assessment. She says that, if our goal as teachers is only to know whether students understand how to create a particular genre in a classroom setting, then making our criteria explicit and then analyzing our students’ success is fairly easy. This approach might be enough for teachers working with second language learners or students who lack the background knowledge necessary to apply the more abstract approach of genre awareness to the rest of their lives. For most composition teachers, however, the goal is not for our students to master a particular genre, but whether or not they can use their knowledge and apply the skills they’ve learned in our classes in other contexts.

So, how do we do *that*?

Over the last forty years, a number of studies have been done on the effectiveness of genre pedagogies and transfer. These studies have looked at transfer from a number of angles. In a cross-institutional study at the University of Washington and the University of Tennessee by Anis Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff, for example, the authors looked at the extent to which students’ previous knowledge helps or hinders them when they attempt to learn new academic discourse conventions (*Genre* 2010). From this, Bawarshi and Reiff learned that nearly half of students draw on “familiar writing process skills or habits (invention, brainstorming, freewriting, drafting, revision) when facing a new writing task or genre” (115). As

would be expected, Bawarshi and Reiff also found that students' previous writing experience—the influence of their high school writing or AP courses, for example—greatly impacted their success in genre-centered classrooms.

Anne Beaufort discusses another study she and John Williams did on genre and writing transfer in “Writing History: Informed or Not by Genre Theory?” (2005). In their research, the authors track one student's (Tim's) writing experience across first-year composition, history courses, engineering courses, and post-college jobs. Tim took Composition 101 and 102 his freshman year but, by the end of his senior year, struggled to articulate genre conventions and said he couldn't remember ever receiving any explicit instructions on how to writing history genres. In their report, Beaufort and Williams argue that many of Tim's less successful history essays were because of this curricular disconnect. “Specific skills Tim needed to write effective history essays—ways of incorporating other's ideas, including use of in-text citations as rhetorical tools for supporting one's argument—were not emphasized in freshman writing” (*College Writing* 104-105). In their findings, the authors discuss a number of problems related to Tim's (and other students') understanding of genre, including, most significantly, a lack of a clear “framework of analysis” and conscious understanding of the connection between rhetorical purpose and discipline expectations (53-54).

Part of the reason for this disconnect, the authors found, was that, because genre awareness is tacit, instructors often have difficulty explaining explicit genre features. Even when teachers *can* articulate clear genre expectations, students' own understanding of a genre may conflict with the teacher's. In a study conducted by Janet Giltrow and Michelle Valiquette on how members of a discourse community—in this case, Psychology and Criminology—conserve genre knowledge, and how newcomers to the community acquire that knowledge. In their study, “it became clear that there were very different suppositions regarding genre expectations and what shared knowledge can be assumed... [S]tudent writers... were challenged by the task of estimating shared knowledge” (Bawarshi and Reiff 121). Bawarshi and Reiff summed up the problem this way: “Genre competence, then, and genre performance, rely not just on disciplinary knowledge, but also ‘knowledge about this knowledge’—a type of insider knowledge that helps writers judge how much background information to include and how much explanation of concepts is needed” (121).

Despite these challenges, in her work *College Writing and Beyond: A New Framework for University Writing Instruction* (2007), Beaufort did find at the end of her and Williams' study that Tim had gained *some* genre knowledge throughout college—particularly in his engineering courses. Interestingly (though perhaps not surprisingly), the genres Tim used in engineering courses were very different than those used in the humanities, but were very practical once he entered the working world. As an engineer, he used both business genres (memos, orders, reports, etc.) and technical genres (technical documentation manuals, project proposals, logbooks), and also incorporated visual diagrams and charts into his work. His engineering courses had also taught him to be short and to the point, which was helpful because, as one of Beaufort's colleague's noted: "They are writing up the chain and executives do not want to read past the first page" (Kincaid, personal communication 110).

By the end of his senior year, Tim reported understanding the advantages of using a preset structure for engineering proposals and reports, and an examination of his engineering reports during his junior and senior years demonstrated the growth of his genre knowledge in the field. That said, when it came to transferring his classroom knowledge to writing in the workplace as an engineer, Tim still struggled more than his college instructors would have liked to know. Beaufort says this is because, "[unfortunately], it is nearly impossible to simulate a real-world task in a school context (Dias 2000, Freedman et al. 1994). School takes precedent: it is more immediate, so the more distant target audience cannot be fully imagined" (132). Beaufort concludes by saying instructors should be looking to teach not similarities between writing in different contexts, but rather those broad concepts (discourse community, genre, rhetorical tools, etc.) to help writers analyze the differences between writing situations they encounter. Additionally, she feels that novice writers would more readily gain access to writing situations and genres if explicitly taught genres in relation to the social contexts in which they function.

At this point I want to look back at our original question—how do genre-based pedagogies treat organization, and how might the IBC-Why model fit into a genre-based curriculum? In the discussions about

genre pedagogies that we've looked at so far, not much has been said directly about organization or structure. Does that mean that organization isn't important within genre pedagogies, or could it be that it's simply implied? How does organization fit into the broad concepts of discourse community, genre, rhetorical tools, and the social situation of a text? Does it fit at all?

I would argue that organization *does* fit, but before I attempt to answer the questions just mentioned, I must cover a final piece of genre that has become increasingly important in today's world—multimodal work. Multimodal work is important because it extends the discussion about teaching writing or “composing” past written text. It also reinforces the nature of genre-based pedagogies, which is that the structure of all texts (and the modes in which they appear) depend on situation and context.

What about Multimodal Work?

Because of the vast changes in communication over the past three decades, and because of new technologies' influence on student writing practices, assignments that utilize a wide range of multimedia platforms are needed in the classroom now more than ever before. In the final unit of Composition 101 at the University of Tennessee, the English Department tackles this need by asking students to regenre an academic position paper they completed in the previous unit to a multimodal argument for a public audience. Chapter 12 of *Rhetorical Choices*, “Re-Genre: Repurposing Your Writing for Multimedia Genres,” discusses the difficult knowledge transfer required to complete this process:

Practicing re-genre as a deep revision strategy in this class is useful to you as a writer. First, it builds your rhetorical muscle. Whenever you shift from one rhetorical situation to another, you have to reconsider all the elements that will make your message effective: What is my purpose in this situation, who is my audience, what do they know and what do they need to know about my topic, what do I want them to do? The rhetorical implications of this shift in situation become even more

dramatic when you're remaking the *same material* for a different audience. In this case, though, you're not only shifting audiences, you're shifting genres. (196)

A study by Michael-John DePalma and Kara Poe Alexander, entitled "A Bag Full of Snakes: Negotiating the Challenges of Multimodal Composition" (2015), looks at the challenges discussed in that passage. In the study, DePalma and Alexander collected a range of data from 24 undergraduate and graduate students at Baylor University who engaged in multimodal tasks in the composition classroom in order to explore the following questions:

- How does multimodal composition reinforce and/or challenge students' rhetorical knowledge and composing processes?
- What kinds of rhetorical frameworks and rhetorical decision-making processes do instructors need to cultivate in order to mitigate the challenges of multimodal composing?
- What kinds of pedagogical approaches might composition instructors utilize to help students negotiate the conceptual challenges of multimodal composition?

The researchers collected data from four writing courses—three undergraduate and one graduate course—over a period of three semesters. Alexander taught two of the courses, "Digital Writing and Literacy" and "Writing in the Digital Age," in which students composed five- to six-minute audio literacy narratives and six- to ten-minute scholarly digital video documentaries. In DePalma's undergraduate "Advanced Expository Writing" course, students created a three- to five-minute "digital story" about a critical moment in their literacy development. In both courses, students were afforded numerous opportunities to conceptualize and define (and redefine) their audiences through proposals, storyboards, workshops, teacher conferences, and through a final reflective letter. Additionally, at the end of the semester, the researchers conducted focus group interviews with the participants to get their feedback on their experience with multimodal composing.

Based on their work, Alexander and DePalma discovered that students faced numerous difficulties when carrying out their multimodal composition projects. In particular, students struggled to define their

audiences and effectively utilize the different semiotic resources available to them in each multimodal genre: figuring out how to structure an argument on paper for one particular audience and then restructure it into a different format for a different audience wasn't easy. They also had difficulty with revision and were frustrated because they lacked the experience working with various technologies to produce the kinds of projects they'd envisioned.

As a result of their findings, Alexander and DePalma make several pedagogical recommendations. These include:

- *Mitigating audience-related challenges through reflection.* By asking students to reflect on and look at examples of multimodal texts, instructors can help them get a better handle on various genres and their target audiences.
- *Analyzing (dis)connections between print-based and multimodal genre knowledge.* Students may benefit from looking at both the similarities and disparities among print and multimodal genres, including each genre's target audience.
- *Taking stock of semiotic resources in the process of remediation.* Low-stakes writing assignments to practice remediation, such as asking students to consider how to adapt a print text to a digital medium (or vice versa), may help facilitate transfer.
- *Reflecting on inventional possibilities while remediating texts.* Students should examine the possibilities and limits available in each multimodal situation (e.g. images, video, written text, voiceovers, etc.) and consider which of these modes combined would best help them achieve their rhetorical purpose.

In a 2016 study by Alexander, DePalma, and Jeffrey M. Ringer from the University of Tennessee, the authors consider the question of transfer and new media in multiliteracy center contexts. The authors draw on a case study of a student named Sophie to offer an approach they call "adaptive remediation" to help students with the multimodal remediation process. Although this study looked particularly at multiliteracy centers, their recommendations can also be adopted in the composition classroom. In particular, they give these pedagogical suggestions:

- *Charting*. Charting is the practice of examining a text to determine its rhetorical moves, including the way it's structured.
- *Inventorying*. When inventorying, students take stock of the range of meaning-making resources at their disposal and “consider how such semiotic resources function in relation to one’s overarching rhetorical objectives” (35).
- *Coordinating*. When students coordinate, they “analyze the rhetorical situation of remediated text, consider how a text might be remediated, and examine rhetorical strategies, inventional possibilities, and additional literacies or resources they want to draw on” to achieve their rhetorical goal.
- *Literacy linking*. Literacy linking is the idea that literacies (i.e. areas of knowledge) in one genre can be transferred to another. Thinking about their own literacies can help students with the act of remediation.

What Does It All Mean? Linking Organization and Genre Together.

In the opening chapters of *Scenes of Writing*, Amy Devitt, Mary Jo Reiff, and Anis Bawarshi introduce the concept of genre by discussing different scenes of writing and reading and comparing them to scenes students enter on a day-to-day basis. They ask students to think about the variety of roles that they play—as a son or daughter, sibling, friend, student, and so on—and how they might act differently and use different communication strategies depending on which “scene” they find themselves in. The text goes on to state that, within familiar scenes, this coordination is most often easy. We know what’s expected of us and intuitively know how to act. Within new or less familiar scenes, however—like a social gathering at college where we don’t know anyone—things are less automatic. Instead of feeling comfortable right away, we observe our surroundings in search of social cues for what to say or do.

The analogy, of course, is that observing others and adapting to new situations in real life is what we must do as readers and writers in different textual contexts. Observing moves by different writers in different genres can teach us a lot about how to write in that genre. These decisions are the rhetorical choices we try

to make our students aware of in genre-based pedagogies and through multimodal work. They are what instructors are trying to help their students accomplish through analyzing the (dis)connections between print-based texts and other genres, charting the rhetorical moves in texts, and all of the other teaching methods stated above.

In Chapter 2 of the same work, “Using Genres to Read Scenes of Writing,” the authors go on to describe different writing genres, both in and outside of academia, and ask students to consider the rhetorical moves being made in each. These include: letters to the editor/complaint letters, syllabi, writing assignments, analysis papers and argumentative papers (including the five-paragraph essay), research papers, biology reports, resumes and job applications, editorials, and more. In particular, they discuss what the language of a writing scene can teach us about what is expected in each genre.

What I find interesting about these conversations, though, is the lack of explicit discussion about organization. Note, “explicit.” I’m not saying that no one is talking about structure. The whole point of charting a text’s rhetorical moves, for example, is to look at its structure; the same is true for inventorying the semiotic resources available in a given genre, or analyzing the connections and disconnections between genres. But no one in these conversations is using the word structure. No one is even using the word organization. Thus, in trying to avoid being prescriptive, it’s almost as if these words have become the elephant in the room.

But is that a problem? Do we actually *need* to talk about structure?

I would argue that, yes, explicit discussion about organization needs to be happening in our classrooms. Why? Because, as I noted in the introduction about my own experience assisting in a first-year composition classroom, when the rubber meets the road, talking about structure is something many students sorely need. Unfortunately, as Kerri Smith (2006) pointed out, some students come to Composition 101 and 102 “unable to organize their thoughts at all” (16). Either that, or, as numerous others have pointed out, they’ve learned the five-paragraph formula so well that they’re unable to move beyond it. When either of these things happen, it becomes critical to talk about structure. Structure—presented flexibly and in

correlation with a text's rhetorical situation—is what students need to not only improve their writing, but also to make the metacognitive leaps necessary to regenre that writing into multimodal formats.

And *that* is where the IBC-Why model comes in. The IBC-Why model is a tool we can offer students to help them identify the parts of both formal and informal writing and then look for how those parts show up in other genres—or don't. Many non-alphabetical texts, such as blog posts, podcasts, and videos, contain each of the elements of the IBC-Why model, even if they don't show up in that order, or even if they don't look like they do in an alphabetical text at all. Individual elements of the IBC-Why model are, in fact, found in most genres students encounter in the humanities and in many multimodal genres. Even web sites, for example, have some sort of introduction on their “About” page, and podcasts generally have some sort of introduction, body, and concluding remarks.

Thinking about it this way, then, the IBC-Why model becomes a sort of control group—a starting point from which students can build their understanding of structure and expand. Questions the IBC-Why model might prompt students to ask include things like: *What's included in the introduction? Why is that necessary? How long is the introduction in this essay? How might that show up in, say, a podcast? Does this meme include any of the elements of the IBC-Why model? If not, what is it doing instead?* In so doing, the IBC-Why model promotes the “high road transfer” Perkins and Salomon (1988) discussed by teaching students to reflect on context, situation, and structure as they grapple with both written and multimodal texts, and the back and forth negotiations in between.

In the following chapter, I will demonstrate how the IBC-Why model can be practically applied to the Composition 101 at the University of Tennessee. In Units 3 and 4, students compose a position paper for an academic audience and then re-genre it for a public audience. Using these assignments, I will illustrate how the IBC-Why model can make more explicit the extrapolative, metacognitive work necessary for students to successfully complete these assignments without giving them a formula they think will always work.

Part Four – Putting It All Together

“Your project is in a controlled space with traditional academic writing. I have these thoughts, but I know the box I’m going to put them in. But this other thing—multimodal composing—is like having a bag full of snakes. It’s like I don’t know what I’m doing with all this. I’m not in control of any of it... The problem here is that nothing is the same.”

— Duncan, graduate student in study

Michael-John DePalma and Kara Poe Alexander begin their 2015 article, “A Bag Full of Snakes: Negotiating the Challenges of Multimodal Composition,” with the above quote by graduate student Duncan at Baylor University. Here, Duncan expresses his frustration with multimodal and transfer work in a way to which many students can likely relate. Taking a traditional academic essay and turning it into a multimodal piece is *hard*—so hard that, for many of them, it might feel like trying to wrestle a bag full of snakes.

In the following chapter, however, I will demonstrate how the IBC-Why model can be a tool to help students wrangle this bag full of snakes. To accomplish this, I will look at the standard curriculum for Composition 101 at the University of Tennessee, which uses a combination of several pedagogical approaches, including genre theory, to provide students with transferrable knowledge and skills in a number of important areas. Some of course goals include: reading texts critically; analyzing rhetorical situations and appeals; writing persuasive arguments; considering counterclaims; evaluating and integrating sources into student writing; and analyzing the ways in which written, visual, and cultural rhetorical elements operate persuasively in different genres. (See page 3 of *Rhetorical Choices* for a complete list.) In particular, I will focus on Units 3 and 4, in which students turn a position paper they’ve written for an academic audience into a multimodal piece for a public audience. In so doing, I will demonstrate how the IBC-Why model can bring into a new light the organization and structure behind standard academic essays, as well as act as a control point for the facilitation of transfer between academic texts and multimodal genres.

The Rhetorical Situation: An Overview of Composition 101

Composition 101 at the University of Tennessee is divided into four units². In the first unit, students learn about rhetorical situations and discuss concepts like rhetorical purpose, rhetorical appeals, discourse community, exigence, and target audience. The first paper, called the Comparative Rhetorical Analysis, asks students to compare arguments on the same topic from two different writers and determine which text is better suited to its rhetorical situation and, thus, more likely to accomplish its rhetorical purpose. It's a challenging task for many students, as it forces them to look at the effectiveness of someone's argument rather than simply stating with which writer they agree, and is a good set up for the second paper—the Annotated Bibliography.

In the second unit, students read and consider the arguments of two (or sometimes even three) additional authors who've written on the same topic as they read in Unit 1. The purpose of this unit is not to look at rhetorical appeals, however; rather, it is to introduce the students to the concept of stasis. Chapter 4 of *Rhetorical Choices* explains that there are four levels of questions, or stases, at which writers can argue about a topic (or argue past each other). These questions include: conjecture (does it exist?), definition (how is it defined?), quality (is it good or bad?), and policy (what should be done about it). If people share the same view of something at the same level—"Graffiti is defined as vandalism," for example—then they are said to reach stasis. If people are arguing different viewpoints at the same level, or are arguing at different levels, however, then the authors are *not* in stasis. This would be the case if one person says graffiti is vandalism, while another says graffiti is art. In this case they're making different arguments about graffiti at the level of definition.

Unit 2's major assignment is the Annotated Bibliography. To complete this assignment, students must identify the main arguments behind each of the articles they've read and write a four-sentence summary

² All curricular references are for the 2018-19 and 2019-20 academic school years and *Rhetorical Choices*, 2nd edition.

of each. In their summaries, students must identify what kind of argument (conjecture, definition, quality, or policy) the author is making and comment on how their argument lines up with the others in the debate. At the end of the paper, students write a conclusion in which they describe the major points of agreement and disagreement in the debate and what level the authors do or do not reach stasis.

Units 3 and 4 of Composition 101 build on the first two units. For Unit 3, students write a position paper on the topic they've been discussing in class. The position paper is a fairly common academic genre and, thus, this project is usually the most familiar for students. For this assignment, though, students write for an academic audience—which they may *not* be used to—and must include three scholarly sources that support their argument. Chapters 9 and 10 of *Rhetorical Choices* look at what counts as a scholarly source, and many instructors provide instruction on how to incorporate quotes and use evidence effectively to achieve one's rhetorical purpose.

In Unit 4, the textbook asks students to re-genre the Academic Position Paper they wrote for Unit 3 into a multimodal project for a public audience. Chapter 12 provides guidelines and tips students should think about when attempting this process. These include things like reconsidering their rhetorical purpose, imagining their new target audience, and considering the semiotic means available to them in their new genre.

In particular, the authors point out in Chapter 12 the malleability and contextuality of genre by highlighting the difference between “form” and “genre.” On page 196, they say:

The word “form” is often used interchangeably with “genre.” That’s okay, except that it implies that genre is merely a container into which you pour content, and like plaster in a mold, that content takes the shape of the form it’s in. But genre isn’t simply a container. It actively interacts with the content, changing the material it holds, and in turn being changed by the material.

This of course ties directly into genre theory and Charles Bazerman’s thought that genres can demonstrate both “the complex regularities of communicative life and the individuality of each situated utterance” (Bawarshi and Reiff xii). The textbook ends this section by saying that the real power of genre is that it is a

lens through which we view things that interest us. Because of different genres' various semiotic resources, it has the power to change what we notice about a topic and our relationship to it.

The Academic Genre, Multimodal Project, and the IBC-Why model

Now that I have outlined the curriculum and rhetorical space I'm operating in, I will revisit exactly what the IBC-Why model is and the ways in which it can be a tool to help students both with the academic composing and multimodal revision process.

At the end of Part 2, I established that, although the five-paragraph essay structure has been a contentious area of debate for many years, the *reason* the debate has been so contentious is that the scholars involved have been talking past each other. They have not agreed on the definition of the five-paragraph essay. Those opposed to the five-paragraph essay define it as a rigid formula that students learn to superimpose on texts, regardless of their rhetorical situation or purpose. Those in favor of the formula, on the other hand, see the five paragraphs as a flexible outline that can be expanded or contracted depending on the rhetorical situation. For these scholars, the formula is simply a starting point to help students organize their thoughts.

What came from this realization is the understanding that, no matter how scholars define the five-paragraph essay, they all have the same goal—to help their students become better writers and thinkers, and to be able to transfer what they learn in the composition classroom to other contexts. Organization is vital to all good writing, of course, and the main value the five-paragraph essay offers is its introduction-body-conclusion structure. It is this structure that all teachers would like their students to master, and which is essential in many writing settings across the curriculum.

That said, if the main value of the five-paragraph essay is its introduction-body-conclusion, and if no one *really* believes in superimposing five paragraphs on *anything*, then why have scholars stuck with the contentious “five-paragraph essay” name?

That question is the reason that, in the concluding remarks of Part 2, I proposed that it's time to create a new tool that provides students with the structure of the five-paragraph essay, but without the "five paragraphs" or the contention that comes with them. My tool, the Introduction-Body-Conclusion model ("IBC-Why model" or "IBC," for short), is a flexible outline that students can apply to numerous academic and other texts. Similar to the five-paragraph essay, a text following the IBC-Why model should have a clear introduction and main claim, a body that builds the writer's argument and supports their main claim, and a conclusion that recaps the writer's argument and revisits their main claim. Unlike the five-paragraph essay, however, a text following the IBC-Why model is not limited to a number of paragraphs and can be expanded and contracted depending on the rhetorical situation. A term paper for an upper division course, for example, might be fifteen paragraphs. A letter to the editor, on the other hand, might only be three or four. The point is that the length of the paper depends on the writer's target audience and on their rhetorical situation and purpose.

At this point I feel it's important to note that, as with any tool, the IBC-Why model has its uses and its limits. The IBC-Why model's application to written academic or many other alphabetical texts is easy enough to see, but what about multimodal texts? A podcast, for example, may have an introduction, a body, and a conclusion, but then again it might not. The same is true for a video. And what about a meme? A meme doesn't have an introduction or a conclusion. A meme's image or theme could be considered its body—maybe?

That said, rather than being an end point for the IBC-Why model's usefulness, multimodal and re-genre work can actually be a jumping off point. By charting what an alphabetical text is doing in each of its three main sections, and by looking at how that same information is conveyed (or not) in a multimodal context, the IBC-Why model can help students inventory what's happening in both written and multimodal contexts. In this way, the model can act as a sort of control point for students to see how meaning in an alphabetic text can be transferred (or not) to the different semiotic resources available in a multimodal genre.

To demonstrate how this might work, in the following section I will apply the IBC-Why model to Composition 101's two major assignments—the Academic Position Paper and the multimodal re-genre project—from Units 3 and 4. I have chosen to focus on these two assignments because the Academic Position Paper is similar in mode and structure to Unit 1's Comparative Rhetorical Analysis, and because Unit 2's Annotated Bibliography is less flexible than most genres and is not often seen outside academia. The multimodal assignment from Unit 4, however, offers an excellent opportunity to examine both the usefulness and limits of the IBC-Why model as a tool to facilitate transfer and help students wrangle that bag full of snakes.

Unit 3: The Academic Position Paper

Chapter 6 of *Rhetorical Choices* introduces students to the genre of the Academic Position Paper. The text goes over important concepts like academic discourse communities and the purpose for academic writing, and explains reader expectations in academic writing, such as objective, unbiased information; explicit writing; and professionalism. Chapters 7 and 8 then build on this introduction by discussing rhetorical situation and purpose, rhetorical appeals, and the classical outline for an argument. As mentioned in Part One, the classical outline includes the *exordium*, *narratio*, *propositio*, *partitio*, *confirmatio*, *confutatio*, and *peroratio*, which the textbook explains essentially amount to the argument's introduction, the writer's stance, an acknowledgement and refutation of the opposing view, and the conclusion (136-7).

By including this outline, *Rhetorical Choices* certainly *does* address structure. Because this discussion of structure is limited to one part of one chapter and discusses one only kind of academic writing, however, I feel students need more. The IBC-Why model is a tool that can help students identify the sections of texts across many genres and, as we will see, think more critically about structure in their own writing.

Following this introduction to academic writing, the textbook provides a sample student paper written by University of Tennessee student Alexis Paine in the fall semester of 2017. Paine wrote on the topic of social media and politics in response to these instructions from the template assignment sheet³:

Write an academic position paper that intervenes in the debate we examined in Unit 2. To do so, you'll need to take into account your own conclusions from your debate analysis paper. Given the debate you've analyzed, what kind of argument should you primarily make (e.g., conjecture, definition, quality, or policy), and for which particular audience should you make that argument? While the stasis analysis you conducted for Unit 2 tells you where you need to begin, much of the work in writing this academic position paper will involve fleshing out that argument.

To accomplish this, the instructions go on to say, students will need to “invent or come up with a combination of persuasive appeals to logos, ethos, and pathos that are appropriate for your intended audience” and “find and cite evidence in support of your particular argument, and frame that evidence in ways that are appropriate for your rhetorical situation.” The instructions also state that the paper should be about 1,000 words; otherwise there is no mention of structure. The IBC structure is assumed.

Now, obviously for Alexa's paper to have made it into the textbook as an example for other students, she must have done an exemplary job. Even writing samples like Alexa's usually undergo editing by the Composition Committee before being published, though, meaning that even the best student essays generally need structural reinforcement before appearing in a textbook. For the purposes of my analysis, I am not concerned with who put the final touches on Alexis's essay, of course, but rather how it aligns with the introduction-body-conclusion format of the IBC-Why model. In the following section I will use images⁴ of her text taken from the textbook to illustrate how each of her sections line up with the IBC-Why model.

³ As provided by the English Department at the University of Tennessee.

⁴ All blue highlighting and instructional commentary is from the textbook and not my own. It may be noted that this commentary offers implicit teaching of structure. The IBC-Why model makes this explanation of structure explicit.

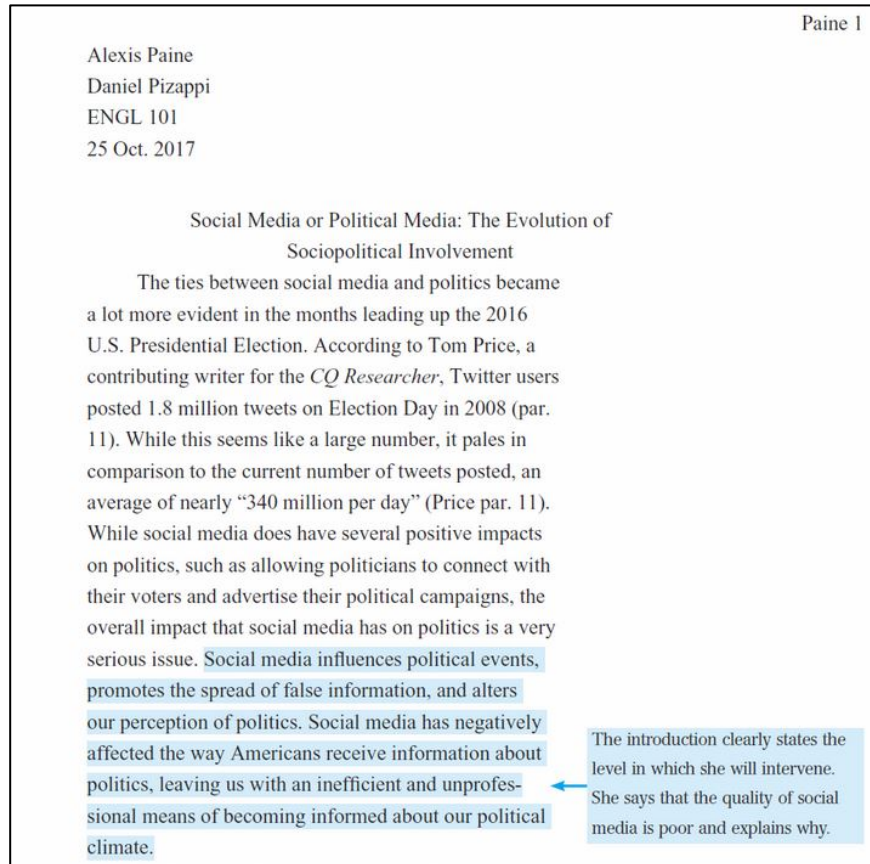


Figure 1

The Introduction.

In the introduction to Alexis’s paper, she does several things. First, she identifies in the very first sentence what her paper is about—the tie between social media and politics. She adopts a formal tone and cites evidence appropriate for an academic audience. She also gives a very clear thesis at the end of her introduction. She says: “Social media has negatively affected the way Americans receive information about politics, leaving us with an inefficient and unprofessional means of becoming informed about our political climate.”

Important for our analysis is that Alexis’s introduction only takes up one paragraph. Her introduction doesn’t need to be very long as her audience is already familiar with the concept of social media and the political landscape of the United States.

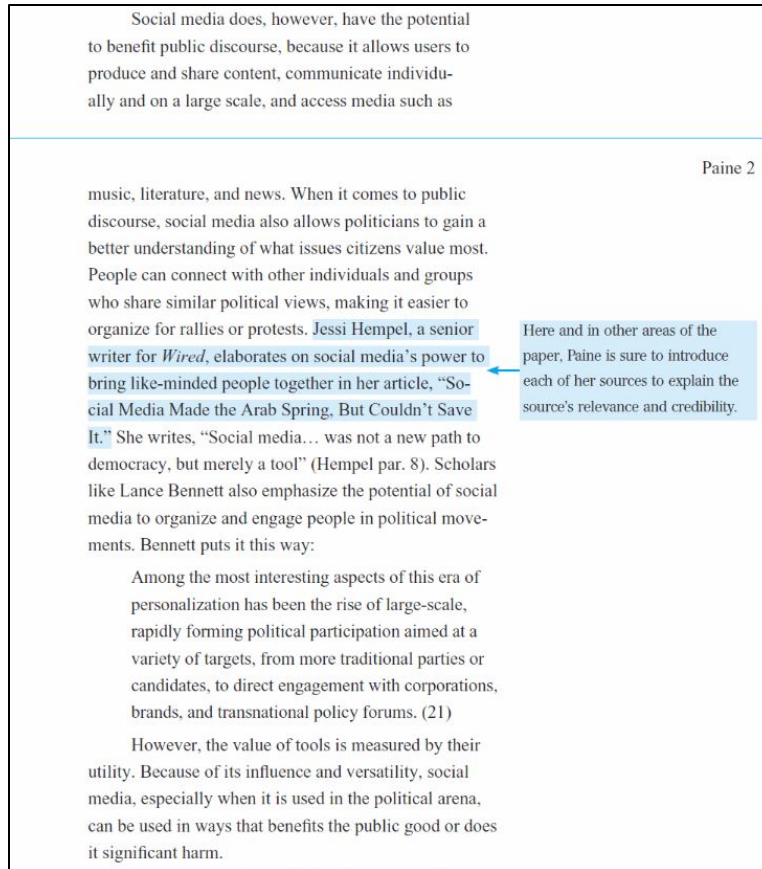


Figure 2

The Body.

Because there isn't room to include all of Alexis's text, I have here included only the first two paragraphs of the body of her essay. In all, the body of her essay takes up five paragraphs and builds her argument logically by making these points:

- First, she acknowledges the counterclaim that social media can benefit public discourse.
- Next, she argues that, although it *can* do good, social media used in the political arena most often does harm.
- Last, in the final three body paragraphs, Alexis supports her claim that social media does more political harm than good because it: 1) polarizes society, 2) has negatively changed the way politicians debate and the way public perceives those debates, and 3) spreads false political information through news articles that haven't been properly vetted.

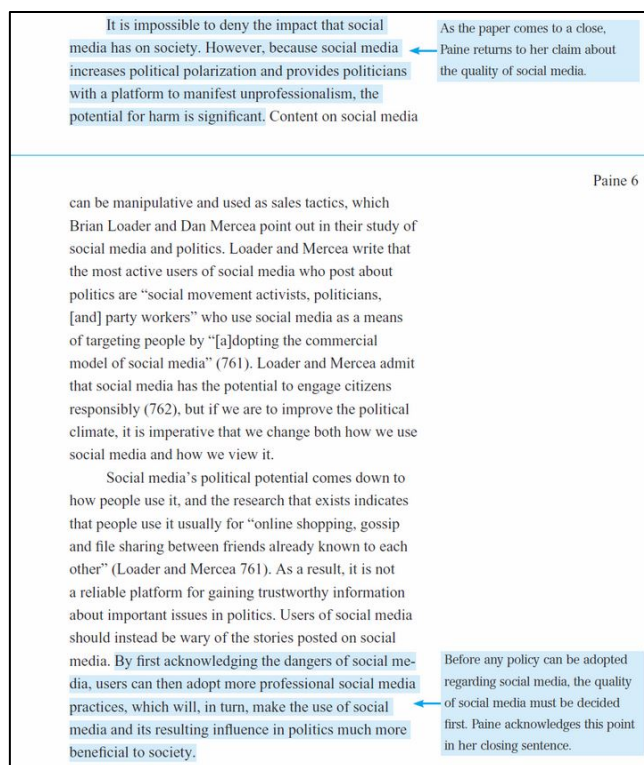


Figure 3

The Conclusion.

After her final supporting point, Alexis starts winding down her argument. In the second to last paragraph, she returns to her thesis statement about social media’s potential for harm in politics, and in her final paragraph she comments on the quality of social media as a political platform when she says users must recognize social media’s dangers and “adopt more professional social media practices” in order for social media to benefit society through politics.

Important for our analysis, though, is not Alexis’s specific points but rather the format of her conclusion. Due to the length and nature of her piece, she ultimately uses two paragraphs to both recap her argument and hammer her point home. This lines up well with the IBC-Why model’s structure and demonstrates that in many instances writers need more than one paragraph to conclude their work.

What it means.

As can be seen, in the case of the Academic Position Paper, the IBC-Why model works well. Its general outline—which is common in writing settings across the curriculum—matches the IBC outline

section by section. Because of this, the Academic Position Paper demonstrates how the IBC-Why model not only works, but also how acts as a baseline for standard academic texts, which helps promote transfer. By acting as a baseline, the IBC-Why model gives students a starting point for “high road transfer” in which they deliberately and mindfully apply the abstract “IBC” from one context and apply it to another (Perkins and Solomon 25). This can be helpful both for students who are familiar with this standard academic outline, and for those who may have less academic writing experience than others. For less experienced writers, the IBC-Why model offers a sort of road map to help them navigate what’s happening—and needs to happen—in a text.

Unit 4: The Multimodal Project

Now that we have looked at how the IBC-Why model applies to a traditional academic essay, we will consider how it might apply and help with transfer to a multimodal context. The template assignment sheet for this project is as follows:

Your task for this final project of the semester is to repurpose or re-genre your Unit 3 argument for a multimodal genre aimed at a public audience. You can choose to write a multimodal op-ed (see RC ch. 11) or compose a genre such as a podcast, infographic, TED Talk, or video PSA, among others (see RC ch. 12). Your selection of genre should follow from your rhetorical purpose and audience.

Following from RC ch. 12, your rhetorical purpose for your multimodal public argument can be to inform your audience, convince them to change their behavior, or dramatize an idea or problem in a way that will influence their beliefs or emotions... You have a say in defining your intended audience for this project, but it should be a public audience, which can be generally defined as non-specialists who are interested in reading about and engaging with arguments about current events or other topics of broad interest.

As with the Academic Position Paper, the assignment sheet gives little to no instruction on structure. The closest it gets is saying that, because the emphasis of the course is not on learning technologies or platforms, students should select a mode or medium they're already familiar with or are willing to learn. Interestingly, the assignment sheet also indicates that part of the student's grade will be based on how closely their project adheres to the conventions of the genre. For tips, the instructions point back to Chapter 12 in the textbook for general guidelines for composing in online genres.

Now, for the purposes of this demonstration, it would be ideal if, in addition to the general multimodal tips offered in Chapter 12, *Rhetorical Choices* also included an illustration of how Alexis turned her Academic Position Paper about social media and politics into a multimodal project. It would be fascinating to see what multimodal genre she chose, and who her new target audience was, and what semiotic resources she used to illustrate her introduction, body, and conclusion. Unfortunately, the current version of the textbook does *not* offer any examples. Students must look elsewhere for ideas, and because of this, I have chosen to analyze my own multimodal project—a blog post—which I completed in English 505 (Composition Pedagogy) in preparation to teach English 101 myself. In addition, because a blog post is perhaps an easier comparison to make to a traditional academic essay, I will also consider how the IBC-Why model might be applied to a meme. I will consider both how the IBC-Why model can help with this transfer, and also where it acts more as a control point between one genre and another.

The Blog Post

For this multimodal class project, I chose to write a blog post about a New York Times “Room for Debate” discussion on whether or not foreign language classes should be required in college. I chose this topic because, as I discuss, I spent three years teaching English in Taiwan and Hong Kong before coming to the University of Tennessee and have always wished I had mastered a second (or third, or fourth) language. My opening lines are shown in Figure 4 on the next page.

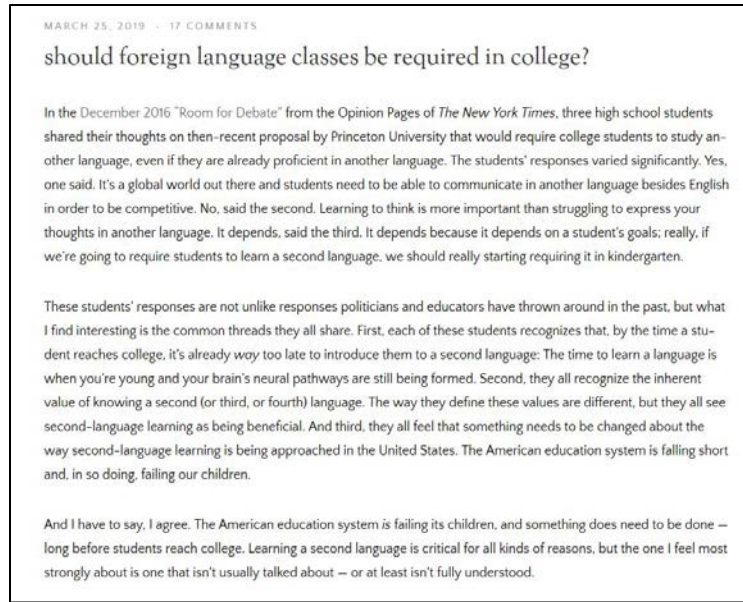


Figure 4

The Blog Post—Introduction.

In my opening paragraphs (Figure 4), I set the stage for my reader. My target audience for this project is the readers of my blog, *Shift*, as well as anyone else who might stumble across my page. Because my readers have likely not read the *New York Times* discussion I am referencing, I take the time to explain the gist of the conversation in the first paragraph. In the second paragraph, I add my own thoughts on the discussion. It isn't until the third paragraph that I offer my main claim that the American education system's approach to second-language learning is failing—young adults need be exposed to a second language long before college—and one of the biggest reasons this is important is... Well, I don't say what my reasoning is because, in the genre of a blog post, I don't have to. Instead, I use this moment to create interest and hopefully keep my reader reading.

The Blog Post—Body.

After my introductory paragraphs, I move into the body of my blog post (see Figure 5). Because this isn't a formal academic paper, I use my own experience living abroad in Taiwan as evidence to support my main claim. I also include pictures and slideshow to create interest in my story. In this first body paragraph, I



Figure 5

explain how impressed I was by many Taiwanese students' adeptness in both their native language of Mandarin and English.

In the next four body paragraphs of my post, I continue to build my argument by discussing my experience returning to the States after living in Taiwan and Hong Kong and by highlighting how my quality of life would have been better if I'd known Mandarin while living in Asia. I also bring in the results of a study done by the Pew Research Center and statistics from the 2015 U.S. Census to add credibility to my blog post and build my argument logically.

The Blog Post—Conclusion.

In my second to last paragraph, I begin to conclude my argument (see Figure 6). I return to my main claim that the American education system is failing its children by not requiring second-language learning earlier in its curriculum. I do this by pointing out that, despite the obvious importance of this issue, nothing is being done about it. In my closing paragraph, I send the reader off by acknowledging and rebutting a counter claim that might be made against my argument: What language should we teach? *Any* language. No matter the language, the cognitive benefits are the same.

At the rate the United States is going, we'll likely never know. Things seem to move at a snails' pace when it comes to making changes in education at the federal level. According to Dan Davidson's "Notes on the American Academy Commission Report: America's Languages (2017)," the founders of our country understood that "the study of language in the U.S. was a complex and varied endeavor, so much so that they determined not to establish an official state language for the new nation. They supported inquiries into what they referred to as the 'rationale, genius and idiom of the English language,'" as well as examined Native American languages and linguistics more generally, as they believed that an "appreciation of the plurality of languages would improve communication domestically and internationally, and help the new nation understand its place in a changing world." And yet here we are more than 200 years later, lagging behind the rest of the world in this very key area.

That said, if anyone brings up the argument, "Well, if we're going to teach a second language, what language should we teach? There *are* so many here in the States, after all—how do you choose?" To them, I say, *Any* spoken language! It doesn't matter. The results and benefits of knowing a second or third are the same no matter what language is being studied.

Figure 6

How the IBC-Why model helps facilitate transfer to a blog post.

Now that we've walked through a blog post using the IBC-Why model, it's easy to see how the model can be applied to not just academic texts, but other texts, as well. In preparing to do this project, I took stock of several things. But first, why a blog post?

Blog posts are usually single entries on a web page. They can take many forms depending on the kind of blog—some blogs only publish photographs or poems, for example—but most posts are essentially online opinion pieces that follow an introduction-body-conclusion format. Bloggers usually write in a lively style and often include personal narratives, but good bloggers don't only rely on personal experience to make their arguments. They also include fact-checked evidence to make their points because they know that their personal experience alone will not be enough to convince a wide audience.

Because of these characteristics, I knew a blog post would be a good choice for my multimodal project. It matched my rhetorical goal of sharing my opinion about the importance of learning a second language in school (and how the American education system needs to do better) with my blog followers,

many of whom already knew that I'd lived abroad—in fact, had followed me for that very reason.

Additionally, I was comfortable using the informal tone typical in blog posts in my writing.

Once I had determined that I would write a blog post for my project, I used the IBC-Why model to think about what needed to be done in each part of my post. My thoughts were as follows:

- *First, who is my target audience and what do they know about my topic?* At the time of publishing I had a few dozen regular readers, but I knew my post would be online and available to anyone to stumble across. For this reason, I knew that the very least I needed provide some background about the discussion I was jumping into to provide context for my own argument.
- *Second, how would I support my argument?* Because my interest in this topic is based on personal experience, I knew I needed to explain my own background in relation to the topic. I also needed to back up my experience with evidence from others. Thus, after presenting the context of my argument in the introduction, I used the body of my blog post to share my personal story and supporting evidence.
- *Last, what was my point? What did I want readers to take away from my conclusion?* If I was going to make an argument, I needed be sure I made it clear in my conclusion. I did this by returning to my claim that learning a second language is important and the American education system needs to do better.

Thus, by first walking through the conventions of and semiotic resources available in the blog post, I was able to determine that a blog post would be a good fit for my rhetorical purpose. Then, by considering where the various sections of the IBC-Why model would fit into a blog post and the rhetorical context of each, I was able to pull off a successful project. Using the IBC-Why model, then, we can help students think about the semiotic modes offered in a genre and how and where each rhetorical sections of an IBC essay might show up among them.

The Meme.

Now that we have examined a multimodal genre that is similar in form to a traditional academic essay, we will analyze how the IBC-Why model might help with transfer to a much less similar genre, a meme. The *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* provides this definition of a meme: “1) an idea, behavior, style, or usage that spreads from person to person within a culture,” or “2) an amusing or interesting item (such as a captioned picture or video) or genre of items that is spread widely online especially through social media.” Memes can take many forms and may be as simple as a single image with a caption, or may include multiple images with text, like a comic strip. Interestingly, *Rhetorical Choices* makes no mention of memes, and not all Composition 101 instructors may allow students to create memes for their Unit 4 project. Nevertheless, for the sake of example and an illustration of the application of the IBC-Why model to an atypical form in academia, I will focus on a meme, anyway. Additionally, because we have just looked at a blog post dealing with learning a second language, I will examine a meme that also deals with second-language learning (see Figure 7 below).

The Meme—Introduction.

As can be seen in Figure 7, a meme doesn’t have much of an introduction. The semiotic resources available in a meme are its image (or images), and its text or captions or dialogue (if it reads like a cartoon). Because of this, if one was to consider where they’d find the “introduction” to a meme, the closest they might get is the viewer’s first glance. The context for the meme, then, would be how and where the viewer found the meme, and who created it. Some memes have very targeted niche audiences while others are meant to be understandable to a wide variety of audiences.

In our example in Figure 7, one of the first things that the viewer sees is a close-up of the front of actor Tobey Maguire’s face. Maguire is looking to the side and appears amused or perhaps pleased. His mouth is curled into a half smile. But what is he looking at? The viewer has no idea until he or she looks at the caption.



Figure 7

The Meme—Body.

After the reader takes in the image, their eyes go to the text for more explanation. This meme's caption—"When you understand a conversation spoken by the locals who think you have no clue"—gives us insight. Apparently Tobey *is* pleased with himself. He can understand a conversation in a foreign language, and the people talking—the locals—don't know he understands. The text also tells us that Tobey is in a foreign country, or at least somewhere unfamiliar, which is perhaps another thing the meme is trying to point out: learning a foreign language makes travel easier. Tobey's sly smile demonstrates that it might make travel more enjoyable, too. Knowing a second language is difficult but rewarding; after all, you can listen in on the locals!

Thus, with one simple image and caption, this author has presented not one, not two, but three reasons to learn a second language. Could it be, then, that without actually reading an entire essay, this meme alone could help the reader piece the author's argument together?

The Meme—Conclusion.

But what about the conclusion? Obviously a single-image meme such as this one does not offer any concluding remarks. Like the main claim and supporting points, the conclusion is mostly implied and, truth be told, could go many different directions. If learning a foreign language is a good thing because it helps us understand what's going on around us in foreign settings, and if it makes communication easier when traveling, and if it's something to be proud of, then _____. The image lets the reader fill in the blank.

How the IBC-Why model helps facilitate transfer to a meme.

So then does the IBC-Why model work here actually work here? Since it doesn't have clear-cut IBC sections, does it apply? I would argue that, although no, a meme cannot capture the full introduction, body, and conclusion of an essay, by thinking through what each part of the meme is doing in terms of its introduction, body, and conclusion, the IBC-Why model *can* help facilitate transfer. It does this by acting as a point of comparison between the formal essay and the new genre. It also helps point out the affordances of the new genre, as well as the importance of a specific target audience.

To demonstrate how this would work in the classroom, let's use our example of Tobey Maguire in Figure 7 again. Let's say a student has written a position paper in which they claim that learning a second language is a very valuable life skill. Their main supporting points are that learning a second language makes you smarter, can help with your career, and makes traveling more enjoyable. Now, clearly it would be difficult to get all three of these main points across in a single image. It might be possible if the student did a cartoon-style meme, or a series of memes, but it might also be best if they focused on just one of their supporting points. After all, a single image could only do so much.

Once the student has decided on a main point and a format, they can return to the IBC-Why model. So, what's the introduction going to be? Oh wait, a meme doesn't have one? Well, then what *does* it have? A meme does have context. Context is part of the introduction, right? Or at least it influences the introduction?

So where will this meme be seen? And by whom?

Considering these details, the student decides to create a meme for her Intermediate French class. Most of these students are already excited about learning a second language; some are even planning to study abroad in France next school year. Deciding on this target audience also then helps the student with another part of her meme: the image. In order to catch her classmates' attention, she knows she'll need to find something interesting. Their teacher showed Tobey Maguire's *Spiderman* film in French the other day...

A-ha. A quick Google search and she has a picture.

So what about the meme's "body"? The student's supporting points for her point that knowing a second language makes traveling more enjoyable are: 1) knowing a foreign language while traveling makes it easier to get around, 2) increases cultural awareness and appreciation, and 3) allows you to converse with (and eavesdrop on) the locals. So how can she convey those in her meme?

That's where her meme's caption comes in. The student realizes that the "body" of her meme will largely be implied through the conversation of her image and text together. Without one or the other, her meaning would be lost. The student decides on "When you understand a conversation spoken by the locals who think you have no clue." She spaces the text out on the top and bottom of Tobey Maguire's face because she decides she wants to frame it—she wants that satisfied look to be what viewer's see first. Once they see how smug Tobey looks, the rest will fall into place.

But then, what about the conclusion? As stated earlier, a meme really doesn't have a conclusion—at least not in any traditional sense. Instead, a meme's conclusion is mostly implied and could go in variety of ways depending on the viewer. In our example student's case, her meaning would likely be understood by her French classmates, but if she showed it to her parents or grandparents, for example, different meanings would likely appear. Thus, using one single image and caption, and one single argument, both the flexibility and limitations of the genre of a meme readily appear.

What about other multimodal genres?

Having considered a meme, which is about as far from an academic essay as is possible, it doesn't take too much imagination to see how the IBC-Why model could also be applied to more similar multimodal genres. Websites, podcasts, videos, even posters—all have their own conventions and utilize different modes to get across those major parts of an essay: What's the context and what's my point? What support do I have for my point? And why am I telling you this? What do I want you to *do* about it?

And thus, by acting as a starting point by which to identify what's happening in an essay, and then compare and contrast various genres and their semiotic resources to one another, I believe that the IBC-Why model can help students with transfer between alphabetic and multimodal texts, and in so doing, help them wrangle that bag full of snakes.

Summing Things Up

As I have tried to demonstrate, the IBC-Why model is a tool that can help students better understand the structure of a text by thinking through its rhetorical parts—the introduction, body, and conclusion. In so doing, the IBC-Why model can help students both with the organization of their written texts and with transfer. In the Composition 101 program at the University of Tennessee, students write two standard academic essays—the Comparative Rhetorical Analysis and the Academic Position Paper—and also re-genre their Academic Position Paper to a multimodal project for a public audience. Other school's first-year composition programs may include different assignments than those at U.T., but I would argue that, no matter the requirements, the IBC-Why model can help students with transfer in almost any setting. By looking at examples of texts and thinking critically about the reasoning behind the different parts of those texts, and then by analyzing the different sections of their own writing, students can improve their understanding of structure across genres. In addition, while not all multimodal genres contain clear-cut introductions, bodies, and conclusions, by looking at the conventions of various genres and the semiotic resources afforded in each, the IBC-Why model assist with transfer by acting as a baseline by which students can identify both similarities and differences between genres.

Conclusion

*The enlightened one neither seeks easy formulae nor shuns repetition.
Repetition may be needful for those still on the way. Repeat, therefore,
to reveal crucial stepping stones along the road. Experienced travelers
thus lighten the journey for those coming after.*

— Will D. Desmond

As we have seen, the debate surrounding the five-paragraph essay is actually a lot simpler than it seems. By tracing the five-paragraph essay through history in Part One, we discovered that, far from starting with current-traditionalism, the five-paragraph essay has roots that extend back to theme writing in the 1600s, which traces *its* roots back to the *Progymnasmata* and class rhetoric. These deep roots showed us that the five-paragraph essay's outline was never intended to be a set-in-stone formula prescribed to every writing situation. Rather, its purpose was to teaching basic writing principles and to help students learn how to structure their writing. Each attempt or new approach to teaching structure, then, has ultimately been with these goals in mind and in response to the perceived rhetorical needs of that time.

In Part Two, we looked at the scholarship surrounding the five-paragraph essay over the last several decades. We considered the arguments that have been made both against and in favor of five-paragraph essay and, by doing a stasis analysis, we discovered that scholars have been talking past each other. Those in favor of the five-paragraph formula see the outline much the way my mentor Dr. Haluska did—as a flexible foundation upon which student writers can build. Those opposed to the formula, however, have seen the structure as permanent and a hindrance to student invention that interferes with transfer. Based on this discovery, at the end of Part Two I proposed a new outline to intervene in this circular discussion on structure—the introduction-body-conclusion why (IBC-Why) model—which I feel can help with writing instruction in a number of ways.

In the IBC-Why model I proposed that most texts in the humanities contain in some form or fashion an introduction, body, and conclusion. In written texts, these forms may expand or contract depending on the audience and situation; in multimodal texts, they appear through the different conventions and semiotic resources afforded in a given genre. In cases where they do *not* appear, the IBC-Why model can help facilitate with transfer by acting as a starting point and a baseline by which students can compare genres. This is similar to the way some scholars have proposed that the five-paragraph essay, when taught as a foundation, can help student writers move from simple, five-paragraph essays to bigger, more complex arguments.

In Part Three, I discussed genre theory, which highlights the fact that all texts are rhetorical and tackles the teaching of writing by first considering genre conventions and a text's rhetorical situation. When a student asks about how to structure a text in a genre-based course, the answer is always about its rhetorical situation, which is true. For the student struggling to put the pieces of a multimodal project together, or who is making the complex move from a written text to a new multimodal text, however, just thinking about the rhetorical situation is not always enough. This is where the IBC-Why model can be of service and help the student think through the rhetorical sections of each text in each genre.

In Part Four I demonstrated how the model could work in “real time” by applying it to the Composition 101 curriculum at the University of Tennessee. I focused specifically on Units 3 and 4 because they ask students to do exactly the work I feel the IBC-Why model can be helpful with. In Unit 3 students write a position paper for an academic audience, which requires a standard introduction-body-conclusion format. In Unit 4 they then re-genre that paper into a multimodal project for a public audience. Using the examples of a blog post and a meme, I showed how the IBC-Why model can be applied to and help students think through the complex parts of transfer between two very different genres. I also demonstrated how, even when genres seem to be completely different, the IBC-Why model can help by acting as a baseline and point of contrast.

Having accomplished all this, I recognize that there is still much work to do in this area. The IBC-Why model has not yet been tested outside of hypothesis, and I am certainly looking forward to testing it out

in my own classroom in the coming years. Additionally, my research did not consider second-language learners or writing contexts outside of Composition 101, or in 101 classrooms in programs outside of the University of Tennessee. I certainly feel, however, the IBC-Why model can help with all of these. In programs that focus on structure, the IBC-Why model can help students consider the logic and context behind those structures. In more rhetoric-based programs, the IBC-Why model can help students understand how writers use structure to accomplish their goals.

Additionally, no matter the context, it is important to remember that the whole reason behind this discussion is that we as teachers want our students to do well. We want them to write clearly and concisely, and to be able to articulate their arguments in ways that are appropriate for their intended audiences. We want them to be able to see the connections between genres and to be able to transfer what they learn in our classes to other classes and to the situations they encounter throughout the rest of their lives. And so, although the IBC-Why Model has its limits, the IBC-Why model can help promote high-road transfer by helping students juggle both the structure and rhetorical purpose of texts. In so doing, the IBC-Why model can be a tool to help composition teachers in all settings meet students where they are and make the most of their time in our writing classrooms.

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