

**SCREENPLAY STRUCTURE AS ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY STRUCTURE: CAN
NARRATIVE KNOWLEDGE HELP STUDENTS WRITE STRONGER ACADEMIC
ESSAYS?**

A Thesis Presented for the
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I genuinely can't appropriately thank all of the people that helped me on my journey to this point, and to claim otherwise is simply ridiculous. That said, there are people who I need to let know how important they are to me, as well as names about which I want to be reminded each time I open this thesis, so I'll do my level best to identify them here.

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores the question of whether screenplay structure knowledge can help students to write stronger argumentative essays, connecting to the notion that defaulting to the standard five-paragraph essay is in many ways too limiting and that it does not adequately promote individual style. The collected data is comprised of short informal writing submissions from twenty-four college freshmen, as well as interviews with fifteen members of that larger group. The students attended a semester of the author's Composition 101 class at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. In that class, the author taught a unit that led to each student writing an argumentative essay which included three elements drawn from screenplay structure. In particular, using the movie *Aladdin*, the author taught his students to leave "breadcrumbs" throughout their introductions in order to make their arguments more cohesive in the way that movies establish significant elements in their first acts that connect to story beats that occur later; to think of counterarguments as villains in order to strengthen the counterargument and, ultimately, to underscore the strength of the main argument; and to connect their introductions to their conclusions in order to reduce the repetition of their conclusion, just as a movie's ending is not simply a repeat of its beginning. Throughout the study, the author determined that though this approach was decidedly helpful in leading students to think differently about their own writing, the research presented here is not equipped to answer the original question of whether this approach leads to stronger argumentative writing, as the study does not include a baseline collection of essays with which to make a comparison. That said, several of the study's participants acknowledge that they believe their writing has improved. In particular, the participants responded positively to the counterargument-as-villain perspective and the connection between introductions and conclusions, even as they acknowledged confusion about how to implement "breadcrumbs."

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CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

My Story

I am about to do something that conventional storytelling wisdom recommends against, which is that I am going to start here in the present but very soon I will “flash back” to past events. I am choosing to begin this way because I want to underscore that what you are about to read matters to me now, it mattered to me when I was younger, and it will matter to me going forward. I am choosing to call out the narrativizing that I am doing because what you are about to read is inextricably tied to story, to narrative, and to structure, and I want to be sure to make all of those connection points explicit. This thesis concerns itself with the idea that screenplay structure can help students to write more structurally solid argumentative essays, and I want to start off by detailing why I believe that this is so. I am writing these words as I approach the end of the first semester of my final year of grad school, but as is the case for all stories, mine begins before this moment.

Stories have always mattered to me. There is a story in my family that I taught myself to read at age two by studying Laura Ingalls Wilder books at my grandparents’ home. Is this family story factual? I honestly do not know. Is it true? In the absence of any other narratives, absolutely. As I got older, I continued being an avid reader, but I also started watching TV and movies, probably to an unhealthy degree. My family started calling me TV Boy because, well, they were not particularly inventive when it came to nicknames, I suppose.

I knew what time it was based on what was on TV. I associated dates on the calendar with a movie’s release. I began to read pop culture magazines and, as the world’s technology progressed, I became a fixture on various movie and TV online discussion boards. When I

realized that all of these on-screen visual and aural stories were actually written by real people, everything changed for me.

I began to dip my toe into the waters of screenwriting, and before long I was diving and swimming in that pool regularly. I remember vividly the day my mom's church friend found out I was interested in screenwriting, and so he gifted me real shooting scripts from various sitcoms. I hadn't realized until then, but he was an Emmy award-winning editor and so had access to a world that I was only beginning to understand was both bigger and more attainable than I had ever imagined.

I took those sitcom scripts home and, as with the Laura Ingalls Wilder books, I studied them. I truly did have to learn how to read them, as they looked so different from anything I had known before. They didn't read like a book: their margins fluctuated in and out, character names appeared in all-caps above those characters' dialogue, and there were many new terms with which I was not already familiar. Phrases like "FADE IN," "COLD OPEN," and "TAG" were mysteries for me to solve. I started checking screenwriting books out of the public library, obsessed with cracking the codes found within these bizarre documents. I tried writing scripts of my own, attempting to replicate the marginal formatting one click of the spacebar at a time.

I eventually bought screenwriting software that made the formatting a breeze, but just as owning a canvas and some paint doesn't make someone an artist, having all the tools of the trade in front of me didn't make me a screenwriter. I needed to learn and train. I didn't know it at the time, but the missing piece was structure. Fortunately, I had read and watched so many stories by that point – I was TV Boy, after all – that with the help of various screenwriting books and magazine articles, I realized something profound: I actually already knew screenplay and story structure! Sure, I didn't know the language. I had to learn words and phrases like "three-act

structure,” “inciting incident,” and “hero’s journey,” but the actual function of the ideas? How they all work together to make a satisfying story? As it turned out, I had already been educating myself on those points when I thought I was just watching TV and movies.

My education now became reciprocal and symbiotic: books and magazines would give me the words for the concepts I knew but couldn’t name, and movies themselves would become my proving ground. I started watching movies not only as a movie lover but as a writer. I could tell when I was at the ten- to fifteen-minute mark because I could identify the inciting incident with ease. I began to talk about movies with specific reference to the ordinary world of Act One, or the synthesis of Act Three. I investigated abnormal structures – Could a story work with four acts? Five? Two? – and surrounded myself with people who either knew this language as well, or who would be impressed by my knowledge.

I wrote spec scripts – scripts written on the speculation that they might be sellable – of my favorite TV shows at the time: *Friends*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel*, etc., as well as scripts for original ideas. I became the friend in my group that others knew could talk knowledgeably and extensively about narrative choices in the shows that we were all watching on TV. I became a junior-high guru of sorts, answering friends’ and friends of friends’ questions about their own stories. To anybody who knew me back then, it would not have been surprising when they learned that I moved to Los Angeles after high school.

L.A. was a bigger world in many ways than the worlds I had known before, but very quickly it also revealed itself to be familiar. Here was a city that did not require me to give a context for all of the knowledge I had gathered during my youth. I found countless people who knew the same things I knew, and we were able to talk about structure, story, and screenplays forever if we chose. I had, in many ways, found my place. Every possibility seemed open to me.

I soon became part of a group of self-producing artists who were determined to make content that would prove that the big studio system was not the only path to quality and success. We made webseries and short sketches, commercial parodies and mock PSAs. I became the resident writer of our group, finally proving to myself that all of my information-gathering indeed had a practical application. I wrote for countless hours, honing my skill and craft, and then I had the unmatched joy of seeing my stories be realized aurally and visually. I watched these projects on my computer screen, a decidedly different experience than the big screen of a movie theater, but it still felt like a full-circle experience.

Life, as it does, continued on, and I never became a financially successful screenwriter. Los Angeles was no longer a viable place for my growing family and me to live, so we packed up and moved across the country to Knoxville, TN. My son was three at the time, and we spent a year of both of our lives bonding and getting to know our new home. And, of course, we talked about story and stories. It became a game for him to identify different sorts of conflicts: “I think *Aladdin* is person versus person, but also probably person versus self.” We discussed differences between antagonists and antiheroes, between conclusions and cliffhangers, between faulty storytelling and intentional subversions of expectation. When my son turned five, he started kindergarten and, partially in an effort to show him that we are never too old to keep learning, I also started school again as a college freshman.

Just as L.A. and Knoxville were worlds unlike those I had known before, Pellissippi Community College was an unfamiliar landscape that took some getting used to. I had always been a decent writer, and I had always loved English classes, but at that point it had been seventeen years since the last time I was a classroom student. I did not remember the expectations of writing for school. I had not written anything that wasn’t for myself or that

wasn't meant for filmed production in almost two decades. Early on in that first semester back to school I had an essay due for my English 101 class, and I was anxious and stressed.

It was, as I recall, a "personal essay," which seemed like an odd descriptor because shouldn't all writing be personal, at least to some degree? I read the detailed assignment prompt, listened to in-class instructions, and took notes, but when it came time to actually write a first draft, I realized that I wasn't sure how essays were supposed to work. I had written plenty of them, of course, but my essay-writing days were far behind me, and I just didn't know what they were supposed to look or sound like. I didn't know where to start and I felt foolish asking for help because this felt like such a fundamental thing to be tripped up on. I'll take a moment here to clarify that as I continued my college career, I made myself very well-acquainted with instructors' office hours and I quickly disabused myself of the idea that I shouldn't use that time as the valuable resource that it is. But during those first few weeks, I hadn't yet had that revelation, and so I misguidedly felt that I had to figure out a solution on my own.

In my effort to do just that, I finally sat down and just started writing. I began what I eventually came to refer to as a Word Vomit Draft: I just got everything out – good, bad, and otherwise. I let it all cover my paper without form or intention other than saving myself from the intimidation of the blank page. I wrote a great first line that I still remember: "My shadow walks like my father." And then I wrote hundreds of other lines that haven't stayed with me, but at the end I had something. It might not have been a good something, but I just needed it to not be nothing, and it definitely was not nothing.

When I took a step back to read what I'd written from a bird's-eye view, I realized something significant: I actually had given form to this personal essay. I had given it structure. I still wasn't sure what an essay was supposed to look like, exactly, but I understood in that

moment what I had done and that I actually quite liked it. What I had done, of course, was given my first college essay a screenplay structure. It made sense; it was what I had been knowingly and unknowingly training myself for throughout the course of my life.

So, what do I mean by saying that I gave it a screenplay structure? I mean that I used narrative techniques to make my essay a satisfying experience for my reader. More specifically, I let my position be the de facto hero of my text, and my writing followed that hero along a journey to an endpoint that was, as many compelling story endings are, both surprising and inevitable. I took a draft of my personal essay to my instructor during her office hours, and her pleased response felt both rewarding and validating.

I'll take a moment to focus on that instructor. Her name is Ines Gibson, and she was and is a vital element of my story. I began college with the intention of becoming a second-grade teacher. During my first semester, though, I realized that wasn't the right fit for me. I was in Ines' office one day and she had just finished looking over one of my essay drafts, and we were talking about my feeling a bit lost. In that moment, she asked me if I had ever considered teaching English 101 at a community college, and when I said I hadn't she suggested that I consider it. After a long weekend of family conversations and reflection, I changed my major and set out on a path that has led me to this present moment.

I'd like to say that my first college essay was the result of an intentional and explicit decision to bring a screenplay structure to another genre of writing, but that's just not so. That first essay was, for all intents and purposes, an accident, the natural outcome of my years of having written and studied screenplays. The framework was second nature to me at that point, and so it came through when I sat down to write. But as the semesters and years of my

undergraduate career continued I started to recognize what I was doing, and it began to make a lot of sense to me.

Most screenplay structures (which I will detail more in the literature review of this thesis) follow a three-act structure. In very basic terms, a screenplay's first act will establish the world as it is, the normal world of the story; the second act will then turn that world on its head, creating a bizarro, topsy-turvy version of what has been established that the protagonist must contend with; and the third act will synthesize the two worlds from the previous acts, resulting in a new normal brought into existence by merging the starting point of act one and the hero's interactions with the complications and challenges of act two. And during my own college career, I realized that this structure can be relevantly applied to many essay types, particularly argumentative essays.

An argumentative essay also follows a basic three-part structure: introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion. In the introduction, as in the first act of a movie, the writer sets the stage, providing for the reader all the information required to situate the reader in the world of the essay, leading to a thesis statement. The body paragraphs then require the argument/thesis/hero to interact with potential challenges. The body of the essay complicates things, throwing hurdles in the way of the argument in order to determine how sturdy the argument is. The conclusion, to my mind, does not just restate the thesis and present the introduction again, but instead, at its best, it synthesizes the information that the introduction provided and the challenges that the body threw in the argument's way. The conclusion makes clear why the reader has been on the journey through the text, and it leaves the reader with an ending that is both surprising and inevitable.

It would be nice to say that as soon as I landed on this revelation, essay writing was easy for me, but that is not the case. I had an understanding of a structure that I knew to be consistently successful, but of course I still had to put in the work of deciding on an argument, researching, considering the composition of my ideas, and all the other writerly work that goes into crafting any successful and satisfying story or essay. But having an explicit understanding of that underlying structure was a true gamechanger for me. I no longer wondered whether so many rules of argumentative essays were arbitrary. I understood the importance of laying the groundwork in the introduction, the relevance of a strong counterargument in the body, and the necessity of a conclusion that actually said something meaningful instead of just repeating what had already been said.

I started my grad school career and almost immediately I felt lost and unanchored. My undergrad experience had come to make sense to me, and it took me a long while and several bumpy roads to understand how grad school could accommodate the sorts of connections I wanted to try to make. My understanding in undergrad was that English as a discipline was an umbrella term, one that included composition, literature, and anything else that was decidedly word-focused. But when I became a grad student, it felt like all that changed. Everything was segmented and separated. My Rhetoric, Writing, and Linguistics (RWL) focus did not mesh well with the literature or film studies classes I signed up for. I tried taking a grad-level screenwriting course only to be told that it was only open to MFA students. Because of these seemingly strict divides, I wondered about the relevance of my idea that screenplay structure could be applicable to argumentative essay structure. Was there a place for this sort of crossover in a landscape that felt very much defined by its boundaries?

As I started grad school, I also became a tutor in one of my campus' writing centers. I was simultaneously learning the first-year composition (FYC) program at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and also regularly seeing students' attempts at the products of that program. As the semester progressed, students began coming to the writing center for help on their argumentative essays. I hadn't actively thought about my screenplay-to-essay concept for several months at that point because of my understanding that different disciplines weren't really supposed to merge, but when these essays started appearing, I noticed the language I was using. I started suggesting that students think about counterarguments as villains. I pointed out that if a movie ended by just showing the beginning again it would feel strange and confusing, just as a conclusion reiterating the introduction feels unsatisfying. Beyond noticing how I was framing these ideas, I also quickly recognized understanding in my tutees. The things I was saying, the ideas I was transferring over from screenwriting to essay writing *made sense to them!* The concept wasn't just something that was relevant to me because of my screenwriting background; it was something that clicked for a lot of people because story, narrative, and yes, even movie structure is built into many people's pasts and experiences.

I began my second year of grad school with new fears but also with a renewed confidence and enthusiasm. Since my first-semester conversation with Ines Gibson so many years earlier, I had known that I wanted to teach Composition 101, though I came to understand how rare it is for someone to have this as an end goal. As I began the last year of my master's program, I was finally an actual classroom instructor for incoming freshmen. For me this was not just a steppingstone, not just a mandate to get through so that I could enter the wider world and do what I *really* want to do, as it was for many of my peers. No, for me this was the culmination of what I had been working toward during my previous five years of schooling. I often

hyperbolically say that I want to read terrible essays for the rest of my life and help those essays' writers to become stronger writers and more effective communicators. In several tangible ways, the start of my second year of grad school was a dream come to life.

It was also terrifying. Though I had been a mentee in FYC classes and had taken a composition pedagogy class to help me think through lesson planning and the various assignments UT's FYC students would complete, it was all theoretical until it was actual. I didn't know as the semester began what kind of teacher I would be, what my students would be like or connect with, or if I could actually do the work that I felt called to do. What I did know, however, was that I wanted to teach my classes' third units through a very particular lens.

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville's FYC program is intentionally structured. The Composition 101 format, in particular, is built to scaffold, with each of four units building on what has come before. Unit three leads students through the writing of an Academic Position Paper (APP), which is the first time in the semester that students are asked to write their own arguments rather than analyzing others' rhetorical conversations. I knew going into this semester that I wanted to teach this unit by way of screenwriting structure and, after seeking and receiving permission from UTK's Director of Composition Sean Morey, I set out to do exactly that.

What follows is a research report that explores the question "Can narrative structure in general and screenwriting structure in particular help students to write stronger argumentative essays?" In particular, I focus on three elements: breadcrumbs, counterarguments as villains, and non-redundant conclusions. I will expand on these concepts throughout this thesis, but very briefly, breadcrumbs refers to layering ideas and information throughout an argument's introduction so that when those ideas come up later in the body, the whole essay feels cohesive; counterarguments as villains promote creating a tension and conflict which the essay's main

argument can heroically help to resolve; and a non-redundant conclusion is intended to shift students' perspectives away from just restating a thesis and attempting instead to make their argument always be working toward a specific takeaway, an ending that is both surprising and inevitable.

But what follows is also both a culmination and a continuation of my own story that began several decades ago. Story has always been necessary to me. Stories help me to make sense of an often chaotic and seemingly nonsensical world. Stories have helped me to find and hone my voice. Movies, as I see them, are rhetorical arguments. When done well and satisfyingly, they present a debatable position, and then they put that position through challenges and obstacles to test it, before finally seeing where everything settles. If I can help students to understand that they a) already know this structure intuitively, and b) can apply this knowledge to their own written arguments, then I genuinely believe that many of them will become more confident and effective communicators.

Literature Review

Ask a college freshman to write an argumentative (or any other) essay and the chances are decent that they will write a five-paragraph essay. This format seems to have existed forever, and as Matthew J. Nunes observes in “The Five-Paragraph Essay: Its Evolution and Roots in Theme-Writing,” its origins remain unclear (298). Nunes goes on to define the structure of the five-paragraph essay, a structure that is familiar to anyone who has spent any amount of time in a composition class. He writes that such an essay “should, of course, have five paragraphs: an introduction with the thesis, three body paragraphs with topic sentences proving the thesis (generally three reasons and three points), and a conclusion that restates the thesis and sums up the main points” (Nunes 299). I begin with the five-paragraph essay not because my research is

intended to reinvent the wheel, but because it is intended, at least in part, to reframe this well-known structure and to invite and encourage nonstandard ways to think about it.

It is not my mission to do away with the five-paragraph essay entirely. I believe that it is a useful structure in many ways. It helps writers understand that an argument should have multiple points that come together to strengthen the overall message of the text; it shows writers that a thesis statement can be a helpful tool to orient readers and let them know what to expect; it provides a handy map onto which writers can apply their own specifics. The five-paragraph essay gets the job done. It exists as a framework that students who are new to writing can fall back on, and it is sturdy enough in its construction that it can accommodate infinite topics. Writers just beginning to consider how they might present their thoughts and arguments are often well-served by the fill-in-the-blanks nature of the largely prescriptive format.

But it is that prescriptiveness that gives me pause. Students have approached me in both the classroom and tutoring sessions frustrated that they are not allowed to write more than three body paragraphs. Other students have expressed concern that they would be penalized if their thesis statements were more than a sentence long, or if they were anywhere other than at the very end of their single-paragraph introduction. And countless students have been explicitly taught that the purpose of the conclusion of a five-paragraph essay is to restate the thesis and to reiterate the introduction. It is to these and other ideas that my approach speaks. My hope is that by considering argumentative essays through the lens of screenplay structure, writers will feel emboldened to shake things up a little. I want them to think about arguments in more complex ways, to recognize why the “rules” they have learned do or do not make sense, to consider the difference that context plays, and to understand that what matters most is a clear communicating of ideas, and not a strict adherence to prescribed mandates.

The five-paragraph structure has its defenders. Kurt Schick is one such advocate, positioning his cheeky and cynical “A Five-Paragraph Defense of the Five-Paragraph Essay” as a frustrated rejection of “‘postformal’ pedagogies (to include expressivist/Romantic, social constructionist, critical, cultural studies, and various process-oriented approaches)” (41). Schick believes that “[s]tudents nowadays get plenty of practice ‘freewriting’ or ‘journaling’ – often about their ‘feelings’ – but they typically learn little about how to construct a mechanically correct sentence or coherent paragraph, let alone a thoughtfully developed argument” (41). Schick’s seeming protests against students experimenting with style and bringing their own unique voice and identity to their writing have their supporters, such as Kerri Smith who, in her article “In Defense of the Five-Paragraph Essay,” suggests that FYC instructors by and large want students to have in-depth knowledge of the form in order to build on top of that foundation. She notes that her ideal would be for “more students [to] put their ideas together in the coherent fashion demanded by this underappreciated form because, almost without exception, students who know the five-paragraph essay intimately are more prepared to take on the challenge of college-level writing” (Smith 16). Byung-In Seo points out in “Defending the Five-Paragraph Essay” the importance of a clear structure for remedial students, noting that for such students, “using a formula is vital. It gives students an organizational tool that can be applied to reading and writing most expository texts” (16). While such advocacy for the five-paragraph essay is well-meaning, alternatives that encourage more writer individuality are not necessarily antithetical to the benefits of such a rigid structure.

In fact, Marie Foley makes an explicit call to action along these lines in “Unteaching the Five-Paragraph Essay.” She insists that “[o]ne way to rid ourselves of the formula is to develop a repertoire of alternatives to it. We (that is, all of us engaged in the teaching of writing) need to

share whatever practical, workable, nonformulaic strategies we have developed to increase students' consciousness of form." (Foley 233). It is to Foley's call that I am responding, in part because I believe she is right, and in part because her words were published in 1989, and so little has changed since then that they are unfortunately just as relevant now as they were three and a half decades ago. It is here that I would like to address what may seem like an unexamined tension in my argument: if Foley calls for nonformulaic solutions, how can screenwriting structure – another formula – be the answer? To that concern, I will respond with a clarification. I am not, in fact, advocating for FYC argumentative essays to align with a full screenplay model. Instead, I am using the structure as well as some finer details of its narrative effectiveness to help students understand and strengthen particular elements of their argumentative essays.

I am not the first person to take screenwriting ideas and to apply them beyond their specific narrative contexts. I begin with John Truby, the author of *The Anatomy of Story*, who provides a very broad definition of what a story is: "A speaker tells a listener what someone did to get what he wanted and why" (6). This simple description has three key elements, and it is not incidental that they align so well with the three points of the rhetorical triangle that FYC instructors and students are so well-acquainted with: the speaker, the audience, and the message (Figure 1). In other words, rhetoric as we aspire to teach in our 101 classes and story are, in fact, very similar, a fact which can be used to instructors' advantage when attempting to connect rhetoric to students' prior knowledge bases.

Randy Olson, a marine biology professor turned filmmaker, makes such connections in his *The Narrative Gym*, in which he claims that the basic underlying structure of all effective communication can be summed up as what he names the ABT framework. More specifically, the construct of ____ AND ____ BUT ____ THEREFORE ____ is what Olson insists all effective

RHETORICAL SITUATION

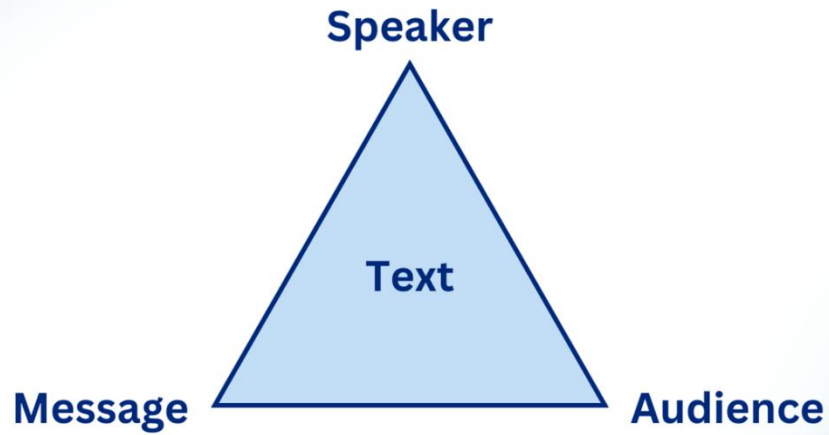


Figure 1: Rhetorical Situation Diagram. Created by Eric Loya

screenplays subscribe to, as well as every effective song, speech, nursery rhyme, novel, and yes, even every argument and essay. ABT “is the dumbbell that allows you, if you work out with it enough, to begin to develop the ultimate goal of ‘narrative intuition,’” which he describes as “the ability to do more than just know narrative structure [...] It is only when you’ve achieved narrative intuition that you can really consider yourself to be a skilled communicator” (Olson 11). Though Olson clearly and explicitly states that the same structure that undergirds screenplays can also be found as the basis for argumentative essays, his book does not dive deeply into this specific connection point, opting instead to more broadly claim that the structure is the foundation of numerous types of writing.

On the other hand, in the article “How Screenwriting Can Help Your Grant Writing,” Christine W. Hartmann applies screenwriting narrative techniques not to argumentative essays but to, as the title suggests, writing grants. She writes specifically of the importance of grant writers crafting a strong hook, saying, “Reviewers are to grant proposals what audiences are to films. A strong hook in a grant proposal, just like an inciting incident in a film, draws people in. To do this, it must meet two conditions: it must convey a sense of emotional urgency and open a question in the reviewer’s mind” (Hartmann). She concludes her piece by observing that “whatever the subject, when a reviewer reads a hook, they either lean forward in anticipation or lie back and yawn. So embrace the opportunity to learn from the movies to keep reviewers on the edge of their seats” (Hartmann). Hartmann narrows her focus specifically to grant writing, but her overall philosophy aligns nicely with that of this thesis, which is that screenwriting tools often prove useful for writing outside of scripts. That said, though both Olson and Hartmann acknowledge this idea, both authors leave open a gap into which this report rests, namely: what is the usefulness of using screenplay structure as a tool for strengthening college freshmen

argumentative essays? My belief is that by using narrative structures and perspectives, students will be able to better understand the reasons behind many unexamined choices that go into their argumentative writing and that, by being more deliberate and intentional, their writing will be more stable and effective.

To be clear, I fully acknowledge that screenwriting is a discipline that relies on structure in significant ways. In their article, “The Five-Paragraph Essay and the Deficit Model of Education,” Lil Brannon, et al., suggest that the five-paragraph format “is one of those school-created ‘things’ that persist, much like the ‘modes’ of discourse. They persist because they have been enshrined in textbooks and tested by the testing establishment, even after scholars in composition have demonstrated the irrationality of their use for over 30 years” (16). Very similar things could be said about screenplay structure. Particular ideas and rules were put into place decades ago, and now young screenwriters learn them and, yes, oftentimes churn out scripts that are technically correct but that lack a sense of life and vitality. Despite that, narrative elements of screenplays offer students multiple opportunities for deeper understandings of why rhetorical arguments are effective when formatted in particular ways. They provide an alternative that, while still rooted firmly in form, is not as restrictive, prescriptive, and rigid as the traditional five-paragraph essay is often taught to be. Screenplay structure also does not contradict the five-paragraph essay structure; the two can easily and effectively co-exist.

So, what is screenplay structure? The question is misleading because there are actually numerous structures, which is one key difference between screenplays and the much more prescriptive traditional five-paragraph essay. For simplicity’s sake, this thesis will focus on the three-act structure, as it is a standard foundation for the vast majority of effective scripts. In fact, no lesser an authority than Aristotle himself presented a three-part form in his *Poetics*:

A whole [story] is that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end. A beginning is that which does not itself follow anything by causal necessity, but after which something naturally is or comes to be. An end, on the contrary, is that which itself naturally follows some other thing, either by necessity, or as a rule, but has nothing following it. A middle is that which follows something as some other thing follows it. A well constructed plot, therefore, must neither begin nor end at haphazard, but conform to these principles. (10)

Over the centuries, storytellers have expanded on this simple instruction and, in the screenwriting world in particular, have devised countless ways of filling in the broad categories of beginning, middle, and end.

At a glance, many of the modern three-act structures might look like they are, in fact, four acts. This is because the second act – the middle – is often longer than the first and third and is therefore commonly broken in half by what screenwriting guru Blake Snyder calls the Midpoint. Snyder’s book, *Save the Cat!: The Last Book on Screenwriting You’ll Ever Need*, breaks a screen story down into fifteen moments, or “beats,” in what has come to be known as the Blake Snyder Beat Sheet, or the BS2. The BS2 includes beats that are particularly relevant to the work I am doing with my composition students and their argumentative essays, most notably the “Opening Image”/“Final Image” relationship, as well as the “Theme Stated,” “Set-up,” and “Bad Guys Close In” beats (Snyder 70). As Snyder puts it, the opening image and final image “are bookends. And because a good screenplay is about change, these two scenes are a way to make clear how that change takes place in your movie” (72). This relationship between the beginning and the end of a narrative is significant and relates specifically to a problem I see in many argumentative essays, which I will address more fully in time.

How does one make a beginning that successfully sets up the ending counterpart? Snyder mandates that the first act of a screenplay must establish many important elements in the set-up beat: “this is the make-or-break section where you have to grab me or risk losing my interest... I make sure I’ve introduced or hinted at introducing every [main] character... we start to plant every character tic, exhibit every behavior that needs to be addressed later on” (75). He also insists that the opening of a movie must state the theme clearly, saying that “once you [know what your movie is about], be certain that the subject is raised right up front... make sure it’s there. It’s your opening bid. Declare: I can prove it. Then set out to do so” (Snyder 74). In my classes, then, I echo these ideas and guide students to apply them to their introductions. I parallel establishing these “tics” or “behaviors” with dropping breadcrumbs or with planting seeds. I make clear that doing this work early in the text allows writers to call back to established ideas later in their papers, helping the whole text to feel more cohesive and stable, just as a movie or other story will set up character or narrative elements early on so that they can organically pay off as it progresses.

The second act of an argumentative essay takes the form of body paragraphs. This is the space where a writer can really dig deeply into an argument to prove how strong it really is. It is also likely to be able to be the most enjoyable part for a reader to read. There is a reason the majority of images and moments that end up in a movie’s trailer come from the second act. Once the starting world and the stakes are well-established, and before the final takeaway needs to be articulated, the middle gets to play out and it is often the most fun. It is here that writers can introduce the tension and conflict that is so vital for an engaging narrative. Olson insists that of the three parts of the ABT framework, the middle part – the But – is not only the most important for his structure’s context, but is in fact “the most important word in the English language” (5).

He goes on to say that “[i]t’s a word that has power. It’s a connector word that embodies the power of contradiction [...] It changes things, and it creates drama” (6-7). Thomas Newkirk corroborates the significance of this sort of contradiction in his *Minds Made for Stories*, observing that “[t]he writer builds patterns of anticipation and gratification; curiosity and fulfillment; itch and scratch” (36) and that “formal academic essays must establish some problem, itch, or need to read on” (38). I have long believed that creating an intentional tension makes a lot of sense not only for movies and stories, but for argumentative essays as well. But it took a while for me to understand how I wanted to frame that significance for my students. Eventually I realized that the answer was obvious: the counterargument as the villain.

Every story craves a villain. Every hero is defined, at least in part, by the challenges that the villain presents and represents. In my classes, I encourage my students to think about their counterarguments as villains for their main argument to best, to overcome, or in some cases to find a middle ground with. In John Truby’s *The Anatomy of Story*, he zeroes in on this direct relationship between hero and villain, underscoring that “you must see the opponent structurally, in terms of his function in the story. A true opponent not only wants to prevent the hero from achieving his desire *but is competing with the hero for the same goal*” (46, emphasis in original). He goes on to clarify that by constructing such a relationship, “the hero and the opponent are forced to come into direct conflict and to do so again and again throughout the story. If you give your hero and opponent two separate goals, each one can get what he wants without coming into direct conflict. And then you have no story at all” (Truby 46). Robert McKee, in his landmark tome *Story*, makes the hero/villain connection even more explicit, declaring, “A protagonist and his story can only be as intellectually fascinating and emotionally compelling as the forces of antagonism make them,” and he adds that going against this wisdom is the main cause of

dissatisfying stories (317). Clearly, then, villains and the conflicts they usher in matter a great deal to any narrative, which is why I ask my students to make their counterarguments meaningful. If their main argument defeats or even just stands up to a weak counterargument, one that is easily waved away in a sentence or two, well, that is about as interesting as a hero defeating a nameless minion. But if the main argument stands toe to toe with a counterargument of substance, scratches a powerful itch, overcomes a major problem, perseveres through a significant contradiction, then the reader has truly learned something about that argument.

I will acknowledge here a concern that I will explore more deeply in my Conclusions chapter, which is the possible detrimental nature of presenting counterarguments as villains. Though in the classroom I make clear that villains, like counterarguments, often have reasonable perspectives that are well worth considering, I am also aware that many people will understand villains to be simply entities to best and then to dispose of. My intention going forward is to foreground the nuances of this idea more explicitly to my students in an effort to minimize the chance that they just dismiss any merit that counterarguments might have on their own terms.

One of my biggest pet peeves as I began my teaching journey emerged when I discovered that nearly all of my students had been taught that the conclusions of their essays were meant for two specific purposes: to repeat the introduction in different words, and to restate the thesis statement. To my mind, it would be difficult to make less effective use of the conclusion space than that. Should a conclusion reference the introduction and thesis statement? Of course. But if all that is happening is that the essay is repeating the beginning and calling it the ending, then the reader might as well just re-read the beginning. Screenwriting and storytelling taught me that what consumers want in their endings is synthesis. As Pelle de Meij summarizes in “Hegelian Dialectics as a Source of Inspiration for the Intelligence Community,” German philosopher

Georg Hegel suggests a particular three-pronged method for resolving conflicts: “Thesis represents an idea or opinion; antithesis represents the counter-opinion or opposite idea; synthesis represents the domain where thesis and antithesis intersect and overlap. In other words, dialectical synthesis can represent consensus, i.e., ‘compromise’” (66). This structure of thesis-antithesis-synthesis anchors nearly every satisfying story and it is applicable to argumentative essays as well. Randy Olson echoes this idea with his ABT framework in *The Narrative Gym*. ABT – And, But, Therefore – is really another way of representing Hegel’s structure. Olson makes broader contextual connections more explicit, declaring that the ABT narrative template “is how we communicate. It’s always been how we communicate. And it’s not one of many ways to communicate effectively – it’s THE ONLY way to communicate effectively over the long term” (19, emphasis in original). If writers think of their conclusions not as a space to repeat what has already been said, but to synthesize, to “therefore,” or to mirror the introduction in order to highlight the journey that the text has taken the reader on, then that reader is much more likely to feel that the journey has been worth the time investment.

Ultimately, I am assuming an understanding of movie frameworks while at the same time hoping that my students have not already explicitly connected screenplay structure to argumentative essay structures. The reason for this blurring of the familiar and the unfamiliar has to do with what Mary Jo Reiff and Anis Bawarshi call “boundary guarders” and “boundary crossers” (314). In their “Tracing Discursive Resources: How Students Use Prior Genre Knowledge to Negotiate New Writing Contexts in First-Year Composition,” Reiff and Bawarshi suggest that “[a] strong sense of an expert status can leave students more strictly attached to prior habits and strategies and less willing to try new conventions” while those who consider themselves novices “are more open to adapting prior habits and strategies which, in the long

term, can allow them to develop more as expert writers in various disciplines” (314). By presenting an unfamiliar way of thinking about argumentative essays to my students, I hope to encourage boundary crossing, which is a term referring to those who are “more likely to question their genre knowledge and to break this knowledge down into useful strategies and repurpose it” (Reiff and Bawarshi 314). The authors conducted a study at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, on the little-researched topic of what genre knowledge FYC students bring into their 101 classes, and one of their findings suggests that students “reported mainly academic genres when asked what genres they drew on to fulfill the [preliminary essay] assignment [meaning] that they may not call on (or may not be aware that they are calling on) potentially useful resources that they associate with other domains” (324). It is here that my study hopes to be of use. If my students are not aware that they can draw on non-academic knowledge bases to help them to strengthen their academic writing, then this new understanding could be revelatory for them. Furthermore, if I am able to show them that there is so much more to learn about argumentative rhetoric, then there is a very good chance that they will become the genre crossers I believe they can be.

Reiff and Bawarshi connect to the concept of transfer, which Neil Baird and Bradley Dilger examine in depth in their *WPA* article entitled “Metaphors for Writing Transfer in the Writing Lives and Teaching Practices of Faculty in the Disciplines.” Baird and Dilger interviewed several college instructors in order to better understand writing transfer and the ways that it is discussed and approached in the classroom. They determined that there are two broad categories of transfer: simple and adaptive. Jenn Fishman and Mary Jo Reiff, in “Taking the High Road: Teaching for Transfer in an FYC Program,” also identify two broad categories of transfer, which they call “low road” and “high road” (Fishman and Reiff). They also refer to these ideas

as “hugging,” as in a student transferring writing concepts only to very similar types of writing, and “bridging,” as when a student transfers writing concepts to a broad range of writing (Fishman and Reiff). Within Baird and Dilger’s simple transfer is No Transfer, Application, and Assemblage, and within adaptive transfer is Negative, Remix, and Recontextualization. I believe that my teaching and findings intersect primarily with Application and Assemblage, which Baird and Dilger define as “Concepts of writing are moved wholesale and unchanged from one context to another” and “Small amounts of new knowledge are added, perhaps inelegantly, onto prior concepts of writing. Because context is not carefully considered, concepts of writing are only slightly modified,” respectively (106). I also believe that when my students have a difficult time moving on from the prescriptiveness of the five-paragraph essay they are wrestling with Negative Transfer, which Baird and Dilger identify as “Prior concepts of writing are not valued. Students are encouraged to abandon that knowledge” (106). And finally, my study intersects a bit with Recontextualization – “Careful consideration of contexts requires significant adaptation of prior concepts of writing” – when I ask students to use the familiar concepts of introductions, thesis statements, body paragraphs, and conclusions in the new context of this particular approach to argumentative essays.

I will address quickly Baird and Dilger’s concept of Negative Transfer, which focuses pretty clearly on the instructor’s perspective, rather than the student’s. While I agree that there is value to this framing, I also tend to think about negative transfer as the occurrence of a student having previously learned one way to do something, and that prior understanding complicating doing a similar later task in a different way. In other words, I see negative transfer when I ask students to let their conclusions provide something new, because so many students have learned that the purpose of a conclusion is to repeat and reiterate what has already been established.

When their attempts to do what they have learned before complicates what they are now being asked to do, this is an example of my primary thinking regarding negative writing transfer.

The last framework of transfer that I will discuss here comes from David N. Perkins and Gabriel Salomon's "Knowledge to Go: A Motivational and Dispositional View of Transfer."

Perkins and Salomon suggest that in order for transfer to successfully take place, a person has "to build three mental bridges. In mnemonic spirit, let's call them *detect*, *elect*, and *connect*" (250, italics in original). Essentially, a person must first determine that there is a connection between a previously learned concept that could be made (detect), choose to pursue that connection (elect), and then actually appropriately make that connection in the new scenario (connect). They go on to point out that "[i]n some classrooms and some everyday circumstances, developing the connection is the principal problem. Participants already understand that they are supposed to apply a prior learning and feel motivated. Even so, the connection may prove hard to see" (Perkins and Salomon, 252). I do wonder about my own students' likelihood of pursuing the potential connection points that will inevitably present themselves as they continue their academic journeys outside of our classroom setting.

CHAPTER TWO – METHODS

I began the process of this research study long before I stepped foot in the classroom as an instructor, and my Methods chapter would feel insincere if I did not underscore every step of my experience from the beginning. To that end, I will break this chapter into three sections: Preparation, In the Classroom, and Post-Semester.

In order to position this thesis in a wider context, I'll note that this study's participants were drawn from the two English 101 sections that I taught in the fall semester of 2023. I taught this fall 2023 semester as a graduate student in the Rhetoric, Writing, and Linguistic program at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. UTK is an R1 institution located in the eastern region of Tennessee, itself in the southeastern region of the United States. As of fall 2023, UTK had 28,883 undergraduate students, and in 2023, 6,694 new freshmen and 1,559 new transfers enrolled in UTK.

As for the curriculum itself, UTK's First Year Composition program is different from many other FYC programs I am familiar with, in particular due to its significant and explicit focus on rhetoric. The English 101 classes that I taught are arranged into four units, each culminating in the submission of a major unit assignment. Unit one concerns itself with a comparative rhetorical analysis (CRA), for which students compare the rhetorical effectiveness of two texts; unit two focuses on a debate analysis annotated bibliography (DAAB), which asks students to analyze four texts by applying concepts from stasis theory; unit three – the focus of this study – builds to an academic position paper (APP), prompting students to make their own arguments using the tools that they have learned throughout the previous units' analyses; and unit four builds directly from the previous unit, as students will remediate their unit three arguments, shifting them from academic essays into a public form of argumentation.

Preparation

I decided early on with the guidance of many helpful advisors to conduct my own qualitative research because, though I knew the workload would be substantial, I saw the value of collecting new findings in order to determine whether the ideas occupying my mind had any merit. Once this decision was firmly in place and I had permission to teach my class's third unit the way I would need to for this study to work, I filled out and submitted my application to the IRB. It was during this initial application process that I created first drafts of what would become my interview questions (see Appendix A) as well as my recruitment message (see Appendix B) and consent form (see Appendix C).

A significant element of my study was that my students would be the only members of the potential participant pool. At the point of full IRB approval, there were two things that complicated this fact: I did not yet have students as I had not yet begun teaching, and I would not be able to recruit my participants until after the semester (which had not yet started) had ended. The reason for this latter complication is that I needed to avoid even the perception of any connection between a student's grade and their decision to participate in my study. This meant that I would have to wait until my not-yet students were officially my former students before I would know if I would have any interview subjects at all. That said, there were sources of data collection that I was able to integrate throughout the semester, which I will detail later in this Methods chapter.

As my summer break wrapped up and my first semester of teaching loomed on the horizon, I put a few more things in place to set myself up for my highest likelihood of success. I knew that I wanted my students to watch a movie – 1992's animated *Aladdin* – so that we would all have a common ground for structural discussions, and so I worked with UTK's Digital Media

Services to get the movie integrated with my Canvas course. And with that, I was as prepared as possible to begin teaching my very first classes and to start putting my research into action.

In the Classroom

Even though I knew that my research study would revolve primarily around the content that I would present during unit three of my classes, I felt that it was necessary to lay the groundwork from the beginning. In terms of consistency as well as comfort and legitimacy of my students' responses, I wanted to make sure that I established a teaching persona and a classroom atmosphere prior to unit three so that nothing would seem uncharacteristically strange or unusual once I started talking about screenplay structure in an FYC Composition 101 class. In a very meaningful way, I was dropping breadcrumbs in the early days of my class so that the semester would feel like a complete whole, in much the same way that I encouraged my students to do in their writing.

To that end, on the very first day of class, I strategically chose a Question of the Day that was designed to let my students know that I am a movie fan and that we would be connecting course materials to movies throughout our time together. That question was "When did you first realize that sometimes a movie is just kinda... bad?" The choice of this question served many purposes. First, it got everyone talking since it was the one Question of the Day that I insisted every student answer. It also, of course, got us talking about movies in particular, right from the very beginning. But the unexpected angle of the question – asking about a bad movie instead of a favorite – was designed to let my students know that they should anticipate being a little caught off guard, and that feeling a bit off balance was actually okay. It would be foolish of me to think that any student consciously thought about this first-day moment when we began talking about argumentative essays through the lens of screenwriting, but I do believe that if everything up to

that later moment had been predictable and typical, unit three would have felt jarring in its unconventionality.

Another thing that the first Question of the Day did was to let my classes know about me. They heard my answer to the question, sure, but that is not quite what I mean. Instead I'm referring to the fact that I responded to each of their answers and, for the most part, I had something relevant to say about each of their choices. In fact, I even recall hearing one of my students say to another, "Dang, he knows something about every movie!" Mine was a class where movies could and would be taken seriously, a class where just because something was known to be entertainment did not mean that it could not also be academically valuable. And my students were learning that during our first moments together.

Throughout the semester, I kept a focus on movies during lectures, class discussions, and casual conversations. This likely would have happened to some degree even without an intentional choice to do so, but the truth is that I was active and purposeful in making sure that movies were a part of the fabric of my classes, in an effort to ensure that my students would be more likely to get on board when I explicitly brought in the screenwriting element for unit three.

I also established two other elements early on that were designed in part to establish a familiarity in my students with elements that would later become vital for my study: Weekly Engagement Updates, and Self-Reflection questionnaires. I assigned Weekly Engagement Updates nearly every week of the semester, with sporadic exceptions such as the week of Fall Break. These Updates were informal writing assignments with a minimum word count of two-hundred words. Every week, each student was expected to tell me in writing what their experience of the week had been. While I encouraged them to focus on our class and their engagement with our content, I also made a point of not being overly prescriptive with these

short write-ups. Several students kept things relatively surface-level throughout the semester, clearly interested in hitting their word count and nothing more. Many other students turned their Updates into de facto journaling opportunities, detailing some of the stresses and anxieties they experienced as they transitioned from high school to college. Most students fell somewhere in between, keeping things relatively superficial unless something out of the ordinary happened that particular week.

The purpose of these Updates was multifold. First, I genuinely wanted my students to have an opportunity to reflect on and articulate their experiences. Second, I also wanted them to know that I really did see and acknowledge them, as I made a point of responding in writing to every student's Updates throughout the semester. Third, and most relevant for this study, I was particularly interested in what they would have to say during the weeks that I was teaching argumentative essays by way of screenwriting frameworks. I had no guarantee, of course, that any of them would choose to write about the way we were covering the course material, nor that any of them would grant me permission to use their Updates once the semester was over. But I also believed that if I did not establish early on that Weekly Engagement Updates were a regular part of our class, suddenly assigning them during the relevant weeks of unit three would draw attention to the unusualness, and that could too easily become the focus of the Updates, which would defeat the purpose. So I assigned these short informal writings every week, at least in part for the chance that I would have some students choose to share their genuine thoughts about our process.

The other breadcrumb I dropped as early as I was able was the idea of a Self-Reflection questionnaire. These became a part of each of the major assignments of our classes, which meant that it wasn't until several weeks in when the major unit one assignment was due that my

students first completed one for me. But it also meant that, since this study is focused on my classes' unit three major assignment, by that point my students had already completed two questionnaires.

The Academic Position Paper (APP) questionnaire was a list of questions that I had already created during the summer break before the semester began as part of my IRB application process. It consisted of nine questions, many of them fairly boilerplate, such as “What did you find difficult about this assignment?” and “How could this assignment be improved in future versions of ENGL 101?” But there were two questions that were more specific, which I knew I would be looking at closely when it came to my data analysis: “Did thinking about an argumentative essay in terms of a narrative screenplay structure change your perspective or process regarding this type of assignment? How so?” and “Do you think you can use this narrative approach in future writing assignments? Do you think you will? If so, how so?” Once I had my APP questionnaire completed, I created questionnaires for units one, two, and four. My intention was to make each set of questions feel consistent with each other set so that unit three's set did not announce itself as anything out of the ordinary. Ultimately, I did not end up using my original unit four questionnaire because I realized by the time we got to unit four that the self-reflection questions that UTK's English department provided was a better fit, but at that point my students had already completed their APP questionnaire, so that change did not impact this research study's data collection.

I would also like to make clear the fact that, though I am focusing on the benefits of Weekly Engagement Updates and Self-Reflection questionnaires to my research, I very much see the pedagogical and humanizing benefits of these practices as well. I do believe that it is important for students, especially incoming freshmen, to build connections and to reflect on how

they are doing in the often intimidating and overwhelming world that college can be, and these opportunities for written communication between student and instructor certainly help to facilitate those connections and reflections. I will continue to use both of these tools in future semesters, regardless of my research study needs.

Once the groundwork had been laid, I continued to build what I hoped would amount to a consistent atmosphere in my classrooms throughout units one and two, and before long unit three and the APP were upon us. Though I have made much in this chapter of my intention to make sure that my students knew our space to be one where movies were to be respected, I want to make clear that composition and rhetoric were always front and center throughout the course. Conversations and references to movies and related pop culture were common, but they were also always in support of course content, rather than overwhelming it. I say this here because as I began unit three, I wanted to be very careful not to make screenwriting or screenplay structure so prominent that my students became confused about what the unit, the class, or the assignment were actually about. I wanted them to understand that all that we would be doing for the next several weeks would be in service of strengthening their ability to understand and to textually articulate their own arguments. The result of my effort to accomplish this is that I only explicitly lectured on the screenplay-as-argumentative-essay framework for three class sessions, and even then I dedicated no more than half of any of those seventy-five minute sessions to those lectures. My hope was that this would be enough time for my students to understand the parallels I envisioned, and also that the approach would be novel and interesting enough that the limited time spent on it would still be memorable.

The first of the three sessions was largely about introducing to my classes that we would be learning about crafting argumentative essays in a novel way. I intentionally did not, at this

point, detail what this approach would entail, except to generally say that we would be using the narrative structure of screenplays to rethink the ways we look at arguments. I built a PowerPoint presentation that was vague and intriguing, my intention being to make my students curious in order to keep their interest and engagement. I framed that first session as a ten-minute or so request for my students' permission to teach the argumentative essay in an unusual way. The mini lecture culminated in my overtly asking them to raise their hands if they would, as I called it, "embrace the weird." This was a phrase meant to acknowledge that the way we would be talking about argumentative essays would almost definitely be different than they had ever experienced before, and that some of it might initially seem a bit odd. By framing it in this way, I hoped to continue building interest in this approach, but also to confirm to my students that it was reasonable if the ways we would be discussing the unit three assignment were unfamiliar to them. The truth is that I was betting quite heavily on them going with it all, as I'm genuinely not sure how I would have navigated things if there had been a response of resistance. As it was, though, every student in both of my classes raised their hands. They didn't know exactly what they were in for, but they were game, which came as a great relief to me (see Appendix G for this unit's class session breakdown).

At the end of that class session, with Embrace the Weird having now become a familiar phrase, albeit one with very little context, I made my second and last intentionally vague move: I assigned both of my classes to watch *Aladdin*. Again, I made the choice not to tell them specifically why this was the assignment, instead just making clear the expectation that they would come to class after the weekend having watched the movie, even if they had already seen it. I directed them to the link that I had already posted on Canvas, and let them know that they could reach out to me if they encountered any difficulty. I had also compiled a list of various

screenwriting structures, which I had posted to Canvas. I instructed them to read through this compilation, but made clear that they were not expected to memorize it, nor would they be tested on it. I wanted them to be familiar with various frameworks, and my hope was that they would find skimming through the list interesting enough that they would begin to make connections during their viewing of *Aladdin*. I told them that we would likely have an in-class free write the following Monday where they would articulate some of their experiences with the list and the movie, and I sent them off for the weekend hoping that my urgings had proven effective enough that they would show up on Monday prepared.

So, why *Aladdin* in particular? I will detail the specifics as I talk about the next two class sessions, but more broadly, *Aladdin* was an ideal choice because it accomplishes so much of what I wanted my students thinking about, and more than that I believed the idea of watching it would be enjoyable enough that they would be likelier to actually follow through and watch it. I made a reasonable guess that the popular Disney movie would be familiar to the majority of my students, and that the chance to rewatch a title from their childhoods would come with a bit of nostalgic cache and would be appealing. Additionally, *Aladdin* is a movie with which I am very familiar. As I mentioned in my Introduction chapter, my son and I have had many discussions about this movie in particular, and it has proven to be a surprisingly fertile ground for deep dives into narrative, structure, argument, and rhetoric.

When my students arrived to class the following Tuesday morning, I had them do the in-class free write I had alluded to the week before. The prompt was as follows: “You’ve watched *Aladdin* and you’ve read about some screenwriting structures. In this free write, connect those dots: identify how *Aladdin* fits into some of the screenplay structures you read about. Do they help you understand why the story does or doesn’t feel satisfying? Why or why not? Can you

think of other movies that utilize some of these story elements? Can you make connections between *Aladdin*'s structure and the structure of argumentative essays?" I was less concerned with "correct" responses, and more concerned with whether or not students were buying into the conceit that these two genres had relevant connections. Their responses made clear the fact that the majority had, in fact, watched the movie and that fewer but still many had at least glanced at the screenwriting frameworks list.

In the continued spirit of not wanting to overwhelm or confuse my students, I spent only a bit of that class session connecting an argumentative essay's introduction to the first act of a screenplay. In particular, I introduced the concept of narrative breadcrumbs, reinforcing the metaphor by also referencing planting seeds and leaving clues. I articulated that the core idea was to integrate elements early on in the argument that would later be explored more deeply. By doing this, I reasoned, the deeper exploration would feel connected to the rest of the argument instead of just feeling like "the next thing that happens."

To underscore the significance of this rhetorical move – and also to highlight that many of my students already understood this concept intuitively – I had prepared slides with screenshots from *Aladdin*. Since I was operating on the assumption that we had all recently watched the movie, it allowed me a shorthand and meant that I did not need to contextualize every image or narrative beat. Instead, I talked generally at first about many elements that were introduced in the first third of the movie that were necessary for understanding later elements. I asked my classes to identify some of these elements, and they named characters such as Aladdin, Jasmine, Abu, Jafar, Iago, the Sultan, and the Genie. They also named locations like Agrabah, the Cave of Wonders, and the palace. I made sure to confirm that, yes, their contributions were

exactly correct, and that without these early introductions much of the later story would not make sense.

I then narrowed the scope a bit by showing images of particular moments, setups to later payoffs. I showed an early moment of Aladdin jumping off of a marketplace building, sitting atop a carpet, and I reinforced that this is later echoed by Aladdin riding a sentient magic carpet. (Figures 2 and 3) I showed an image of Aladdin offering Jasmine an apple by rolling it down his arm, underscoring that the move is intentionally memorable enough that when he does the same thing later in the movie and Jasmine recognizes it, the audience members understand because they share her recognition. (Figures 4 and 5) And I showed them an early moment of Aladdin standing on the edge of a building's roof, looking down at Jasmine as he offers her his hand while asking, "Do you trust me?" (Figure 6) This moment is recalled later when Aladdin, posing as Prince Ali, stands at the edge of the palace balcony, offering his hand to Jasmine in an identical way while offering her a ride on the magic carpet by asking, "Do you trust me?" (Figure 7) Each of these moments is intended to work in two ways simultaneously: as a story or character beat operating on its own terms with its own context, and also as a connector to something that occurs later or earlier in order for the entire narrative to feel whole.

And finally, I narrowed down even further by talking about the thesis statement. The screenplay frameworks sheet I had asked my students to read included the Blake Snyder Beat Sheet, which discusses the Theme Stated beat and states that there is a moment in most movies where a character actually explicitly and verbally states the movie's theme. In *Aladdin* this beat occurs when Aladdin sings to himself after having been verbally and physically dismissed by his surrounding community: "'Riff-raff, street rat.' I don't buy that. If only they'd look closer, would they see a poor boy? No, siree; they'd find out there's so much more to me." I underscored the



Figure 2: Aladdin (1992), Walt Disney Pictures



Figure 3: Aladdin (1992), Walt Disney Pictures



Figure 4: Aladdin (1992), Walt Disney Pictures



Figure 5: Aladdin (1992), Walt Disney Pictures



Figure 6: Aladdin (1992), Walt Disney Pictures



Figure 7: Aladdin (1992), Walt Disney Pictures

fact that this moment is the movie's thesis statement, this is the argument. The movie's take is that Aladdin is more than society tells him that he is, and this position will be challenged and proven or disproven by the end. I made clear the fact that this moment does not occur at the very end of act one, just like their thesis statement does not have to appear at the very end of their introduction, though it certainly could. I also pointed out that act one is not a single scene, just as their introduction does not have to be confined to a single paragraph. And with that, I moved on from the screenwriting/argumentative essay connections lecture for that day.

The next Thursday was a bit more extensive. Since my classes met only two days a week, I needed to make sure to fit all three major talking points into Tuesday and Thursday. This decision was based in part on the fact that I had a lot of material to cover outside of my research study paralleling, and in part because I did not want my classes' enthusiasm to lose steam, and I thought that if the explanation portion of this approach extended into another week, the risk of that happening was too great. This meant that Thursday was the day I talked about body paragraphs as act twos, and conclusions as act threes.

Once again keeping things decidedly *Aladdin*-centric, we talked about what we identify with strong villains. In fact, the Question of the Day was just that: "What makes an effective villain?" Given that this connection seemed a little less opaque to me, I was able to move into the metaphor a little more smoothly. I made clear upfront that we were talking about counterarguments, and I underscored that this was an opportunity for my students to strengthen their main arguments by providing a legitimate challenge for them to overcome. We talked about the fact that Jafar has a great deal of power: he is the royal vizier; he manipulates the Sultan through both ordinary and magical means; the palace guards are under his command; he has great knowledge. In short, he is designed to be quite a formidable foe for Aladdin, and if Aladdin

were to best him the audience would learn a lot about Aladdin's own strength, cleverness, and character. I made the connection explicit, stating that just as the best villains are difficult to overcome, so too should a counterargument be strong, legitimate, and non-disposable. In other words, a counterargument should not just appear in an argumentative essay as a single sentence, easily brushed past and dismissed; it should instead be a meaningful presence and it should matter, just as a villain should be a real character and not just a tool to get the story told.

On that same Thursday, we talked about conclusions. Throughout units one and two both of my classes had confirmed to me that they had received consistent and explicit directions to make their conclusions reiterate their introductions and restate their thesis. Given this already established context, I saw this as an opportunity to expand that conversation. I showed a slide that had two identical images from the early moments of *Aladdin*, side by side, and I asked my students to think about how strange it would be if they were watching a movie and the last twenty minutes was just the first fifteen minutes all over again. We all agreed that it would be strange, even annoying, and most of all unsatisfying.

Instead, I suggested, memorable and satisfying movies do what their argumentative essays should do: they recall what has happened before, but they send their viewers off into the world with something new to consider. Once again referencing *Aladdin*, I pointed out that Aladdin the character undergoes many meaningful changes throughout the movie: he starts off as a goodhearted but overlooked citizen, becomes a prince, and eventually loses his esteemed status and is simply Aladdin once again. But that last part is particularly important. During that class discussion, I underscored how necessary it was for Aladdin to ultimately prevail *as himself* rather than as Prince Ali. If Prince Ali had changed the law in order to imprison Jafar, or if he only used the Genie's magic to marry Jasmine the audience would have witnessed a story with a beginning,

middle, and end, but the experience would likely not have been particularly satisfying. Instead, by reducing Aladdin back down to where he started, a seemingly powerless kid with a vest and a fez, by making sure the audience understands visually and thematically that he is back where he started, and by making that version of the character win the day, the movie concretely answers its own primary question and satisfyingly keeps everything thematically relevant. If Aladdin believed that he was more than what people have decided he is – if that is the thesis statement – then the movie had to make sure that the Aladdin audiences were introduced to at the beginning was the one who wins at the end. The movie recalls its beginning by showing audiences that the clever boy they met in the opening moments finally believed in himself enough to let “just Aladdin” prevail.

I then brought the metaphor back to my students’ argumentative essays in particular, urging them to genuinely consider the journey that they are taking their readers on. Instead of just repeating the introduction, I asked them to let their conclusions act as a destination. I wanted them to think about their conclusions as the moment everything had been leading up to, the major takeaway, the chance to pull everything together. I referenced the Hegelian dialect explicitly, noting that, just as in a movie, the beginning should be the thesis, the middle should be the antithesis, and the end should be a synthesis of what had come before. I clarified that the conclusion should absolutely include elements of the introduction, but that it should also act as a culmination of all that had come before.

And with that, I had introduced my students to the foundational elements of my screenplays as argumentative essays parallel. As the semester went on, we continued talking about these ideas, of course, but it was during those three class sessions that I did the major work of creating a base on which to build what I hoped would be a new understanding of how to

approach this genre of writing. I will note that despite some significant reframings, I was not anticipating that any student would revolutionize the genre of academic argumentative essays. I fully expected that what I ultimately received from my students would be, frankly, freshman-level argumentative writing, with common pitfalls and evidence of inexperience firmly in place. That said, my hope was that the submitted writing would also show some interaction with creativity and exploration. My hope was that at least several students would think more deeply and less robotically about the thoughts they were communicating via the written word. So while the assignments themselves from this point on were largely the same as other FYC sections' assignments, I hoped that my students were thinking a bit more deeply about why certain structures and choices make sense instead of solely doing something out of habit or without intentionality.

Post-Semester

In order to avoid even the idea that any student's grade might be impacted by their decision to participate or not to participate in my study, I had to wait until after the semester was over and I had submitted my classes' final grades before attempting to recruit my interview subjects. This resulted in a bit of added anxiety because I wanted to maximize the likelihood that my (now former) students would still be at least somewhat in "school-brain mode" rather than fully committed to their winter breaks. To that end, as soon as I graded their final assignments and entered their grades into UTK's database, I left a quick message in response to their submissions on Canvas. I had done this for every submitted assignment throughout the semester in an effort to maintain a human connection between myself and them, but the difference this time was that in addition to brief words of encouragement or guidance, I also mentioned in this space that I would be sending each student an email that I hoped they would respond to. I

thought this would make it less likely that they would overlook my recruitment email (see Appendix B), and that it would also make them feel more comfortable to let me know that they would rather not participate, which meant that I wouldn't have to wait and wonder how many people who had not responded were declining participation and how many were just taking a while to respond.

This approach worked very well, as in the ensuing days I heard back from the majority of my potential participants. I did not receive a response from everyone, and multiple students who did respond made clear that they would rather not participate in the study at all. Nine students responded that they granted me permission to use their written materials – Weekly Engagement Updates, Self-Reflections, and submitted APPs – and a delightfully surprising additional fifteen students agreed to let me use their written materials and also agreed to be interviewed. Actually, sixteen agreed to be interviewed but after that initial response, I never heard back from one student to secure a date and time.

The following table (Table 1) introduces the twenty-four participants in this study. Each student's pseudonym is presented as well as whether they identify as male, female, or non-binary. The third column notes whether that student was interviewed, and the two final columns give some information about each interviewee's writing history prior to our class and whether they had ever before considered a connection between narrative structures and argumentative essay structures. Since the information in the last two columns came directly from questions posed during interviews, non-interviewed participants are not reflected here.

I conducted three interviews in person in the Panhellenic building on UTK's campus. The remaining twelve interviews happened virtually over Zoom. In all fifteen cases I received permission and then used Zoom to record images and audio, as well as an app simply called

Table 1: Participants and Their Prior Writing Histories

PSEUDONYM	MALE, FEMALE, OR NON-BINARY	INTERVIEW	PREVIOUS WRITING HISTORY	PREVIOUS CONNECTIONS BETWEEN NARRATIVE AND ESSAYS
ALYSON	F	Y	“I feel like I've written every single year since starting school, to whatever extent that that grade level takes it. [...] I didn't do a lot of creative writing for school or out of school.”	“I have never thought about it. Like, combining the two types of [structures] to think of them similarly.”
ANDREA	F	Y	“[H]onestly, I haven't had that much writing experience throughout high school, besides that one [previously mentioned AP] English class and then, like, the basic reading.”	“Never.”
ANTONIA	F	Y	“[My creative writing history is] basically non-existent. I don't really write for fun. I don't really find writing that super interesting.”	“No I have not [ever made that connection].”
BRADY	M	Y	“[N]ot very extensive. We wrote in high school and through middle school. I mean, just general essays but nothing too crazy.”	“Absolutely not.”

Table 1 Continued

DAMON	M	Y	“[One assignment] kind of required you to write argumentative essays, but as a group. And then also, you had to make a presentation that, like, went along with it. And so like the final was an essay and the presentation, and we just turned that in as a group project.”	“No, I had never thought of that before.”
DANNY	M	Y	“I don't, like, write for fun or anything. Like, so, like, all my writing is through school and the only, like, advanced level course that I took prior to taking a college course this semester was the AP seminar one. [...] [T]he closest thing to, like, creative writing that I do is, like, when I'm, like, I'll text my mom, like, what I did for the, like, weekend or, like, what's going on in school.”	“I'd say prior to this class, I never, like, that was never something that I was, like, actually, like, looking at.”

Table 1 Continued

DAWN	F	Y	“I’ve always enjoyed English. So, I felt like, once I got, like, my base, like, a set of things that I did, I just did those things for four years in high school. [...] I journalled a lot when I was younger. Lots of, like, stories.”	“Honestly, not really.”
DEAN	M	N	N/A	N/A
GEORGE	M	Y	“I don’t write creative. [...] [I’ve written academically] just in English classes and sometimes in history. And that’s it.”	No, never [did I make that connection]. I always thought about it as like, I guess these are the points I’m gonna make and I’m not gonna really connect them at all or, like, make them flow, like, in the essay. It’s just, like, this is my one point. Now, I’m gonna talk about my next and my next.”
GINNY	F	N	N/A	N/A
KENNEDY	F	N	N/A	N/A
LEANN	F	Y	“I only wrote for assignments and to get in my application to get into school [and I only wrote creatively] when I was assigned.”	“No, not at all.”

Table 1 Continued

LYLE	M	Y	“Creative writing history... Yeah, genuinely, like, nothing, like, extracurricular or anything. Just school. I'm not a writer.”	“Not once, no. Like, genuinely, like, that was what was so cool about the unit. I never, like, even considered the fact that you can, like, treat it as a plot [...] like, no, never.”
MARK	M	N	N/A	N/A
MICHAEL	M	Y	“So I think I did one [argumentative essay] my junior year and it was a similar thing. It was picking, you know, some sort of controversial or hot topic and then go off to do some of your own research.”	“Not at all, I would just, like, the way that I was taught to write essays in high school was just that very cut and dry five-paragraph essay, never veer from that or anything different.”
NICHOLAS	M	N	N/A	N/A
NIKKI	M	N	N/A	N/A
NOEL	NB	N	N/A	N/A
PERRY	M	Y	“I've been in English class since, like, middle school. So I've written, you know, essays since then. [...] [In high school] I started to be able to really figure out, like, how creative can I get.”	“I never had [thought about this connection] before your class. I just thought it was just another essay, another paper to write.”
PIERCE	M	Y	“I've taken a couple AP writing classes in high school, but other than that, it's just been pretty standard.”	“Not really, no.”

Table 1 Continued

PIERRE	M	Y	“Prior to our class I've had quite a lot [of experience] writing argumentative essays. They're my favorite out of all I would say. [...] I've taken about two or three creative writing classes. And then I would, like, create different narratives and read different literature, different stories and whatnot. And they were pretty fun, I would say.”	“Before our class, I have not [made that connection]. It's really just been, like, a set format for it, or what I've been taught. You know, just, like, the standard intro body paragraphs, then countering them and, you know, there's, like, a standard thing.”
QUINT	M	N	N/A	N/A
ROBIN	F	Y	“[I am] not a huge writer. [...] [C]reative writing was never really my thing.”	“I see the structure behind [an argumentative essay]. I see, like, kind of the narrative structure as, like, it's progressing, it's a story. I mean, I don't know that I strongly thought about that, but if you ever asked me, I would say, well, yeah. There is a story behind that writing.”
XAVIER	M	N	N/A	N/A

Recorder to record audio. For the in-person interviews, I opened my own Zoom room and aimed the webcam at my participants to make the recording. I used the Recorder app as a backup just in case there was a problem with any of the Zoom playbacks so that I would increase the likelihood that I would still have clean audio of each of my interviews. The interviews varied in length, with the shortest being nine minutes and twelve seconds, and the longest being twenty-eight minutes and nineteen seconds. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym, and of the fifteen interviewees, one provided a preferred pseudonym, and one asked to know what pseudonym would be provided. All others deferred to me without further comment.

Both Zoom and the Recorder app automatically provided text transcripts of each interview's audio. Once the interviews were completed, I sent the Recorder app's transcripts to my UT Gmail account. I then copied them and pasted them into individual Word documents, labelling each with the appropriate participant's pseudonym. From there, I made adjustments that I was able to before listening to the interviews again. For instance, I was able at a glance to see where the automatic transcript had not correctly identified which voice was speaking, and so I went through and broke up each speaker's speech, distinguishing between myself and my interviewee.

I then watched each interview, one at a time, while reading through each transcript to note where the text differed from the spoken interview. When such deviations presented themselves, I paused the video and made the proper adjustments to the transcript. I did this for each of the fifteen interviews.

I now had all of my collected data, which I began to analyze. I primarily utilized an inductive approach because I felt it was best to let my participants' spoken and written words tell their own stories without my preconceived ideas of what I hoped to find altering my findings. I

had each participant's Weekly Engagement Updates and Self-Reflection responses collected and separated by student, and I went through the writings and began coding what I saw. I later did the same with the fifteen interview transcripts.

At first, I wasn't quite sure what I was looking for. There were certain specific questions that I asked during interviews, such as "Tell me about your experiences writing argumentative essays prior to our class," or "Do you think you will use any elements of this approach when writing future argumentative essays?," which were designed to get at particular bits of information. In these cases, I wanted to situate my participants in a context in order to better understand where they were coming from when they began engaging with this approach, and I also wanted to get a sense of how likely they thought they would be to carry any of these ideas with them going forward. Those preplanned questions offered something of a framework from which to begin analyzing responses, and once I had some information that was relevant, I was able to start looking in other responses for things that fleshed out my participants' experiences. It was at this point that I started noticing what would later become codes such as Reader Experience and Positive Outcomes.

Identifying themes from the written materials was a bit less structured because of the freeform nature of the Weekly Engagement Updates and the sometimes phoned-in quality of the Self-Reflection responses. From those data sources I was primarily seeking a sense of what the experience was like for my students in the moment. I quickly noticed that several students mentioned excitement and curiosity about being assigned to watch *Aladdin*, for instance, which became a variety of themes and codes.

Patterns began to emerge, and I ultimately tallied up the various codes I had identified. Certain codes became more prevalent than others – "Connections," "Helpful/Useful," and

“Transfer,” for instance – and I ended up combining several related codes such as “Enjoyment,” “Excitement,” “Fun,” and “Feel Good.” Once my codes were in place, I began to see larger experiential narratives forming, which I will detail in the Results and Discussion chapters.

As I was coding, I marked everything that I believed at the time might end up becoming relevant and useful in my study. That said, as I began writing my Results section, I quickly realized that not everything that I coded for had a place in my finished presentation. Some respondents, for instance, discussed prior writing foci or the engagement levels of previous teachers. Even though I coded for these mentions, they largely did not find their way into my reporting. It is also worth noting that several codes overlap with each other and in my effort not to represent the same student comment multiple times, certain codes that appear in my list do not make an appearance in this report, even as the content does under another code’s name. For example, when George noted in his written contribution, “Thinking about the counter argument as the villain of the story made me understand it better,” I coded that statement as “Counterargument as Villain” and also as “Increased Understanding.” But in the final reporting, the quote itself is only represented in what eventually became the theme “Screenwriting Elements,” rather than being included twice, once for each code.

I will note that I used the submitted APPs a little differently than the rest of my collected data. I realized early in this process that the finished argumentative essays would be useful but not quite as much as I had originally assumed. What I mean is that since this is my first semester teaching FYC, I don’t have a wealth of knowledge regarding what quality of APPs other students submit. I also don’t have access to or permission to use other students’ essays in this study. I could and have applied my own sense of quality and understanding to my participants’ writing,

but given that this study is meant to focus on my students and their understanding and growth, I chose to let their observations lead the way.

The final piece of the puzzle that has become this study was compensating my participants for their participation. Though the process was more complicated than I had originally anticipated, with the help of several people, I was able to purchase and later to be reimbursed for fifteen fifteen-dollar Amazon gift cards. I sent a digital gift card code to each of my fifteen interviewees, and having accomplished that I had completed the work of my study, and all that was left was to analyze and report my findings.

CHAPTER THREE – WEEKLY ENGAGEMENT UPDATE AND SELF-REFLECTION RESULTS

I have divided my data collection into two chapters: weekly engagement updates/self-reflections, and interviews. The reason for this is that the former category is comprised of written contributions from students during the semester when they did not know that their words might be used in a research study, and the latter category comes from one-on-one dialogues during which participants understood the wider context of the study. Because of these distinct scenarios, I believe that the contributions provided by my participants have likely been affected by each set of specifics and therefore warrant an acknowledgement of those differences in their presentation here. A written response to a self-reflection prompt might be more honest, for instance, but also potentially less thorough. A student's verbal answer to an interview question, on the other hand, might go more in depth but could also be impacted by the fact that the student's teacher is sitting right in front of them. Therefore, my Results section will be broken into chapters reflecting both data streams, beginning with weekly engagement updates and self-reflections.

Every week of my class requires each student to write what I call Weekly Engagement Updates. The purpose is multifold: they provide an opportunity to turn visible what would otherwise be invisible, allowing me to understand better the work that each student is doing when they are not in our classroom; they allow students to reflect on their own work habits and to articulate what might otherwise go unnoticed; they keep open a low-stakes, stress-free line of communication between students and instructor; and they keep students writing, which is so important for improving effective written communication. Many students over the course of the semester end up allowing these updates to become de facto journaling exercises, which is completely appropriate. My main desire is that they genuinely feel that these updates are an

opportunity for them to get whatever is in their heads down on the page. The Weekly Engagement Prompt, every week, is as follows:

Write a bit about your engagement with this class this past week. Maybe you were really feeling fired up and ready to go, eager and enthusiastic about all of the things you needed to do. Write about that! Maybe this week was a harder one, and you just couldn't really manage to engage deeply. Write about that! Maybe you were somewhere in between. Write about that!

To be clear, you will not be penalized for acknowledging that engagement was tough and I'm the only one who will read this, so please be honest about your experiences. Since this class is rooted in a labor-based system, it's helpful for you and me to know what that labor and engagement really looks like, which is the purpose of this weekly update.

You don't need to write a lot, but please hit a minimum of two hundred words, though you can certainly write at length if you'd like. Also, this does not have to feel academic or "correct." Feel free to write casually, conversationally, in stream of consciousness, or with sentence fragments. Everything is fair game, so long as you're reflecting genuinely and presenting your assessment of your engagement level and experiences from this week.

(Hey, look at that! The prompt above is what about 200 words looks like!)

These Weekly Engagement Updates were due every Sunday by midnight, with the exception of the week of Fall Break. Students were always prompted with the same language, week to week, and they would submit their Updates through Canvas as a text document that only I would see, as opposed to a discussion board post that other classmates would have access to. I responded to each student's Update every week with an often brief but personalized bit of text so that they knew that I actually had read their shares and that I was not just mechanically offering everybody the same response. If a student did not hit the 200-word minimum, I would comment on that, but that was really the only time that I would offer criticism; this really was designed to encourage students to feel safe, comfortable, and encouraged to be their authentic selves without fear of judgement.

The Self-Reflection content came from a more focused source. For every major unit assignment, students were expected to respond to a list of questions after having completed their submission. While each of the four self-reflection lists had overlapping questions, several

questions were unique to each assignment. For the purposes of this study, I looked at two of the questions from the APP Self-Reflection list, which are as follows:

5. Did thinking about an argumentative essay in terms of a narrative screenplay structure change your perspective or process regarding this type of assignment? How so?
6. Do you think you can use this narrative approach in future writing assignments? Do you think you will? If so, how so?

Each major unit assignment had nine self-reflection questions that were designed to get students thinking about their interactions with their own writing processes, and also to help make visible what would otherwise have been invisible to me. For instance, if I read a student's submission and felt that understanding of a particular concept was not clearly on display, often the self-reflection would shine a light on that aspect because the student would also acknowledge a fuzzy understanding of that concept. Alternatively, a student's self-reflection might indicate clearer understanding of concepts than did the submission itself, and my feedback would be able to incorporate a wider breadth of assessment than the submission alone would have allowed.

This written data stream made up of Weekly Engagement Updates and Self-Reflection responses consists of a cumulative 185 instances of 63 individual codes which I have grouped into eight separate themes as well as one subtheme (see Appendix F):

- Screenwriting Elements are instances in which participants talked about breadcrumbs, counterarguments as villains, or the conclusion/introduction connection discussed in our class
- Positive Outcomes concerns itself with students expressing positive associations with this approach or with their evolving changes in their writing
- Negative Outcomes is made up of instances when students expressed concerns or confusions regarding this approach

- Transfer focuses on participants discussing whether and/or how they will use these ideas in the future
- Movie/Story (with a subcategory of Just Story Elements) is comprised of mentions of specific movies or of narrative elements that students brought up that were not breadcrumbs, counterarguments as villains, or the introduction/conclusion connection we discussed in our class
- Connections emerged when I recognized that many responses identified points of connection between this approach and the ways students were thinking about their writing that I had not explicitly covered in class
- Reader Experience surprised me when I began to realize how often students were writing specifically about how this approach allowed them to think more directly about their eventual audience
- Miscellaneous acts as a catchall for codes that did not quite fit anywhere else (Figure 8).

The largest category is Positive Outcomes with its 49 individual instances of codes making up 27% of the total data collected. Screenwriting Elements and Movie/Story each make up 16% of the total, though Screenwriting Elements actually consists of 30 individual instances of codes whereas Movie/Story consists of 29. The Movie/Story category includes Just Story Elements, which provides 18 of the 29 instances. Just below Screenwriting Elements and Movie/Story is Transfer, which makes up 15% of the total with its 27 instances. The rest of the categories have decidedly less representation, with Connections making up 11% of the total with 21 instances, Miscellaneous making up 7% with 13 instances, and Negative Outcomes and Reader Experience each making up 4% of the total with 8 instances apiece (see Appendix D).

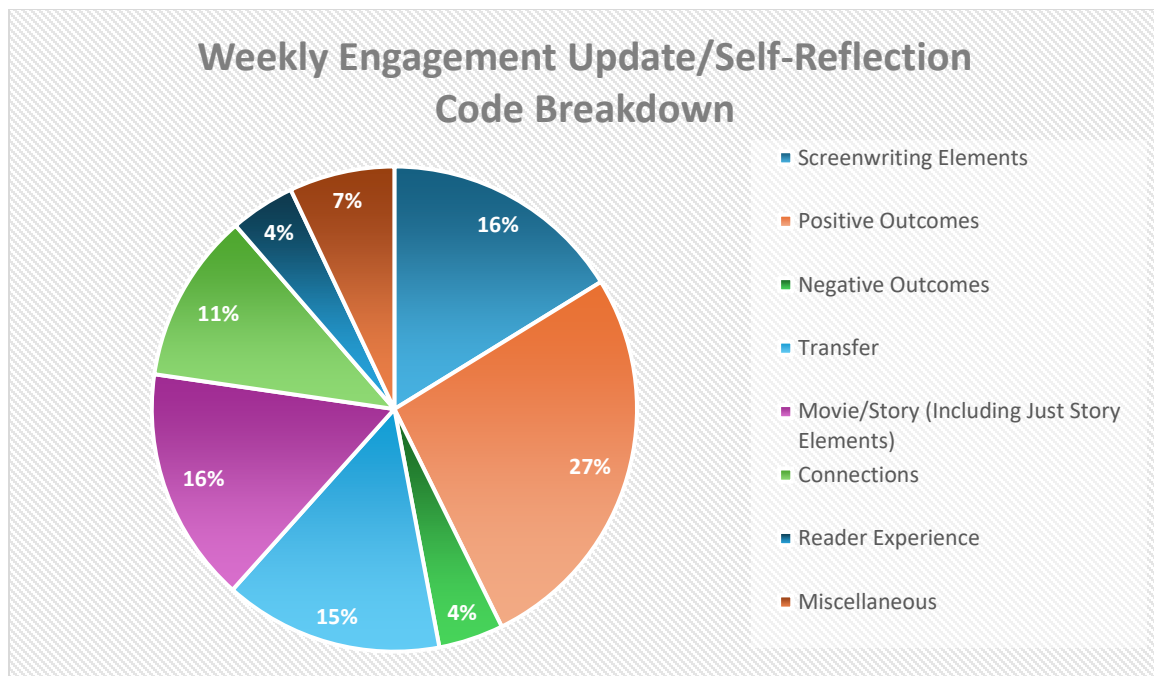


Figure 8: Written Data Code Breakdown

Positive Outcomes

The category of Positive Outcomes consists of a variety of codes that I determined indicated positive associations that my subjects made with their production, their process, or the way this new perspective of screenwriting structure connecting to argumentative essays was presented to them. The codes within this category that occur most frequently are “Easier,” with ten occurrences, “Enjoyment” with nine, “Helpful/Useful” with eight, and “Increased/Deeper Understanding” with six occurrences. The rest of the category is populated with codes such as “Fun,” “Interesting,” “Makes Sense,” and the like.

Several students identified the beneficial nature of thinking about argumentative essays by way of screenwriting elements. For instance, Michael, who would later point out the rigidity of previous essay formulas that he had experienced, stated, “The screenplay structure made this feel more approachable to me. This isn't because I'm familiar with writing movies, but I sure do watch a lot of them so I felt like this made it easier for me to follow my own rising action climax and falling action.” Andrea agreed, saying, “I was able to understand the connections between screenplay structures and argumentative essay structures, it felt like I was discovering a bunch of different analogies and it all clicked for me pretty easily.” Andrea wrote simply, “I liked the connection between the screenplay narrative and an argumentative essay.” During her interview, she would go on to express her hope that she will carry these understandings and connections with her going forward and that she will keep a spirit of creativity in her future writings. Dawn noted that “[t]he screenplay element helped [her] better organize [her] paper and how to shape it so it has a nice flow and ‘story-line’.” Dawn went on to say, “[The narrative approach] gives me a new perspective to writing an effective paper. For me, the narrative approach makes it simpler and lets me zoom out to see the big picture without getting hooked on the little details.” During

our later interview, Dawn would go on to underscore the similarities between screenplay and argumentative essay structures, which helped her to connect one to the other and led to her emphasizing the flow that she mentioned here in her written response.

Nikki wrote that she “feel[s] pretty good about connecting APP essays to movies and it makes sense to compare the two because their layouts are pretty much the same.” Dean enthusiastically commented, “I really appreciate you coming up with such a clever method to teach this; I feel like I really understand what it is that we are doing in class.” Brady really honed in on the change in perspective this approach provided him, writing

I NEVER would've thought that an argumentative paper's structure could be related to that of a Disney movie. But now that you mentioned it and gave this assignment, I absolutely see how this connects. It was a great connection to make too because usually I struggle in developing a structure for my papers that I have to write. So seeing this connection really helps me figure out how I want to structure my paper. Building on that, I feel very good about this paper so far.

He would later say during our interview that visualizing how movies are structured helped him to fill in that structure with his own information, and that the approach lined up nicely with his enjoyment of outlines. Damon echoed this excitement and also connected the approach to his own essay topic: “I really enjoyed thinking about my essay as a screenplay especially given that my argument revolves around narratives. It helped me a little more.” He went on to say that “it was engaging in my opinion to learn about seeing these structures in a different way. [Writing about a topic that I find interesting] combined with analyzing film structure has kept me thoroughly engaged this last week.” In his later interview, he would also add that this approach helped him reframe and strengthen his counterargument. And finally, Kennedy underscored that

this process “made it much easier to visualize how I wanted to write this paper. I am a huge example person so thinking about it as a narrative screenplay made things easier.”

Negative Outcomes

This category focuses on instances in which students expressed concerns or confusions regarding this approach to thinking about argumentative writing, or even times when a student admitted to having completely forgotten this approach altogether. This section is decidedly short, in large part because respondents expressed very few negatives regarding this approach, and in part because some responses that might have otherwise found their way into this category were a better fit for another category. For instance, Noel wrote in their self-reflection, “I don't even remember how the screenplays related to our APP I'll be honest,” and Alyson recalled similarly, saying, “As much as I love the analysis of screenwork, putting it to paper in argumentative form didn't help me. Honestly, I had forgotten the idea.”

Both Nikki and Andrea expressed concern regarding breadcrumbs, which will be presented in more depth in the following Screenwriting Elements section of this chapter.

Screenwriting Elements

This category consists of moments when my participants specifically mentioned any of the three screenwriting elements that I encouraged them to engage with while writing their essays: “Counterargument as Villain,” “Breadcrumbs,” and the “Introduction/Conclusion” connection. Of the three elements, “Counterargument as Villain” was mentioned the most at more than twice the cumulative mentions of the other two elements (Figure 9). The “Counterargument as Villain” code also includes mentions of “Argument as Protagonist,”

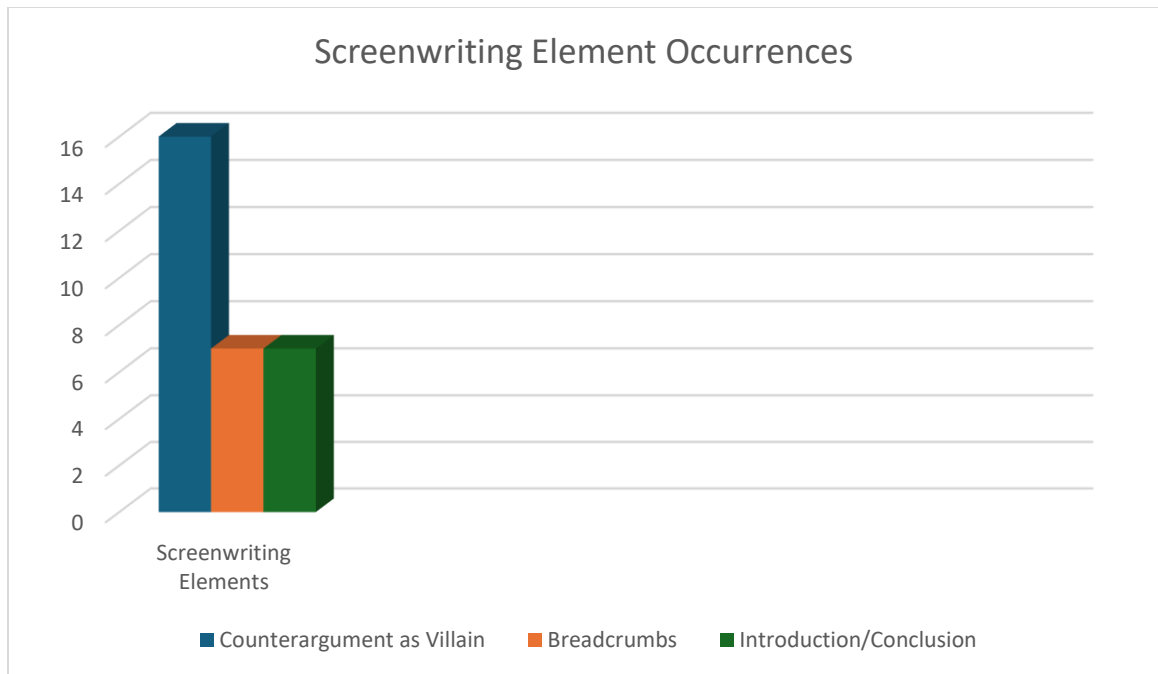


Figure 9: Screenwriting Element Occurrences

“Counterargument” without any other qualifiers, and “Rebuttal.” “Breadcrumbs” also includes “Breadcrumbs Difficult/Confusion,” and “Introduction/Conclusion” includes mentions of “Introduction” without other qualifiers.

George connected strongly to the first category, noting his own growth when stating, “Thinking about the counter argument as the villain of the story made me understand it better. I thought I was already pretty good at writing a counter paragraph but this made me understand the rebuttal a lot more,” and that “it was easier to imagine [the counterargument] as a villain the argument had to defeat.” In our later interview, he would expand on these ideas, noting that this approach to counterarguments allowed him to make better use of other perspectives instead of just formulaically introducing an opposing viewpoint only to immediately cut it down. Dean found some whimsy in his implementation of this approach, commenting, “I liked having the counterargument sneak up at my argument’s strongest points, almost as to remind the reader that the argument is very objectionable but very defensible.” Even though Quint did not find the approach particularly useful, he did acknowledge that he likes “the approach of building up our ‘protagonist,’ breaking them down by a villain but they prevail. I think this is how arguments should be, especially in essay format.” Pierce observed that he will “use this approach because [he] will try to think more about [his] audience and what the other side of [his] argument was thinking to find a stronger counterargument.” Damon, who would later point out that he now wants his counterarguments to be “worthy opponent[s],” here explored the concept more deeply, noting

I think I will take the narrative approach with me in future writing assignments by looking at the counterargument as a complex villain. I think that was the most important part of looking at an argument like a screenplay since in order to have a good screenplay

the villain needs to be convincing (like a counter argument). I really tried to have a convincing counter argument which even I myself agreed with at times.

Andrea expressed some concern, noting that she is “nervous that [she] won’t be able to effectively use [her] counterargument without sounding repetitive.”

The “Breadcrumbs” category includes a spectrum of mentions, ranging from confusions and difficulties with implementing breadcrumbs, to seeing the value and intending to utilize the approach in future writing scenarios. For instance, Andrea continued to express some concern beyond her aforementioned counterargument uncertainties: “I feel like I have encountered a much more challenging way to write an essay because of the breadcrumbs and counterargument being weaved in, and this scares me. I am nervous that I won’t be able to smoothly weave in breadcrumbs.” Notably, she would go on to say during our interview later that the breadcrumbs approach was useful and that it improved her writing. Nikki echoed these concerns, noting, “The breadcrumb thing made sense in my head but when I went to incorporate them I felt like it was more difficult than I imagined.” Leann had some initial confusions that began to dissipate as she continued through the process. She observed, “[A]fter our last class on Thursday I was still a little confused on how to put the breadcrumbs into my introduction without directly setting it up for that five-paragraph essay however after doing the APP prompt proposal assignment I do think that I’m getting a better idea.” Danny underscored his change in approach, stating, “The biggest thing that changed for me was leaving the hints throughout the introduction and then bringing them up later. This helped me form the structure of my paper better.” In our later interview, he would expand on this observation by saying that it made his essay “more complete.”

With regard to the “Introduction/Conclusion” category, Andrea noted, “Personally, I felt [the screenplay connection] was most helpful when deciding what I should say during my

introduction and conclusion!” She went on to write, “I usually struggle writing my introduction and conclusion because I am not sure what to write to properly set up or conclude my talking points. Thinking of it in terms of how a movie sets it up made it a lot easier to narrow down topics throughout my introduction and not simply restate this in my conclusion.” Leann appreciated the usefulness of this approach, stating that the screenplay connection “made [her] realize that the introduction and conclusion can be different but still reference each other.” She went on to say, “I have always struggled writing conclusions. And knowing that there is a way I can write it without it sounding like a mirror image of the introduction is helpful.” She would later reiterate that this approach prevented her conclusion from being “an exact copy” of her introduction.

Movie/Story

Though I spoke directly about movie and story elements such as *Aladdin*, counterarguments as villains, the connection between introductions and conclusions, and breadcrumbs during class sessions, several respondents brought up other specific movie titles as well as other story elements that were not explicitly part of my teaching. This category concerns itself with those references. The code “*Aladdin*,” unsurprisingly, gets mentioned the most as it was the title that I assigned my classes to watch. But several participants also discussed topics that led to codes such as “Watching Movies,” “Plot,” “Care About Movies,” or “Rising Action,” among several others.

Though by and large students found it useful to frame their thinking of their essays through a narrative lens, some participants were less than convinced of the utility of such a framing. For instance, Lyle and Alyson did not find much to connect narrative to their essays, but both of them came away with new ways to think about movies, with Lyle writing, “Turning this

whole topic into an argumentative essay reality made me have to care more about movies than I ever have before. I've always just enjoyed films that I've watched," and Alyson claiming, "If I took away anything from the screenplay narrative approach, it would be more with my analysis of movies than something to do with my paper." Lyle would later note that he "really love[d] this unit," and that in particular he did enjoy connecting screenplays to essays, and Alyson would say in our interview that *Aladdin* was an effective choice for making this connection. Robin, who did not get a lot out of this approach, still acknowledged that when thinking about future writing, "Even if it is an academic paper, I want to approach it and tell the story, walk through the story arc." Andrea, who previously expressed confusion and concern with concepts such as breadcrumbs and the counterargument as villain, acknowledged that "watching *Aladdin* and reflecting on the movie helped [her] synthesize the two structures and understand what [my] goal was... [she] really enjoyed watching *Aladdin* and [she] definitely followed how [I] synthesized movie structures with argumentative essays." She would later comment that *Aladdin* made her think about essays differently as well.

But most respondents did acknowledge that connecting movie structure to their thinking about essays made sense to them. Michael, for instance, connects his own habits to the approachability of screenplay structure, stating, "This isn't because I'm familiar with writing movies, but I sure do watch a lot of them so I felt like this made it easier for me to follow my own rising action climax and falling action." He would go on in our later interview to make specific connections between the structure of his argumentative essay and the movie *Django Unchained*. Dawn really took the structure to heart, breaking her essay up thusly: "My paper sort-of follows the 'story-line' or 'plot' type format – for example, the introduction (like an exposition in a screenplay), supporting details (like a rising action), counter (villain), defeating

the villain, and then the conclusion (like a resolution),” and she observed that “[t]he screenplay element helped me better organize my paper and how to shape it so it has a nice flow and ‘story-line.’” Dean made several story element connections to his own writing, insisting that this approach “did change my perspective because I feel there are some theatrics to my paper as I created some drama throughout... I will use [this approach] to create that suspense that a good movie gives the viewer.” Dean went on to share:

I really enjoyed the Tuesday session of this class and the connections you made between *Aladdin* and the subject we have been studying in your class. I thought it was a clever way to get us invested in the learning process by having us watch a classic and fun film that is easy to understand. I think the low effort assignment of watching a movie actually made the topic at hand easier to understand rather than some kind of worksheet.

Mark pointed out that he “was trying to structure [his] conclusion as like a happy ending to leave the audience with something to think about.”

The specific choice of the movie *Aladdin* was a hit with several students, many of whom remarked that their enthusiasm for this title led to further engagement with the assignment. Antonia expressed enthusiasm over getting to do something out of the ordinary: “I’m also excited to have an excuse to watch a movie as homework instead of doing something like calculus so thank you for that!” She would later enthusiastically comment that the specific movie, *Aladdin*, was a particularly good choice. Damon enthused, “I found this week very engaging and I enjoyed the topic of comparing argumentative essays with screenplays a lot! *Aladdin* was a great pick and it kept me engaged at the beginning of each class last week.” Brady appreciated the low-stress nature of this part of the unit, stating, “I really enjoyed that we got to watch *Aladdin* for homework. It gave me a nice break from stressful homework and kind of let

me just sit back and relax with some popcorn and watch a movie from my childhood so that was really cool. I also really enjoyed it because it really gave me a new understanding of how an argument can be structured.”

Transfer

A significant focus of the ideas at the foundation of this thesis is whether or not students will be able to use this approach to writing argumentative essays in the future. This category, then, concerns itself with mentions of transferability, with my respondents’ own ideas about how they might or might not carry these ideas with them as they continue their college careers and beyond. Within the twenty-seven occurrences of transfer-related codes, fifteen are “Transfer” in general, eight fall under “Minimal Transfer,” and there are two instances of “No Transfer.”

Michael believes that he will be able to apply some of these ideas in a broad range of ways, writing, “I absolutely think that I will use this narrative approach for future assignments because I feel that it can be applied to pretty much any form of persuasive writing,” though in our interview he suggested that he might prefer a sales pitch framework rather than a screenplay framework. Michael’s response is an example of what Baird and Dilger refer to as the simple transfer concept of Assemblage, in that he plans to slightly modify the writing concepts we discussed in our class to future writing contexts that are not identical to this context. Andrea was more specific, pointing out that “[n]ext semester, [she] will be taking another English class and [she] feel[s] that [she] can implement the breadcrumbs and counterargument elements in those writing assignments.” Antonia maintained, “I definitely think I will be using this process in future writing assignments,” particularly with regard to introductions and conclusions. Dawn believes that she “can use this narrative approach in future writing assignments as it gives [her] a new perspective to writing an effective paper.” She continued, “For me, the narrative approach

makes it simpler and lets me zoom out to see the big picture without getting hooked on the little details. I think I will be able to zoom out in future assignments, letting it pull me in the direction I need to go just like this assignment.” She would later note that this approach gives her a starting point so that she does not have to invent everything out of the ether. Leann believes that she will be able to use this approach particularly with regard to making conclusions easier for her to write, and she would later note that she will also use the counterargument element. Even though this approach did not really resonate with Robin, she still maintained, “I definitely think I can use this narrative when writing future assignments! And I think that I will just by approaching my work no matter what type of writing assignment as a story.” She would later express a bit more skepticism regarding future applicability. Though Brady did not specify particular types of writing that he was thinking about, he did say that “this structure can be useful in all styles of writing. The breadcrumbs and the way the body paragraphs work relate to all styles of writing.” In his later interview, he would both double down on this stance and also contradict it, suggesting once again that he could use this approach for a variety of writing contexts, but also noting that he would mostly consider it when writing argumentative essays. Pierre, too, lands on what Baird and Dilger refer to as the simple transfer concept of Application, in that he plans to use these concepts for similar types of assignments: “For example, if I had another argumentative essay, I could make sure my counter is also a strong villain. In addition to this, I can make sure my introduction doesn’t say everything in my paper, just like how a movie wouldn’t spoil itself in the beginning.” In our later interview, he would go on to suggest that this approach would be useful in “so many forms of writing.” Ginny considers her reader when she says, “I definitely think I could use the narrative approach because it is a very effective way to persuade an intended audience and get your readers to want to read the essay.”

Some students saw only minimal opportunities for transfer of these ideas, such as Nicholas who said, “I think I can [use this narrative approach] in certain types of essays. Essays like this one is where I could use that again. I think I will because it made it easier on me.” Dean’s response is a bit confusing, but I believe that when he wrote, “I think I can use it again in my writing assignments, maybe less so in magnitude,” that he meant he will use some of these ideas in the future, but with less of a concentrated focus. In other words, this suggests to me that Dean applied the screenwriting elements directly to the writing of this assignment, but that as he looks beyond our class, he thinks he will focus less on using only them and will instead consider them to be parts of his overall toolset. Danny touches on a noteworthy point that is shared by several students, which is the belief that this approach will only transfer to assignments that share commonalities with our class’s APP assignment. He said that this will “be something I keep in mind while doing future writings. It’ll have to be on a paper similar to this one in terms of style and requirements but I will likely incorporate it,” though he would later specify that the breadcrumbs element of this approach is something he plans to carry with him. Perry echoed this sentiment, writing, “[Y]ou can use this narrative approach for other papers that are similar in structure, and I will use it going forward when I can because it helped me,” though he later suggested that “you can kind of take it wherever you want to go.” Lyle considered applying this perspective to a specific potential future assignment: “I think the approach is a nice one and I’m happy I know how to apply it now! Maybe I could write an argument about healthcare at some point or something else I know a little more about!” He later suggested that he could and would use this approach for a variety of essays. Damon sees a specific element as the most likely he will take with him, underscoring, “I think I will take the narrative approach with me in future writing assignments by looking at the counterargument as a complex villain.” He would later

reinforce this perspective in his interview, commenting that this approach will help his counterarguments to be stronger. Mark expresses skepticism, noting, “I am not sure if I will use it in future assignments. I think it depends on what you are writing about.”

Some respondents do not believe it to be likely that they will transfer these ideas to their future writing. Nikki stated, “I feel like the narrative approach wouldn't really make sense to use in other assignments because research/argumentative essays are much different than other types of assignments we've done in this class.” This is especially noteworthy because it suggests that Nikki sees the specifics of an assignment as being self-contained without applicability to other genres of writing. Though this sentiment is in the minority representation in this study, I do wonder if it is a belief shared by many student writers across disciplines. Noel just plain did not retain any of this approach, so when prompted to answer whether they would use it in future writing assignments, they stated simply, “I don't remember what it is so no.”

Connections

As I was coding my collected data, I began to notice instances in which respondents identified connections that they were making between the screenwriting elements I had introduced and their own writing. This category has to do with moments when my students specifically make note of the connections they have made or are making, and the individual codes include “Connections” with twelve occurrences, “Minimal Connection” with six, and “No Connection” with four individual instances. Many of the items coded in the Connections category have appeared elsewhere in this chapter, and in an effort not to be overly redundant I will only minimally represent them again here. Because of this choice, much of the evidence presented here leans heavily into “Minimal Connection” or “No Connection,” which could be misleading if read in a vacuum.

For instance, Dean was coded for “Connections” when he wrote, “I really enjoyed the Tuesday session of this class and the connections you made between Aladdin and the subject we have been studying in you class,” but that same observation has already appeared in the Movie/Story section of this chapter. Similarly, Quint was coded for “Connections” when he wrote, “I like the approach of building up our ‘protagonist,’ breaking them down by a villain but they prevail. I think this is how arguments should be, especially in essay format,” even though this quote appeared in the Screenwriting Elements section of this chapter. Nikki, who previously noted that she only sees transferability of these concepts with regard to other argumentative essays and not to other genres of writing, echoed her own position when she wrote, “I feel pretty good about connecting APP essays to movies and it makes sense to compare the two because their layouts are pretty much the same.” Damon, who would later note that he had never before connected screenplay structure to essay structure, stated, “I think it was easy to understand the connections between the structure of a movie and the structure of an argumentative essay.” Pierre, too, wrote that “it did change [his] perspective regarding this type of assignment. It made the assignment easier to understand and the process easier to fulfill.” And finally Kennedy said that this approach “definitely” changed her perspective, adding, “It made it much easier to visualize how I wanted to write this paper. I am a huge example person so thinking about it as a narrative screenplay made things easier.”

When asked if thinking about argumentative essays in terms of narrative screenplay structure changed his perspective, Quint landed squarely in the “Minimal Connection” zone with this response: “I honestly didn’t really relate it to that, but afterwards I can see how it follows a classic screenplay structure.” But he also did make connections between argumentative essays and heroes overcoming villains, as was detailed in the Screenwriting Elements of this chapter.

Robin's response is especially interesting. While she writes at length about seeing narrative and story in every type of writing (a position she later echoed during our interview), she also says that the narrative screenplay structure did not really connect for her while writing her argumentative essay: "For some reason this specific lesson didn't necessarily resonate with me and carry over to when I was writing my paper. However, the structure makes sense and when thinking about it I definitely see the narrative in almost every situation." Leann acknowledged that thinking about argumentative essays in this way changed her perspective "[a] little bit," before noting that she now understands that conclusions are more than just a restated introduction. She also used the phrase that I introduced on the first day of talking about this approach in the classroom, saying, "This week in class I really tried to 'embrace the weird' and I think that it's really helping me put together a few things." Alyson was firmly in the "No Connection" arena. Though she would later identify connections she sees between plots and essays, when asked if the structure changed her perspective, she wrote, "For me, personally, no. As much as I love the analysis of screenwork, putting it to paper in argumentative form didn't help me." Xavier responded to the same prompt with, "Not really, I believe I had the same mindset as I normally do when writing an argumentative piece, but I definitely took it into account," and Ginny mostly agreed when she answered, "It sort of changed my perspective of this assignment, but overall I feel like it was very straight forward." Noel replied simply, "I don't think so."

Reader Experience

This short section emerged through the coding process as I realized that many of my respondents spoke directly about how this approach made them think more specifically about their eventual readers and audiences. Though we discussed audience in our class sessions, I was

surprised to discover that a narrative approach to argumentative writing seemed to crystallize the relationship between writer, text, and audience for students in a way that they felt noteworthy enough to bring up in responses even when not explicitly asked about audience.

When asked whether thinking about argumentative essays in terms of screenplay structure changed his perspective on argumentative writing, Nicholas responded with a concrete, “Yes, it showed me how I could set up my essay effectively to give the reader the best experience.” Dean also kept his reader in mind, noting, “An academic paper needs to be intelligent, not dull. Personality needs to be there and there needs to be a play to the reader’s feelings by creating feelings of unease in them.” Robin continued to connect argumentative essays to stories in general suggesting that “[w]hen a paper is written this way it ensures that your reader is very clearly able to follow what the author is saying,” a sentiment she echoed during our later interview. Pierce mentioned his intended audience multiple times, underscoring that he thought about his readership when constructing his counterargument as well as when writing in general “to ensure that [the audience] would not be confused about the information I presented since I am so knowledgeable on the topic.” He would, in our later interview, double down on his focus on not confusing his audience, adding that he prioritized a strong counterargument to keep his reader on board with his writing. Xavier similarly considered his readers when thinking about using this approach going forward, writing, “I think I definitely can and will in the future by really connecting my readers to the topic,” and Ginny echoes this connective element between audience and text when she says, “I definitely think I could use the narrative approach because it is a very effective way to persuade an intended audience and get your readers to want to read the essay.” And finally Mark made a point of providing his readers with a “happy ending to leave the audience with something to think about.”

Chapter Three Conclusion

On the whole, I find the results presented in this chapter to be heartening and encouraging. The concept of connecting narrative structure to the structure of argumentative essays is not one that any of my respondents had previously considered in an explicit way, and it is clear that this approach is not the right fit for everybody. Noel and Robin, in particular, made clear the fact that this way of engaging with the essay writing process did not meaningfully resonate with them. Several other respondents found this approach to be minimally useful as they look toward their future academic writing contexts.

But it is clear that this approach was useful for a great many students who engaged with it. I see that in many expected ways, such as when students responded enthusiastically to the counterargument-as-villain idea, as well as their positive associations with watching the movie *Aladdin*. But I am even more impacted by the responses I did not expect.

Some of these unexpected responses are less than ideal, such as the confusions and difficulties expressed regarding the breadcrumbs implementation, or some respondents noting that their biggest takeaway had less to do with rethinking their approach to writing argumentative essays and more to do with them looking at the structure of movies differently. While it is rewarding to know that any reframing of previously unexamined thought processes is happening, recontextualizing movies themselves was never the goal of my first-year composition course.

That said, I cannot help but feel great success when I analyze what my respondents report to me. As I look through the “Reader Experience” section, for instance, I recognize that much of its responses would fit appropriately into “Transfer” or “Connections” as well, but I believe it is important to underscore the fact that so many students spoke unprompted about the connections they made to their audiences through this approach. Intended audience, I am discovering, can be

a decidedly tricky concept for students to wrap their minds around. Despite discussing the difference between an intended audience and a general audience, students will still often think about readers as a monolith. I see in this chapter, though, that this narrative approach is helping many of my participants to think more specifically about their audience, and about how they as writers can impact their specific readers.

Throughout this chapter I see discovery abound. I see that in Brady noting that he never would have considered a narrative connection to essay writing, but now he sees that it can help his structure. I see it when Andrea talks about things clicking for her in ways they hadn't before. I see it when Dawn talks about this process simplifying things for her so that she can avoid getting caught up on small details and instead just get her broader thoughts communicated with a structure that works well for her. Most of all, I see the benefits of this approach presenting themselves when students write that they are enjoying the process and the experience of writing, even if they haven't previously felt that way.

CHAPTER FOUR – INTERVIEW RESULTS

This Results chapter is comprised of data collected from fifteen interviews I conducted with my former students within the two weeks after our semester ended. The majority of the interviews were conducted via Zoom, while the others were completed in person.

This data stream consists of a cumulative 511 instances of 169 individual codes which I have grouped into twenty-two separate categories. Themes include, among others, such names as Writing History, Watching Movies, and Screenwriting Elements. Several themes include subthemes, such as Screenwriting Elements which includes Breadcrumbs, Counterargument, and Introduction/Conclusion, or Positive Outcomes which includes the subthemes Effective, Growth, and Excitement, among others (see Appendix F). Where appropriate, I will combine some themes with others in the following report, and in each instance where I do so I will detail the reasons behind that choice (see Appendix E).

I have also made an effort to link the previous Results chapter with this one by spotlighting moments when participants' previous written responses connect with their spoken responses here. In many cases, respondents' verbal comments reinforce or deepen their written comments, but in some cases students' verbal comments contradict their written comments. For instance, a written comment might suggest that thinking about argumentative essays through a screenplay structure lens did not resonate at all with a writer, only for their verbal comments to underscore that a particular narrative element did, in fact, make a difference for them. When this occurs, I suspect it is most likely that the respondent reflected more superficially to the written prompts than to the verbal context of our interview, or that the framing of each prompt inspired different lines of thought. It is also possible, of course, that with the passing of time between the

written and verbal responses, students genuinely identified differences in their assessment of their relationship to this approach.

Negative Beliefs About Writing

This section is somewhat connected to my respondents' previous writing histories, which are presented in Table 1 in the Methods chapter of this report. The connection point is that both themes have to do with my interviewees' experiences before they were students in my class. Negative Beliefs About Writing emerged throughout the interviews as several respondents identified their own negative self-evaluations about their writing prior to our semester. I believe it is relevant to know where my respondents came from on their writing journeys in order to better understand their intersections with our class's instruction approach.

Regarding respondents' ideas about writing and themselves as writers prior to our class, the consensus was largely a negative one. Lyle made clear that writing was little more than an obligation for him, stating, "If I was assigned to write [an argumentative essay] for an English class in high school I wrote it. That's about it, really." When asked what he would think about when assigned an argumentative essay, he responded, "Is it okay to just say, 'I don't want to do this'? Like, shoot, [...] it really was just a formality. Yeah. Like just something that I had to do[...] I was not the best writer." Leann echoed this notion, saying that she "just thought about what's the easiest way to get through it, to be honest." George mentioned his own quality as a writer, claiming, "I wasn't really good at it. I always got kind of low grades on my essays." Michael, too, turned the conversation personal when he stated that though he "sure did a lot of" personal narratives, "[p]robably [he] was not very good at it." Finally, Alyson landed somewhere in the middle in terms of her assessment of the quality of her writing, noting, "I never felt as

though I was the strongest writer, but as you've taught me, that doesn't mean I'm a bad writer. I've gotten decent grades on all of my papers. I haven't gotten, like, bad grades on them.”

Reading Argumentative Essays/Watching Movies

Given that much of my thinking throughout this thesis is rooted in the notion that a screenplay structure would be useful for students because they likely do not read argumentative essays as regularly as they watch movies, I've combined these two themes in order to put them into conversation with each other. Most of the codes within these two themes have to do with how often my respondents typically do each action, but several interviewees also provided tangential alternatives that they prefer to actually reading argumentative essays.

I will point out here that as I continue to look through and analyze my data, it occurs to me that the language framing my information gathering is more vague and less defined than I had originally thought. I used the phrase “argumentative writing” throughout my interviews, never realizing that my built-in assumption might not have aligned with my participants’ understandings. My intention was for argumentative writing to be linked initially to my students’ Academic Position Papers, the major unit assignment that this report concerns itself with. Assuming that as a starting point, I was happy for students to branch out and make further connections based on their understandings of argumentative writing, but I recognize now that the phrase itself might not have made that initial assumption clear, and the responses may therefore all be starting from different points of understanding. I see this especially later in this section when Michael questions whether argumentative writing is the same as persuasive writing, and so I acknowledge here that my results may be impacted by my own lack of provided clarity.

The majority of my participants stated that they seldom or never read argumentative essays, and a comparable number also stated that they often watch movies. Of twenty-two

instances of codes within the Reading Argumentative Essays theme, fourteen are coded as Limited Reading Argumentative Essays or Doesn't Read Argumentative Essays. In contrast, of fifteen instances within the Watching Movies theme, twelve are coded as Often Watches Movies.

Andrea made clear that she reads argumentative essay, "close to never. Honestly, probably never." Brady and Danny echoed this experience, with Brady responding that he "[a]lmost never" reads argumentative essays and Danny expanding by saying, "So, I would say, like, that I'm not much of a, like... I don't like to, like, read argumentative things." Both Leann and Lyle stated bluntly that they "never" read essays that they are not required to read.

Damon said that he reads argumentative essays "not very often." He added that instead, "I'll watch a video essay, but just going out [...] I don't know where to look for just reading argumentative essays, but I do enjoy, like, video essays and that kind of content." George has read argumentative essays when he has not be required to do so, but he admitted this happens "rarely." In an effort to contextualize, he added, "I don't go looking for the essays [...] The title kind of stands out to me on, I read the first paragraph." Pierre said that though he has "read a lot of essays," he reads argumentative essays "not very often," which was echoed in Perry's initial response of "probably not often." But as Perry reflected more on his habits, he expanded his answer to allow that he reads arguments on "stuff that [he's] passionate about. So, like, sports and video games and stuff like that, and movies. So I'll read, like, [...] argumentative stances on that but in terms of, like, actual essays, probably not very often."

The connection between personal interest in a topic and the choice to read an argumentative text was repeated with some frequency. Michael initially determined that his argumentative essay reading experience was "probably slim to none," but then he reconsidered as he wondered if "persuasive articles" were the same as argumentative essays, noting that if

they are the same, “that is something I do in my free time. Maybe, I don't know, once every two weeks when I get on an auto website I like or something like that.” Though for the most part Alyson does not read argumentative essays on her own time, she acknowledged that “if something, like, interesting comes up across, like, social media or... I guess if, like, a friend or family member will bring something up, I'll go out of my way to look more into it, but it's not that often.”

Several respondents pointed out that they do not read argumentative essays regularly, opting instead to intersect with argumentation through other means. Danny said, “I guess I read, like, comments on, like, Instagram posts. There's always people like arguing in that, but I watch a lot of debates on YouTube, like, I just find it entertaining,” and that his “argumentative research outside of school comes from, like, media.” He also noted that he watches “video essay that are, like, arguing for some character,” and that he enjoys “seeing how other people, like, look deeper into, like, movies, or certain world issues.” Lyle joins Damon and Danny in their preference for other mediated forms, claiming, “I do fall asleep to the video essay every night, but I don't think that counts.”

Despite his enjoyment of video essays, Lyle watches movies “not too often, actually. Like, with friends, sure, but not alone, no.” Similarly, George determined that it is “kind of rare for [him] to watch a movie, like, [he] just kind of [doesn't] watch movies by [himself].” He went on to clarify that he will choose to watch a movie if his friends want to. Robin echoed these sentiments, stating, “So, I'm not a huge movie watcher because I don't have a very long attention span. So it has to be a movie that I'm, like, really interested in. [...] I have to be in the right mood to watch movies.”

Responses like those above were in the minority as most participants made clear the fact that they watch movies often. Alyson and Antonia, for instance, both offered that they “watch movies all the time,” and when Andrea was asked how often she watches movies, she replied, “Pretty often? Yeah, I watch them probably whenever I’m alone.” Perry watches “at least one movie a week,” Michael watches a movie “at least twice a week,” Pierce watches “two or three [movies] a week or something,” and Pierre watches a movie “almost every day.” Dawn detailed her movie watching habits even more, commenting, “I’m really into, like, action movies like Marvel. Like, my dad and I have watched, like, I’m pretty sure every Marvel movie when I was younger. And then, yeah, just on my own, like going to bed and I’ll just pick a movie. So I say pretty often.”

Other Narrative Connections

This section also links to information presented in Table 1 in this report’s Methods chapter. That table identifies connections that respondents had already made between argumentative essays and narrative prior to our class together, and this section highlights connections they have now made between argumentative essay writing and other narrative elements that I did not explicitly present to them during our class sessions.

Though only one student, Robin, identified that she had previously connected narrative concepts to her argumentative writing, as the interviews progressed, respondents began detailing some of the connections they made during the course of our semester, with Alyson noting, “[Y]ou get to see the writing differences in the plots versus, like, an argumentative essay.” Interestingly, at the time of her previous written materials, she noted that “the analysis of screenwork [...] didn’t help [her].” Andrea described her experiences regarding watching *Aladdin* and trusting that things would come together in time:

I was like, I can kind of see where he's going with this, but I'll wait till class when we discuss it. And so, when we actually did discuss it and, like, we synthesized this narrative screenplay with argumentative essay structure, it really clicked for me. So I think it was helpful, like, very helpful and it helped me kind of realize that there are, like, many connections between movies and argumentative essays.

Dawn pointed out that screenplay structure and argumentative essays are very “similar and I think it's more effective and it's easier to connect to. Also, like, it's not so, like, robotic I guess, like, it's kind of like it has, like, emotion.” She went on to say, “[W]hen I was, like, writing my essay and I felt like it was kind of in a similar, like, format I guess, and that was very beneficial. [...] I just had this little, like, light bulb moment every time I would, like, kind of add [a new element].”

Several students took it upon themselves to bring other storytelling connections into their process, beyond the breadcrumb, counterargument as villain, and introduction/conclusion connections I brought into the classroom. Dawn once again underscored the many connections she made, stating, “[F]or, like, a movie for example, like, I thought of, like, the exposition and then, like, you have your rising action and then [...] your climax, and then your, like, falling... I felt like it was very similar.” Robin likened her essay to a storyline, saying, “You really focus on the storyline when you're watching something, so I think that can be beneficial to be, like, tell the story, like, you're trying to make this make sense to your readers, no matter who your readers are. So I think that can be beneficial.” Robin also talked a great deal about exposition and backstory in her essay about learning differences, though she did not use the words specifically:

“[T]here's so much breakdown and I kind of felt like that for [my essay], like, because I was, like, let's talk about learning differences and for me learning differences, I could talk

to anybody about them all day. I understand what's going on, but I realize, like, I have people coming up to me being like, 'Can you take a medication that makes you all better?' And I'm like, 'Unfortunately, they don't have medication for my spelling.' So I realize there's people, 'Oh, do you just see the letters backwards?' So people don't always understand. So, I was like, well, if I'm gonna argue about that I should break that down. So I felt like my story arc happened there where that there was a lot of setup and then it went into the argument, almost how there was all this setup and then Aladdin, like, went into the kingdom as a prince and that's when it kind of got like crazy and I feel like that's when I was, like, then arguing."

Brady compared his essay writing to increasing drama, especially in the climax, stating, "The whole buildup process to like the climax of the movie [...] just adds, like, I mean I don't want to say drama, but I mean, if we're talking about narratives, it adds a little bit of drama to it," and concluding, "I feel like I can still use the aspects of your structure to [...] build drama. And then keep just keep the reader intrigued in my paper. As opposed to just here's black words on white paper and I'm reading them." And finally one student, Pierre, made explicit connections between revising his writing and the disciplines of filmmaking and film editing, saying, "When I was doing revisions going back and finding, like, better sources, and after the peer reviews, like, incorporating some of the feedback my partners gave me, it felt like as if a filmmaker, or someone were like, going through, cut scenes and changing things and changing the narrative."

Screenwriting Elements

This section moves directly into what students got out of the way argumentative essays were presented in our class. It is comprised of three distinct subcategories: Breadcrumbs, Counterarguments, and Introduction/Conclusion. When students mentioned any of these three

specific connection points that were explicitly discussed in class, I included said mention. Counterarguments were mentioned by far the most times at nearly double the combined total of the other two subcategories (Figure 10).

Breadcrumbs

This subcategory includes instances when respondents mentioned breadcrumbs as we discussed the concept in class. As a refresher, breadcrumbs primarily connect to the introductions of argumentative essays, and act as seeds or connection points to elements of the argument that will come later in the body or conclusion of the text.

Pierre connected the breadcrumbs in his essay to story exposition, saying that he had previously been instructed to introduce context “like a hook [...] And that’s, like, almost exactly like an exposition in a book or a movie setting the mood and the scene, the settings, introducing the characters. Just, like, giving a preview of what the paper would be about. Breadcrumbs. Yes.” Though in her written responses, Andrea noted uncertainty with implementing breadcrumbs, here she underscored the usefulness of this idea, stating, “[I]t helped me kind of realize that there are, like, many connections between movies and argumentative essays like the breadcrumbs, how Aladdin like did the trick with the apple on his shoulder to give it to Jasmine and just like how we should intertwine little breadcrumbs to kind of back up our point and make it stronger later on.” She went on to confirm, “I really do think that like leaving in tiny little things that I can repeat just to kind of ingrain them in my audience's brain, instead of bringing them up once would be helpful.” Brady found breadcrumbs to be a generally useful framework, saying, “[W]hen we talked about in the intro, how you leave breadcrumbs to your rebuttal, that is something I'd never been taught before. So when you told us to do that, I was like okay, like, I kind of understand what I'm doing here.” Danny, whose written responses identified

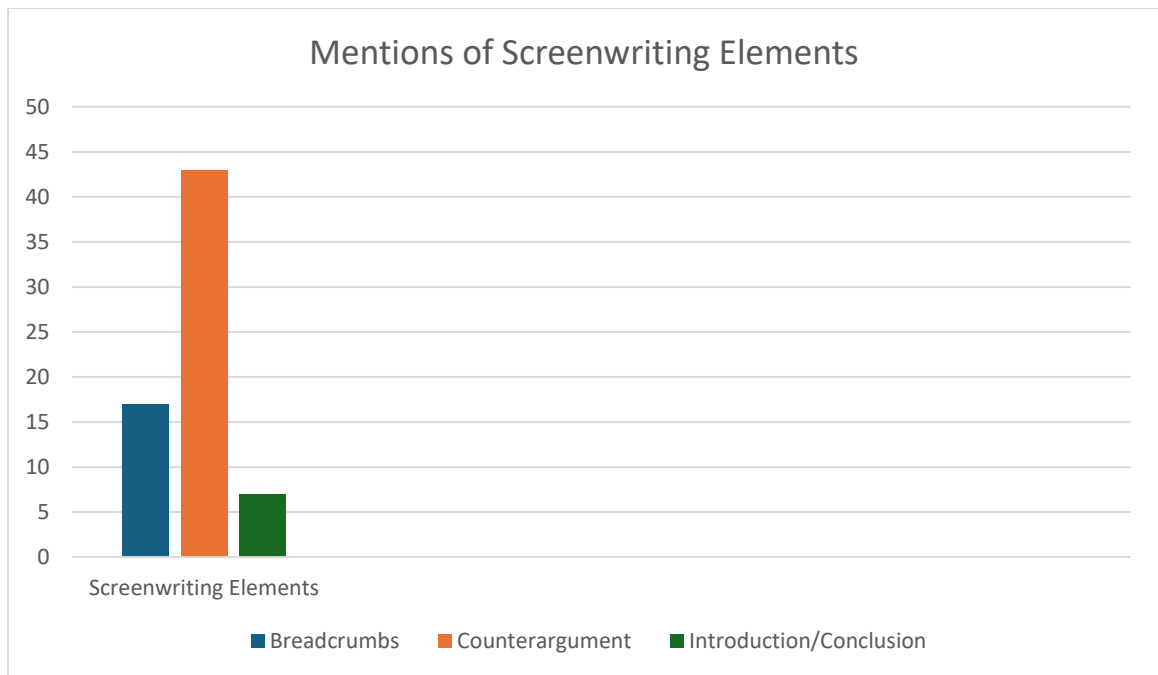


Figure 10: Mentions of Screenwriting Elements

breadcrumbs as the biggest shift in his writing perspective, identified clear changes in his perception of the quality of his writing, noting, “[T]he breadcrumbs did change my way of, like, looking how to write. [...] It made it seem like a more complete essay when I was done because everything seemed more connected doing it in that form compared to, like, my prior essays that I’ve done that were argumentative.”

George found the breadcrumbs approach to be more complicating, noting that it “[made] it more difficult” for him. “It’s just, like, because I have to really think on how, like, how you explain it. Like the breadcrumbs that I’m gonna leave and, like, I didn’t, because when I took classes before, it was like in your thesis, you’re not supposed to [say], ‘I’m gonna talk about this then this.’” Despite this tension between how he had been taught and this new perspective, George did also refer to likely transfer, saying that he would probably bring this approach with him going forward, saying, “I think I’ll use the breadcrumbs because it’s, like, well, obviously you have to get the attention of the reader and like the breadcrumbs do that. Like, in a nice way. I guess.” Despite Lyle’s insistence that he “really [liked] the breadcrumbs analogy,” he also acknowledged he “wasn’t great with the breadcrumbs thing.” He went on, “I wasn’t great at, like, being, like, subtle or coy and, like, trying to, like, plant seeds or anything. But I remember really trying to, like, constantly go back to my introduction and, like, maybe put, like, a sentence or a couple words that, like, allude to later on.”

Introduction/Conclusion

This subcategory contains decidedly fewer mentions than the other two, though the consensus does appear to be largely positive for those who brought it up. As a refresher, the concept here stems from my quick realization that many incoming freshmen have been explicitly instructed to use their essay conclusions to simply restate their thesis statements and reiterate

their introductions. I believe that conclusions can and ought to be more productive, and so the way I taught this in the classroom was to suggest that it would be decidedly disappointing and unsatisfying if a movie's last twenty minutes was just its first twenty minutes all over again. Instead, I suggested, a conclusion should bring the text to a close, referencing what has come before, but also showing what the journey has all been about. Drawing on Blake Snyder's framing of a movie's opening image and closing image referencing each other but not repeating each other, I hoped to encourage my students to connect their conclusions to their introductions, but also to let their conclusions serve a purpose of their own, to provide an ending that is both surprising and inevitable.

When asked whether she would be likely to use any elements of this narrative approach when writing future argumentative essays, Antonia responded, "Oh, yeah, for sure. Definitely [...] the introduction and conclusion thing. [...] I'm gonna be using that same perspective again for the intro/conclusion, I really like that. That definitely, like, changed the way I thought about writing those." Leann had a significant shift in perspective regarding this element. She had earlier written that this approach prevented her introduction and conclusion from being "mirror image[s]," and here she expanded on that observation, stating, "[F]or my conclusion, it's always been, like, just the introduction paragraph restated. So, like, seeing it as, like, a conclusion in a narrative sense – the ending of a movie – that helped me in, like, you know, making it not be an exact copy of the introduction."

George, who struggled with the breadcrumbs concept, also found some difficulty with the introduction/conclusion connection: "[T]he, like, the ending being, like, recalling the beginning? I don't really know how to do that without repeating myself. So that was a little bit more difficult for me." Leann suggested that she had the opposite experience, and that this framework helped

her to reduce her writing's repetitiveness, saying, "[F]or the conclusion it just gives it, like, a new element where you're like, 'Okay yeah' rather than just being like, 'You just said that,'" seeming to suggest that this perspective allowed her to contribute something new to her argument at the end instead of just reiterating what she had already established in her introduction.

Counterargument

This subcategory had significantly more mentions than the other two, as well as several individual codes within it. For instance, Counterargument as Villain, Superficial Counterargument, and Strong Counterargument all feature within this subcategory.

Alyson suggested that she was likely to use the counterargument framework in her future writings, whereas the others – breadcrumbs and the introduction/conclusion connection – she was less likely to continue using. When asked about this, she replied, "[W]hen you're making an argument for an argumentative essay or just, like, in general, you don't really like to acknowledge the other side. Like, you don't want to be, like, they do have good points because you don't want your audience to think that you're agreeing with [the counterargument]." She went on to clarify that though she had historically had concerns about making her counterargument too effective, "[t]hinking of the counter argument as a villain as you taught us is a good way of kind of shaping how you want your counter argument to sound." Damon, who in his written responses identified the counterargument-as-villain notion as "the most important" element of this approach, observed here, "[W]hen you described it as like a villain, I was, like, okay, that makes more sense because you don't want your villain to just like give up in the beginning of the movie. Like you want it to be like a worthy opponent." George, who struggled with the breadcrumbs idea as well as the introduction/conclusion connection, really took to the counterargument-as-villain framework: "Thinking as the counterargument as the villain? I think

that really helped [...] because before I would just, ‘This is the counter but I'm not gonna counter the counter right now.’ So it's like, ‘Here's my good points and then here's why they're wrong,’ and I don't clarify like how we can work on that, how that can be fixed.” Lyle embraced this framework as an extended metaphor which allowed him to enjoy the writing process even more:

“[M]aking the counterargument like a villain that, like, your argument has to conquer, it makes it fun and, like, so much more investing as a writer to, like, try to get your point across. It makes it feel like you actually have a purpose other than you're just, like, talking to a wall or something. Like, you're constantly fighting back against, like, this hypothetical guy, I guess, like arguing against you which made it more meaningful.”

Perry realized that the counterargument could have more of a presence in his arguments, and that allowing this made a sense that he hadn't previously understood “because the bad guy or the villain in every movie, he's gonna be around for the entire movie, maybe get his own scene. So I think looking there you can definitely see a relation.” Similarly, Leann underscored that a strong counterargument “makes [her] argument stronger.” Pierre noted that he plans to use this framing in the future, noting, “When we talked about, like, what makes a villain a good villain, you know, it being, like, big and bad but also, you know, like, being able to be defeated and whatnot. I'll definitely use that [...] So I feel like counterarguments are, like, a great contribution to an argumentative essay or, like, a research paper.” He went on to connect this approach to his writing experience, saying, “[T]he comparison of the counterargument to the villain, that was very helpful. I think that helped me write my counterargument because, like, when I, in the process of writing my APP, it was, I don't know, I felt like it just flowed.”

Several respondents pointed out a previously superficial idea of counterarguments, and how this framing helped them to develop a deeper understanding of their importance. Andrea, for

instance, noted that in other English classes, “[t]hey said, like, in order to get the A or get the points you need to, like, bring up a counterargument. So I would literally in one sentence, ‘Although some people may think blah, this is why this is the right answer,’ and that would be it. Like, I would never bring up the counterargument again.” But she said that now that thinking about her counterarguments as villains “is really something that [she] should carry through [to future writings].” She went on to state that “it really does make [her] stance stronger in the end and come out like the bigger hero.” Similarly, Damon believes that he “definitely will continue to have, like, stronger counterarguments than [he] did.” He said that he used to include single-sentence counterarguments “and it was just kind of there because a teacher told [him] to have a counterargument.” Perry had several revelations regarding counterarguments, claiming that he never considered including a search for counterarguments as part of his research, but clarifying that now he understands that “you can create that stronger counterargument, which makes your opinion and argument look almost more validated. So I think in that sense it makes you look a little more credible.”

Transfer

The theme of Transfer concerns itself with whether or not respondents believe they will be able to use the tools and perspectives that we discussed in our class to help with their future writing experiences. While the majority of individual codes within this category are simply “transfer” itself, other codes include “limited transfer” and “screenplay metaphor limited,” which makes this theme an ideal one to lead into the next two themes, which are Negative Outcomes and Positive Outcomes.

Brady noted the usefulness of the screenwriting framework, saying, “[E]ven if I’m not writing an argumentative essay, if I’m just writing, I don’t know, for example, just, like, almost,

like, a statement piece, like, a summary, right? I feel like I can still use the aspects of your structure.” Damon reiterated what he wrote in his written materials about this approach helping to make his counterarguments more complex, maintaining that he “definitely will continue to have, like, stronger counterarguments than [he] did.” Though Danny had previously suggested that this approach would only be useful in similar argumentative essay contexts, when asked here if he will use any of these ideas going forward, he replied, “A hundred percent. Like, with the, like, the breadcrumbs? Sort of, like, making it more into, like, a plot to get to your final point compared to just final point immediately.” Dawn, who earlier pointed out the benefits of this approach allowing her to “zoom out to see the big picture,” was confident that she “will use that approach in the future just because it's a lot easier than [her] just out here trying to, like, come up with something.” Leann earlier noted that she would use this approach to strengthen her conclusions, and here she expanded on that, insisting that she will definitely bring these concepts with her, “like the counter argument, like, making it strong so I can beat it and then the conclusion I think I'll use that for any kind of essay, not even just argumentative.” Though Lyle originally indicated that, while he liked this approach he also had a narrow perspective regarding future applicability, in our interview he said simply, “I really enjoyed that and will take that with me for sure [...] For every other essay I write, I will. It was really cool and I will take that with me for sure [...] It's a nice throughline of progression for an essay.” Perry previously wrote that this was transferable only to “papers that are similar in structure,” but here he determined that “it's more free-flowing than, like, a traditional essay or paper. Like, you can kind of take it wherever you want to go and I do like that. So using that in more argumentative essays, I'll definitely be doing that.” Pierce agreed that this approach creates a flow, while also comparing this technique to previous writing instruction: “When I was originally writing my essay I would

look back on notes that I had from back in high school and I definitely think I like this structure a bit more. So I'll be using this instead. [...] The structure of it I feel like it just flowed better.”

Pierre previously noted that he would use this approach in “another argumentative essay,” and he doubled down on that here noting that he is confident that “in the future, whenever [he writes] a paper, particularly from an argumentative standpoint [he] can, like, incorporate the narrative approach.” But he expanded in our interview, going on to say about the counterargument-as-villain concept, “I’ll definitely use that. [...] The skills that it takes to do that, I feel like they can definitely be used in, like, so many forms of writing.” And Andrea reiterated that her primary thoughts are about her 102 class that she will take after our semester, stating, “I definitely want to transition over like the different tools that I learned from this year from the APP unit and, like, this screenplay structure.”

Some interviewees felt that though transfer was likely, it was also limited. Brady, for instance, suggested that “if it comes up that [he does] have to write an argumentative essay, probably. [He does] like the structure better than the old one [he’s] used. [He doesn’t] foresee [himself] writing a lot of argumentative essays in the future, but if one were to come up, yeah,” despite the fact that in his written materials he suggested a more wide-ranging applicability. George said, “I think I’ll use the breadcrumbs because it’s, like, well, obviously you have to get the attention of the reader and, like, the breadcrumbs do that. Like, in a nice way, I guess. But, I mean, the way that thesis was structured, I don’t think I’ll use that.” Perry also saw limitations to the applicability of this framework, saying, “I don’t think in terms of like giving advice, I don’t think you can really use this sort of structure. But then if you’re writing a fiction book, I think you can definitely use this structure more often than not.” Though Robin previously felt that she would “use this narrative when writing future assignments,” here she was more on the fence

regarding a broad usefulness, suggesting, “I think the structure and the, like, breakdown is a really good thing to use when writing any kind of paper [...] but I don't know if necessarily for me it was the, ‘Oh my goodness this is, like, how screenplay works, like, let's implement that right into my argumentative essay.’” And finally, Michael, who previously determined that this structure “can be applied to pretty much any form of persuasive writing,” here suspects he will use the framing of a sales pitch when writing in the future, noting, “The screenplay thing might not play as big of a part as the sales thing to me, although it is a good way to visualize.”

Negative Outcomes

This theme and the next are largely self-explanatory. I have broken Negative Outcomes into two smaller categories, namely “Lost/Confused” and “Other Negatives.” This entire section is comprised of occurrences of respondents identifying either moments that did not resonate with them during class instruction, the writing process, or reflecting on the experience after the fact. The theme of Negative Outcomes includes twenty-three instances of nine codes, twenty of which are found in “Lost/Confused,” and three of which are in “Other Negatives.”

George experienced numerous difficulties making connections between the way we covered argumentative essays in our class and actually putting those ideas into practice. Some of these tensions were the result of trying to reconcile prior writing instruction with this new approach. For instance, with regard to trying to apply a narrative structure to his argument, he said, “I think most of the time I wanted to, like, end on my strongest point, but I just didn't really know what to do because I just used to, like, just put it out there and not really think about how it would flow or like anything like that.” He went on to say that it was “harder for [him] to connect” the screenplay structure with his argumentative writing, “because I have to really think on how you explain it. [...] [B]ecause when I took classes before, it was, like, in your thesis,

you're not supposed to name them, 'I'm gonna talk about this then this.' And this is, like, okay well that what you said kind of goes against what I've learned before.” George expressed some difficulty with understanding how to implement some elements, noting, “[T]he ending being, like, recalling the beginning, I don't really know how to do that without repeating myself. So that was a little bit more difficult for me.” He continued, “But in the end I think since I didn't really know how to, like, call back to the beginning without repeating myself – because in my essay I do think I repeated myself because I kind of used a similar sentence, you know.” He did ultimately acknowledge that the whole approach was not all negative, saying, “[E]ven though it's a little bit more difficult for me, it's, like, in the end it'll make the essay flow better and, like, nicer to read.”

Other students expressed confusion as well, like Dawn who said that though this framework was beneficial, “at first when it was first presented, I'm going to be honest, I was, like, lost. I was, like, hold on because I'm not a huge, like, movie person.” But she went on to note that this confusion was quickly resolved, saying, “[A]nything, first glance, is gonna be a little like, 'Whoa.' But then I, like, went through, I was able to like understand really how that, like, translated into my essay and then, like, I would say that's a huge, like, beneficial part of it.” Dawn identified that some of her early confusions stemmed from earlier instruction she had received, saying, “[B]ecause that was very, like, different to me. Like, I never really had, like, a new idea presented in English.” Ultimately she pointed out the potential for future students to not put in the work to make the connections that she eventually made, suggesting, “So you do have to dive a little deep to connect the two. I guess that would be my thing. If somebody isn't gonna take the time to, like, go in and, like, find how they come up, they're just kind of gonna have it left, like, in the air.”

Leann made what became a familiar point, which is that the newness of this approach caused some early confusion, saying, “I think I might have been confused about the breadcrumbs. [...] [T]hat's something I've never done before.” She went on to suggest that I could have delved deeper into explicit teachings of the screenplay structures themselves: “I think I kind of just got a little confused. And that aspect when you just said, ‘Watch the movie and read this,’ and then did the freewrite? But other than that, I think it was really pretty easy to understand.” Perry felt a similar confusion at first, claiming, “[A]t first it was a little confusing because I was like, ‘How could you connect, like, narrative screenwriting to an essay that's about like research and whatnot?’” He also recognized a similar understanding over time, noting that “after really, like going over it in class, after the first couple of classes, I started to kind of, like, understand why. Because there's so many correlations.”

Robin had a more unique experience in that she admitted to having forgotten about the screenplay framework while writing her essay. She said that though a narrative lens was useful, “I don't know if the screenplay narrative was as helpful. I don't think I thought a lot about it in writing my actual essay.” She noted that when she responded to this assignment’s self-reflection questions and saw questions about her experience with the screenplay structure, “I was like, ‘What are we talking about?’ [...] So, I, like, went back into our slides and I read these papers and I was like, ‘Oh yeah, like, I can see how that could be beneficial,’ but it wasn't at the forefront of my mind.”

Positive Outcomes

Much like the previous theme, Positive Outcomes concerns itself with moments when interviewees identified that they had a good interaction either with the instruction of this unit or with their writing process. Of course the framing of “positive” (and the previous section’s framing of “negative”) is subjective. I have broken this theme of 103 unique instances of codes into six subcategories. They are: “Effective,” “Growth,” “Excitement,” “Engagement,” “Personal Expression,” and “Other Positives.”

Dawn noted about this framework: “It definitely helped especially when writing and, like, the examples you provided were very helpful. [Screenplay structure and argumentative essay structure are] very, like similar and I think it’s more effective and it’s easier to connect.” Brady, who previously made clear that he had never thought of connecting argumentative essays to movies, underscored that for him, this framework “was very beneficial.” He went on to say, “I really like the way you put the narrative structure into an argumentative essay because I can envision in my head the way a movie works. And then I could have, I just kind of filled in my information – what I was actually arguing – into that structure.” He also made a direct connection to his own penchant for outlines, saying

“[F]or me, the hardest part about English is, like, putting a structure to the essays that I write. It's kind of like I don't know really where to start until I start and then I just kind of go from there. So I'm a big outline person when it comes to writing essays and such activities, I guess. So whenever, like, you formatted it like a narrative it kind of gave me that outline that I was, like, okay I can start here and then this goes here and that goes there and that's where everything goes. So that's why it was good for me.”

Pierce similarly felt the usefulness of having a structure in place, saying, “I actually think it was pretty beneficial because it kind of gave a little bit of a more structured approach but also let me

kind of choose where I wanted to go with it.” Damon, who had previously suggested a connection between his narrative-focused essay and this approach, noted that, for him, “it’s beneficial [and] it definitely helped [him], like, make [his] counterargument, like, stronger and realize that that’s not a bad thing in your essay.” Danny pointed out that one of the benefits of this framework is that it makes his writing more human, saying, “[W]hen I, like, read through the paper, I feel like it includes like more of what I’m writing it, not like someone, like, a robot that’s just following the rubric. Like, it just makes it connected and it makes it sound like it’s not written by a robot. That’s what I’d say is beneficial about it.” Robin appreciated the story element of this approach, suggesting, “[W]hen you talk about it in terms of a screenplay, you really see the storyline because you really focus on the storyline when you’re watching something, so I think that can be beneficial to, like, tell the story, like you’re trying to make this make sense to your readers.”

Several students identified that this approach provided growth for them as writers, whether that was by broadening their understandings, making the writing process easier, or increasing their understanding in general. Antonia mentioned that she “kind of liked having that different view set on, like, what needs to be in [her introduction, thesis statement, and conclusion]. So [she] definitely liked it better.” Dawn said, “it was just easier to, like, see the screenplay structure and then my essay, Like, every time I would write a new like paragraph [...] I just had this little like light bulb moment every time I would like kind of add [an element].” Pierre identified shifts in his attitudes toward writing, noting, “[T]he narrative approach, it really helps a lot and it made it interesting and somewhat fun. [I]t just flowed. It just, like, came out really well. Just the thoughts came to paper easily.” Alyson focused on the comfort that she felt writing with this approach when she said, “[I]t really helped me feel more comfortable with

writing an argumentative essay as well as just going forward. [...] I got more confidence through this assignment.”

Several respondents identified that they gained new knowledge or perspectives that they appreciate, such as Alyson who noted her “newfound knowledge of how to write the counterargument and how to see the counterargument.” Andrea, who had previously identified discoveries and connections she had made between movies and essays, noted the enjoyment she found from this approach and expressed her hope that she will be able to carry that with her into her English 102 class: “I want to be more creative and not just like think of everything as, like, black and white and, like, do this because this is what you're asked of. But, like, I want to branch it out more and, like, incorporate different perspectives on how to, like, write an essay because I think it'd be more fun that way.”

Andrea also noted the new outlook she gained through our semester when she said, “So using the narrative screenplay structure was really, honestly, like, an interesting approach and it gave me, like, a different perspective on essays when you had us watch *Aladdin*.” Danny also identified a new perspective with regard to the breadcrumbs idea, saying, “[T]hat did change my way of like looking at how to write it and I'd say, like, it made it seem like a more complete essay when I was done because everything seemed more connected doing it in that form compared to, like, my prior essays that I've done.” Dawn gained an extensive new perspective on what argumentative writing could be and emphasized the flow that she mentioned in her written response:

“So, once I got like a good grasp and I started, like, writing, it was almost like I could kind of match up, like, the elements of a screenplay like, ‘Oh, this is where your, like, introduction would be.’ Or like, ‘This is where, like, if X character, if you were to put,

like, people...' [...] Like, I felt like there were just certain elements that, like, would connect to a story and just how it would, like, how the essay just kind of flowed."

Leann made clear that "with the villain, it really changed how [she] saw it, so it's really just impactful to [her]." Though he did not use the phrase, Lyle responded well to the Hegelian dialect, noting, "I love, like it goes from thesis to antithesis to synthesis. It's a nice throughline of progression for an essay. It just makes it more narratively consistent, which I really love. And I will take that [into the future]." Perry marked a distinction between his previous way of thinking about essays and his current way: "Before your class, I just thought it was just another essay, another paper to write, but when I figured out, like, the narrative, like, structure, it definitely became, like, more clear to me, like, seeing it through that way. And it actually helped me out a lot more." Pierre summed up his thoughts with, "[T]he new approach was, I don't know, it was just, like, eye-opening. It was very captivating."

Many respondents focused on their enjoyment and excitement that they experienced using this approach. Dawn compared the freedom that came with this approach to the ways she used to understand the argumentative genre, saying, "It was kind of more like fun in a sense. Like, not lighter because like I still took it very seriously [...] but, you know, it was kind of like a new approach. It wasn't so, like, nitty-gritty." This approach for Lyle "makes it fun and, like, so much more investing as a writer to, like, even, like, try to get your point across. It makes it feel like you actually have a purpose other than you're just, like, talking to a wall or something." Robin connected her love of listening to audiobooks to her argumentative writing: "I really like stories. That's my one thing, like, I'm a huge auditorial listener. And so I will listen to books for hours on end. [...] So the idea of looking at a paper as a story just seems almost a lot more fun in my mind. [...] I feel like it seems a little more approachable."

Multiple respondents identified that the screenplay-as-argumentative-essay approach was interesting to them, with Andrea saying that “using the narrative, screenplay structure was really honestly, like, an interesting approach and it gave [her], like, a different perspective on essays.” Michael, who previously observed that this perspective made essay writing more “approachable” for him, noted, “I would say it's beneficial. I'd never ever thought about anything like the structure before. It just to me was always, like, you know, ‘This is the formula stick to it,’ right? The script thing was interesting.” He went on to connect his willingness to try this new approach to my own excitement about teaching it, saying, “I think the, like, the screenplay, it fits it very well and because you're very into it it's very easy to apply because you're so excited about it that it's, you know, much more interesting to listen to that.”

With regard to personal expression, Danny made clear that he intends to use the breadcrumbs idea going forward because “making it more into, like, a plot to get to your final point compared to just final point immediately [means] you show yourself more.” He went on to praise the genre and the approach by saying that the APP assignment done this way “allowed for us to, like, add, like, our own personal, like, narrative to it.” Dawn, too, pointed out the personal touches she was able to contribute using this framework, saying, “I actually learned something which was really nice for once. [...] Like, ‘Oh look, I have the writing style and like I can write, like, certain ways.’ So yeah. [...] Also, like, it's not so, like, robotic, I guess.”

Reader Experience

Much like in the previous Results chapter, as I conducted my interviews and began coding, I was surprised to notice the emergence of this code, Reader Experience. Several

interviewees commented on various ways that they noticed this screenplay approach helped them to think more intently about the eventual audience of their texts.

Andrea discussed her prior creative writing history, detailing an assignment from high school which required her to write a short story “and they made us, like, really dive into imagery [...] because they wanted to, like, make the audience feel like they’re living through us.” Though she was not too keen on creative writing, she noted about breadcrumbs, “I really do think that, like, leaving in tiny little things that I can repeat just to kind of ingrain them in my audience's brain, instead of bringing them up once, would be helpful.” When asked if he would be likely to continue any of these approaches going forward, Brady answered, “The whole buildup process to, like, the climax of the movie, which is kind of like the refuting side of it. I feel like it intrigues a reader to keep reading.” He went on to observe that the breadcrumbs technique “[keeps] the reader intrigued in [his] paper. As opposed to just, ‘Here's black words on white paper and I'm reading them.’” Damon identified a meta quality to his essay, which was about ludonarrative dissonance. I was not already familiar with ludonarrative dissonance, and so in anticipation that some of my readers also may not be, I’ll quickly note that the term combines ludology – game studies – and narrative. Ludonarrative dissonance, then, is the phenomenon that occurs when the gameplay of a game runs counter to the narrative of that game. Damon connected his essay’s topic to his intended audience, noting, “[I]t kind of makes the reader, like, have a dissonance where they, like, ‘What do I actually believe in this argument?’ Like, they're kind of rethinking what they previously thought from the beginning of the essay” Danny noted that thinking of his argument as a plot “makes it more enjoyable to read.” Though George often struggled to accomplish what he wanted to with this approach, he nevertheless acknowledged that it enhanced the likely reader experience: “I think it's beneficial, like, for the reader because

then it flows more naturally and they don't, like, it's not like this then a big stop, and then they read something else and then stop.” He went on to underscore, “[I]t’s better for the reader and even though it's a little bit more difficult for me, it's, like, in the end it'll make the essay flow better and, like, nicer to read, instead of, like I said, just a block, then a block. [...] [Y]ou have to get the attention of the reader and like the bread crumbs do that.” Lyle echoed that breadcrumbs “[make] it more fun for the reader.” Michael observed that, to his mind, he’s “sure that it’s dull to read [essays] that don’t follow [a narrative structure] at all.” Perry felt confident that “you can definitely use this structure to make it more engaging for your readers.” Pierce, who previously underscored the importance of avoiding confusion in his audience, echoed that sentiment here by saying that a strong counterargument and making sure not to confuse one’s readers “are, like, the two most important factors when writing this essay just because without either of them, it really isn't that good of an essay.” And finally Robin, who previously underscored the importance of clarity for her audience, noted, “I think that can be beneficial to, like, tell the story. Like, you're trying to make this make sense to your readers, no matter who your readers are.”

Prescriptive

Similar to the previous section, Prescriptive is also a theme that emerged while I was coding and its frequency was significant to me. Many participants identified experiences which eventually came to make up the Prescriptive code as they talked about previous writing experiences in school or as a counterpoint to the ways they felt about writing argumentative essays in our class.

Antonia discussed how her high school English classes mandated that she include counterarguments in very particular ways, saying, “So I've always had, like, teachers either want to have, like, that one big paragraph and then I had – I think it was my junior year – like, English

teacher, who was, like, ‘That is incorrect. You need to do it, like, all throughout, not have [just a single] paragraph.’” She went on to detail that the way she used to think about essays was more about the construction than about the content: “[U]sually it's just, like, gather all the facts, kind of present it, find something that could go against it, and then argue against that, and then you conclude it.” By contrast, she noted that she appreciated writing her counterargument in our class’s argumentative essay because it gave her more flexibility to do things her own way, observing, “Again, the two ways that I learned it in high school were, like, ‘Oh no, one big paragraph,’ then the other was, like, all of it. So I kind of saw [this new approach] as more of a combining it, per se, and, like, sprinkling it in and then you have, like, that one, like, super strong one. Yeah, like you would, like, in a movie.” Brady also noted a previous rigid structural expectation: “So you have your intro and then you have a couple body paragraphs and then you have your rebuttal paragraph and then you have your conclusion. So that's kind of how our structure was formulated, that it had to be like that or it was wrong.” He went on to say that he enjoyed the assignment in our class “because it gave [him] kind of a structure to use, instead of linear.” Damon named the five-paragraph essay explicitly saying that for his previous argumentative essays, “I usually thought of like the five-paragraphs structure. So just, like, thesis, and then you had your body paragraphs and a conclusion. And then yeah, just like this, the pretty generic structure of a body paragraph. [...] Like, it was pretty basic.” He went on to say that he would use our class’s counterargument perspective going forward “because before I, like, did counterarguments was, like, a one sentence, like, a line and then I'd be like, ‘This is wrong because blank,’ and it was kind of just there because a teacher told me to have a counterargument.” Michael also talked about the restrictions he felt due to the five-paragraph essay when he said, “So most of my actual academic writing [was] very cut and dry, five-

paragraph style essays, that kind of stuff. And it was a formula that had to be followed, too. There was no freedom, like, sort of we had in this class, so that was different.” He went on to underscore that his understanding was to “never veer from that or anything different [because the teacher would] dock your grade if you didn't agree with them [so] I was not invested in the slightest.” Danny pointed out that he would determine the content of his previous essays solely in terms of the rubric: “I wanted to hit every single aspect on the rubric. So I'd go down the list, make sure I did that. If I felt like I was missing something, go back and add it. That was pretty much my process. [...] My thought process for it was just hit every aspect on the rubric.” Dawn voiced her appreciation for writing in this new way because it allowed her to make authorial choices “[i]nstead of just having, like, ‘Here’s the facts, and here’s more facts.’” Pierre noted, “Before our class, [...] it's really just been a set format for it, or what I've been taught. You know, just, like, the standard intro body paragraphs then countering them and, you know, there's, like, a standard thing.”

Specific Movie Connections/Alternative Narrative Frameworks

I am combining these two themes because they both involve instances when respondents essentially bought into the premise of argumentative essay writing being aided by narrative structure, and they either fully endorsed the specifics of our class’s presentation, or they identified potential alternative specifics that still aligned with the overall framework within which we were operating.

To begin with, multiple participants noted the connection they felt to the movie *Aladdin*, which I assigned them to watch before we started talking explicitly about screenplay structure. Alyson underscored the usefulness of this particular title, even if her written responses suggested that she mostly obtained a new perspective on movies through this unit. She said, “I did really

enjoy using *Aladdin* as the example. I felt like it was a perfect movie to use. Not only is it a very fun movie to watch, but it fit the narrative style that you were teaching us about very well. So I feel like choosing *Aladdin* was a really good choice.” Though Andrea went into depth in her written comments about how *Aladdin* helped her to synthesize the two structures, here she simply commented that *Aladdin* gave her a “different perspective on essays.” Lyle noted the enjoyment that came with watching this movie: “I actually really love this unit. I thought it was so fun, like, not just watching *Aladdin* obviously but, like, getting to, like, take that story and, like, equate it to, like, any other essay that we'd write.” Robin underscored the significance of nostalgic value, saying, “I genuinely enjoyed that movie, and watching it and being able to come back and see the story arc made a lot of sense, especially taking a movie that probably a lot of us watch as kids.” She went on to make direct connections between the breakdown of exposition in *Aladdin* and her own choices to contextualize her topic for her text’s audience:

“Like, even if you take the movie *Aladdin*, for example, like, there's a lot of breakdown: we see him in the city, we see Jafar at the cave at the very beginning, then we see Aladdin in the city and he lives this really poor life and then we see him, like, kind of get introduced to the castle and then he gets kicked out. He goes to the desert. You, like, there's so much breakdown and I kind of felt like that for [my essay], like, because I was, like, ‘Oh, like let's talk about learning differences.’ [...] So, I was like, ‘Well, if I'm gonna argue about that I should break that down.’”

Antonia was already excited about getting to watch a movie, and when she eventually watched this one in particular, she found *Aladdin* to be useful when trying to understand the connections between introductions and conclusions, saying, “I really like the whole, like, especially when we, like, connected it to, like, *Aladdin* when it was talking about, like, the beginning is, like, as it is,

like, in this time. And then, like, the conclusion is different in the way that it's, like, all this has happened and then this is where they are now.” She went on to note the appropriateness of *Aladdin* in particular to highlight the screenplay structures that our class discussed, underscoring, “I like that you chose *Aladdin* for the movie. Like, I thought that was a really good one because it's very, like, cut and dry. Like, this is where this happens, this is where this happens, and here's the end. I really like that there wasn't any, like, confusion there.” Michael agreed, “I like the lecture you gave at the screen thing. I think *Aladdin* played really well.”

Some students mentioned that they made connections between argumentative essays and other movies. Perry, for instance, mentioned *The Avengers* as a way to identify his initial confusion and eventual understanding, saying, “I was like, ‘How could this relate like in any way?’ Like, how could *The Avengers* relate to me writing about, you know, football and the health of that, right? [...] I was clueless after the first class and I caught on after the next couple of classes. So if I can catch on then I think anybody else can.” Michael, who in his written content pointed out that this approach helped him with his “rising action climax and falling action,” made several connections to the structure of *Django Unchained*, a movie he had watched shortly before beginning to write his argumentative essay about how electric cars are worse for the environment than gas-powered cars. As he tells it, “Okay, the whole second act of that movie, I followed that to a script. Like, we had villain introduced and the whole thing was just a build up to, like, one really, really overkill way of finishing it with my last kind of point. Yeah, so that was my film relation, if you will.” He went on, comparing the hero and villain of the movie to the two major players of his argument: “Obviously, I wanted to paint out, like, Leonardo DiCaprio as my electric cars and then have Jamie Foxx be my gasoline argument if that makes sense.”

While several interviewees noted that the screenplay framework was especially useful as an analogy, many also suggested other potential frameworks. Antonia saw the appropriateness of using movies as a starting point, while also observing that other screen narratives would be worth considering: “I feel like the movies is just, like, the most popular one that, like, most people are acquainted with, including myself. I don't really know that many narrative structures other than, like, movies and TV shows.” Leann also considered the usefulness of TV shows, but ultimately wondered about the practicality, saying, “I think a movie is a pretty good thing because it's short enough to be compared rather than, like, a ten-season TV show, right?” Robin also noted the impracticality of longer-form narratives: “I actually think a movie is probably the best way to go because [...] it has the whole story arc compared to, like, a show. Like a show's not gonna have your whole story arc. And a book is just time consuming too. So I think a movie made the most sense.”

Robin was not the only one to mention books, as Alyson spoke at length about her narrative preferences:

“I'm a big reader. So, like, talking about books is, like, always my favorite thing. So I guess, like, talking about, like, how plot structures work in books... Like, I did like the idea of talking about movies because I do also love movies, but there's just something different when it comes to talking about books. Plus then you get, like, the writing as well. Like, you get to see the writing differences in the plots versus, like, an argumentative essay. So I guess that would have made more sense to me.”

That said, she did ultimately concede that “it's easier to watch a 90-minute movie versus a 300-page book.” Lyle went so far as to actively advocate against books being the tool of analogy,

saying, “I would have really hated actually if you had to go read a book instead of watch *Aladdin*. So no. I think I prefer the movie analogy.”

Other narrative forms that were suggested include plays, Shakespeare plays and, in one case, a sales pitch. Michael observed that “[t]he screenplay thing might not play as big of a part as the sales thing to me. [...] Like, I was just... both my parents are in sales, I was raised around it, it’s how they talked to me, it’s what I talked at home. So that’s a second nature thing now.”

CHAPTER FIVE – DISCUSSION

This thesis set out to answer one primary question: “Can narrative structure in general and screenwriting structure in particular help students to write stronger argumentative essays?” I must acknowledge straight away that I have not answered this question, and that is largely due to the fact that it was the wrong question for me to ask. By including the word “stronger,” I set up a comparison that I simply was not equipped to engage with because I did not have earlier examples of my students’ writings with which to compare, nor did I have earlier semesters’ worth of other students’ writings. There are perhaps ways in which this question could have been more explicitly engaged with. For instance, if I had access to my students’ previous writings, I might have been able to relevantly compare their essay structures and whether or not they were communicating their ideas more effectively by using my method instead of another. Another possibility might have presented itself if I had been teaching for longer than I have been. In such a scenario, I might have been able to look at previous students’ essays – presumably ones that resulted from my instruction that did not include screenplay or narrative frameworks – and I could have compared their argumentative essays to the ones from the semester represented in this report. Unfortunately for this possibility, my thesis is rooted in my first semester of teaching, and I simply do not have the history to allow me to make such comparisons. Another possibility would have been to teach one of my two sessions via this narrative framework approach and the other by a more conventional method so that I could compare each session’s output. Frankly, even if this had occurred to me, I would have chosen against it due to the fact that, as a graduate student who was also teaching for the first time, the idea of teaching two distinct methods, one to each of two class sections, feels overwhelming and unrealistic, as well as unethical. Though I may not have been able to answer whether this narrative approach leads to stronger

argumentative essays, I do believe my findings speak to students' perspectives and experiences with their writing, and that those reportings are meaningful and relevant.

First and foremost, it is clear to me that students at this level do want structure to their writing. Anecdotally speaking, I believe this desire never goes away; it certainly hasn't for me. In the absence of other possibilities, students will likely default to what is familiar and easy, which is often the five-paragraph essay. As Lil Brannon, et al. point out, that model "is one of those school-created 'things' that persist," (16) but I believe it is noteworthy that students at the college freshman level seemingly perceive it as lifeless and dull. Words that came up in my interviews when respondents brought up the five-paragraph essay include "generic," "basic," "cut and dry," "formula," "no freedom," and "not invested." Once again anecdotally speaking, I recall a student talking to me during the semester of focus in this report, and she recalled a high school writing assignment for which she had four talking points that she wanted to present, but she felt restricted from doing so because the five-paragraph format only allowed her three body paragraphs.

As I brought up in Chapter One, I do not believe the five-paragraph essay needs to be discarded. I do, however, believe that many students conduct low road transfer when they use such a structure without putting any meaningful thought into why they are doing what they are doing. I see in my research that participants draw comparisons between the prescriptiveness of what they have been taught and the broadening of understandings that this narrative approach ushers in. When respondents make clear that they see the function of a counterargument to be reinforcing their main argument, or that they now understand that their conclusions can do more than repeat what has already been said, I believe they are really identifying the freedom of making their own authorial and rhetorical choices and decisions, rather than feeling restricted by

an unexamined set of unbreakable rules. And when they identify that they will use this expanded notion of approaches for a multitude of future writing contexts, I see the high road transfer that I believe is important to promote.

My report shows not only that students want a structure to rely on, but also that they want to be able to bring their own voices and creativity into their writing. Marie Foley encourages educators to “develop a repertoire of alternatives to [the five-paragraph essay]” (233). My screenplay-structure-as-argumentative-essay is one such alternative, and it seems to be a largely successful one. That said, there are countless other possibilities to explore. Within just this study, students have suggested books, TV shows, plays, and even sales pitches. Perhaps future research could include a cross-disciplinary approach in which instructors outside of composition are brought into the composition classroom to demonstrate meaningful overlaps between argumentative writing and other areas of focus. I would love, for instance, to have had a screenwriting instructor by my side during this unit to offer insights that were outside of my area of knowledge. This would also underscore for students that concepts within the composition classroom are meaningfully applicable beyond the composition classroom.

While I believe many of the ideas supporting the approach presented here are transferable to future contexts, this study strongly suggests that students are also drawing on previous knowledge bases when considering how to approach their writing. Reiff and Bawarshi point out that students “reported mainly academic genres when asked what genres they drew on to fulfill the [preliminary essay] assignment [meaning] that they may not call on (or may not be aware that they are calling on) potentially useful resources that they associate with other domains” (324). My study suggests not only that students are drawing on creative genres when engaging with academic work, but that they are, in fact, aware that they are doing so. This is evident when

Michael says that he actively analogized the storyline of *Django Unchained* to his own essay or when Robin notes that she regularly thinks about the story behind any text that she writes. That said, there is a contextual difference regarding the soliciting of these pieces of information. Reiff and Bawarshi prompted students to provide the genres they drew on without suggesting first that creative genres would be appropriate. My interviews, of course, were connected to a classroom context in which I had made clear that movie structures had value and were worthy of consideration. Therefore, it is possible and even likely that my respondents were conditioned to think outside of academic genres when considering what structures might be of use to them. Nevertheless, it is clear that students are ready and willing to draw on previous experiences and areas of expertise when approaching their academic writing, but it is less clear how often this happens when they are not directly encouraged or prompted to do so.

To connect that to Perkins and Salomon's *detect, elect, connect* framework of transfer, the instruction in my classes is helping students to detect creative possibilities on which to draw which less explicitly creative language might not inspire. Perkins and Salomon also make clear that the steps are always carried out, "but not always fulfilled in the same way, much as, to make an analogy, one might come to a decision by means of a pro-con list or reviewing how similar decisions worked out previously or a quick intuitive judgment" (Perkins and Salomon 250). When my students like Brady note that they can apply this approach to a wide variety of other writing contexts, the *connection* step is evident. What remains to be known, however, is whether those same students will detect future opportunities to apply this approach, and whether they will elect to do the work of actually seeing those connections through. Looking forward, I wonder what would be revealed by a longitudinal study that tracked students who were presented with my screenplay narrative approach to argumentative essays throughout their college years. Would

students detect, elect, and connect these ideas to a variety of writing contexts as so many claim that they will? Would they be more likely to perform what Fishman and Reiff call low road transfer, opting to apply these ideas only to identical or very similar writing contexts? Or would such a study reveal that there is simply not any transferring happening at all, and students receive each writing context as though it is new?

There is also the concept of negative transfer, which Baird and Dilger describe as a situation in which “[p]rior concepts of writing are not valued. Students are encouraged to abandon that knowledge” (106). I think in particular of my student George, who struggled so much as he tried to reconcile what he had previously been taught with what our class and my instruction were asking him to do. He expressed significant concern about how to draft a conclusion that was not just an echo of what came before in his writing, as well as how to leave breadcrumbs throughout his introduction instead of just mechanically getting information out with the goal of getting to a thesis statement. I know I was asking students to think differently about their writing, and I also believed – and still believe – that my approach can lead to a familiar five-paragraph essay, albeit hopefully one that has had more thought and intentionality put into it. That said, I want to take seriously Baird and Dilger’s warning that “[s]tudent interviews suggest instructors who begin with negative transfer support the harmful tendency of students to see every teachers’ approach to writing as idiosyncratic and unarticulated to disciplinary norms” (119). I see this in the responses of students like George, which seem to suggest that, in fact, my approach was received as yet another teacher making yet more rules that should be followed on this assignment to receive yet another grade and move onto yet another class. Looking forward, I would advise instructors who are interested in using this approach to be very clear about their position regarding the more familiar five-paragraph essay structure. In an

effort to invite more writerly thought and intentionality, I hope that those instructors do not inadvertently confuse students and cause them to reject the very thoughtfulness they are attempting to encourage.

I would also like to take a moment to address an assumption I believe I have been making, which is that students who regularly consume narrative structures also understand that they are regularly consuming narrative structures. While I did not expect that every student would be familiar with the terminology of screenwriting, and while I recognize that I introduced the term “breadcrumbs” in a new and specific context, I realize that I held a belief that students would largely already know narrative structure, even if on an unnamed level. I understand now that this is not necessarily the case, and that I likely caused some unnecessary confusion in my classes by not anticipating the need for wider contextualization at the beginning of this unit. Several of my respondents reported feeling confused, especially at the beginning of the unit. While most of them decided to trust me and the process by going with it and seeing what would happen, I recognize that I also likely lost some of my students by not being as transparent as I might have been at the beginning about what this approach was all about. In my effort to intrigue my students into a new approach, I wonder if I instead created a confusion from which some students never recovered.

Several respondents made clear that they were confused at the beginning of this unit, and fewer pointed out that their confusions were maintained throughout. Only two, Noel and Robin, reported forgetting that there was a narrative framework in the mix at all. Going forward, I think it will be important to actively think about the balance between creating a mystique in service of student buy-in, and making sure not to leave students scratching their heads. Given that the majority of the confusion expressed had to do with implementation of breadcrumbs, future

researchers and I would be well advised to bring in concrete examples of introductions laying the groundwork for the rest of the text. While students largely understood the concept as it related to *Aladdin*, it was difficult for many of them to transfer that understanding into their own written texts.

That said, my findings are largely encouraging. It is clear that the idea of a counterargument as a villain connected with many students. I also see clear evidence that multiple students are reconsidering the purpose of a strong conclusion and its connection to its corresponding introduction, a connection that Blake Snyder highlights in *Save the Cat's* Blake Snyder's Beat Sheet. And even though the breadcrumbs idea could admittedly use some finetuning and tweaking, I see clearly that many students have engaged with it and are genuinely intending to continue to find ways to make their writings feel complete and connected, rather than just laying out information in a haphazard manner. Just as there is plentiful evidence to suggest that students have brought previous areas of expertise with them into our English 101 classroom, I am confident that many students will bring new perspectives from our classroom with them into their future contexts.

I am especially heartened to know that entries in the Positive Outcomes theme far outweigh those in the Negative Outcomes theme, even while reiterating that, of course, both of these themes are subjective and based on my own interpretation of what constitutes positive and negative. When asked directly whether respondents believed that this approach had any drawbacks, nobody responded in that context that they believed it did. The biggest negatives were the aforementioned confusions about how the framework would end up being relevant to argumentative essays, as well as some confusions about how to actually implement the strategies once the reasoning behind the strategies became more apparent. But the positives are, to me, very

rewarding. Several respondents commented on their feelings of achievement, growth, and improvement, with Dawn noting, “The screenplay element helped me better organize my paper and how to shape it,” and Pierce underscoring, “I actually think it was pretty beneficial because it kind of gave a little bit of a more structured approach but also let me kind of choose where I wanted to go with it.” Even though the details of my study were such that I was not able to make an appropriate comparison between the ways my participants used to write and the ways that they currently do, their comments suggest that they see positive changes when they engage with their own informal comparisons. If more students recognize that the process of articulating ideas with the written word can be enjoyable, then perhaps over time fewer students will walk into a composition classroom believing that they are “not good at English” or that English is their least favorite subject.

I must comment on two themes in particular because of how surprised I was by their repeated appearances. Those themes are Reader Experience and Prescriptive. I was not expecting either of these themes to emerge, and the more I noticed their presence, the more a narrative began to form. I suspect it is a fairly common experience for a composition instructor to talk to students about the difference between audience and intended audience. The primary difference that I try to help my students understand is that an audience can and often does include anyone who happens to consume a text. An intended audience, on the other hand, is the specific group for whom the author has created the text. I know that in my own interactions with students as both a tutor and an instructor, I have identified a strange relationship between students and the audience/intended audience distinction. There have been times when I feel so clearly that a student and I have cleared up the importance of thinking about a particular audience instead of just writing for whoever happens to read their writing. But so many times those same students

will just default to a generic audience once they really start writing, or they will start to analyze a text for rhetorical effectiveness by identifying the writer's intended audience, only to devolve by the end of the analysis to talking about some sort of monolithic concept of a "reader," with no indication that specificity matters.

But this persistent theme of Reader Experience gives me hope. Several participants noted that writing their argumentative essays while thinking about the structure in terms of movies kept their audiences front and center during the process. Again, I hadn't anticipated this emergence, but on reflection the connection makes sense to me. I believe that as a writer of texts, it is difficult for many students to conceive of an intended audience beyond their instructor or an amorphous "academic community." When reading texts, even when they understand that the purpose of reading is to analyze for rhetorical effectiveness, many students view themselves as the audience for the text, even when they have identified an intended audience of which they are not a member. But movies are different. Students tend to have little trouble identifying whether a movie is likely to appeal to them. They can watch a trailer and determine the genre, which comes along with known genre expectations. Movies help students to understand the differences between audience and intended audience in a wholly different way than reading articles and other alphabetic texts do. This is evident when Mark noted that he tried "to structure [his] conclusion as like a happy ending to leave the audience with something to think about," or when Brady underscored that "The whole buildup process to, like, the climax of the movie [...] intrigues a reader to keep reading." By connecting movies to the writing of their own alphabetic texts, I believe several students have also evolved their understanding of the connection between alphabetic texts and intended audiences. Going forward, I would like to make some of those connections more explicit with regard to the ways I teach this unit.

Similarly, Prescriptive became a theme whose presence surprised me. Once again, on reflection I believe I understand the context of this emergence. I've suggested throughout this thesis that the five-paragraph essay gets the job done but that it does not necessarily encourage much individuality of style or authorial decision-making. Kurt Schick seems to see this as a positive in his snarky critique of how students get “plenty of practice ‘freewriting’ or ‘journaling’ – often about their ‘feelings,’” (41) but with respect to Mr. Schick, I believe that personal style should be encouraged. Students mentioned feeling that their previous understandings of how to structure their essays was decidedly prescriptive, whether that was due to the five-paragraph essay or to instructors mandating that particular elements belong in specific places, and if they do something different they are automatically judged as wrong. This narrative approach helps students to see that there are a wide variety of ways to successfully and effectively craft a written argument, and it also encourages them to be more thoughtful and intentional about what they have reported often seems like an arbitrarily prescriptive five-paragraph structure.

Connecting the writing process to movies has helped students to see that there are numerous “correct” ways to construct an effective piece of writing. Movies are an accessible enough genre of rhetorical text, and more than that they have so much variety in presentation and style, that students can easily see that there is simply not only one right way to be a movie. I was initially a bit concerned that suggesting another structure in place of a previously known structure would just result in more of the same, an extension of an understanding that writing is just either right or wrong. But instead, several students identified changes in their own understandings of what is possible with regard to structure and content. Just as movies might still follow, say, the Hegelian dialect, the ABT framework, or the BS2 *and still be decidedly different from one another*, several students seem to have discovered that so too can argumentative essays

draw on reasonable structures and still allow individual choices and perspectives to come through strongly. Again, now understanding this unexpected result, I intend to adjust the ways I teach this unit so that I can make this concept more explicit in my own instruction.

Conclusions and Limitations

Ultimately, working through this study has been enlightening. The notion of applying screenplay structures to argumentative essays has been one that I have entertained for a long while and one that I have used to great success in my own writings. But I was uncertain about its applicability for others, as well as my ability to teach it. I believe, after having taught this unit through this lens, and having heard from so many students about the usefulness and value that they see in this approach, that the idea has the legitimacy that I always hoped it would.

That said, this is far from a perfect result, which is of course to be expected. This study had many limitations that I would be misguided not to address. To begin with, the cumulative number of students in both of my classes was forty-two, and the number of students who participated in this study totaled twenty-four, only fifteen of whom agreed to be interviewed. While I am grateful to each and every student who participated in this study – and while I also acknowledge that more students agreed to be a part of my research than I assumed would at the beginning – I am also aware that twenty-four students is hardly a critical mass to determine whether a particular approach is truly widely useful and that future researchers might work together to teach this approach to more students in order to increase the sample size of participants. When I consider that even within my relatively small sample size, several students expressed confusion and/or disinterest in this approach, I recognize that I must acknowledge that this framework will not be the right fit for everybody.

I must also address something that a trusted instructor pointed out to me during my completion of this study, which has to do with the counterargument-as-villain concept. This pains me a bit because I am so fond of the idea and because it clearly resonated with so many of my students, but I find myself somewhat concerned about my metaphor of choice. It was brought to my attention that instructing students to view their arguments as heroes and to view their counterarguments as villains to defeat may be irresponsible. I want to be clear that I believe that the metaphors we use matter, and it is not my intention to teach students that arguments that disagree with their own are truly villainous, nor that the only meaningful purpose they serve is to be overpowered by another argument.

I will clarify that I taught this perspective in class by explicitly suggesting that some of the most powerful stories have villains whose perspectives and ideas may be correct, reasonable, or easy to agree with. The complexity of villains' goals and purposes knows no bounds, and we truly can learn a great deal from other perspectives, even if we ultimately determine that we do not agree with them. Though I made sure to say that in class, it remains also true that I largely encouraged my students to find strong counterarguments primarily so that they could conquer them in order to show the strength and power of their own arguments. Despite the shortcomings of this metaphor, I believe that many of my students understood the intention and do not believe that just because a text disagrees with their own argument it is to be truly vilified. That said, I intend to be more responsible with my framing going forward.

In a previous chapter I touched upon another concern I have, which I will explore more in depth here. Though I do not believe it happened often, I am aware that some of my participants were confused about what I meant when I referred to "argumentative essays." I'll be honest and say that their confusion somewhat confused me, primarily because I referred to argumentative

essays throughout unit three in my classes, but I nonetheless want to take their uncertainties seriously. In the future, I plan to be more explicit in class and directly state that argumentative essays, in our context, are rhetorical texts in which an author takes a position and uses rhetorical tools in order to persuade an intended audience toward a particular belief and/or action. I had not realized that my language might have been ambiguous, but recognizing that possibility means that I can and will be more conscious and intentional going forward.

I will also acknowledge that this approach will not necessarily work for every instructor who attempts to use it. I am a factor in the success or failure of this experiment, and not an inconsequential factor. The truth is that I genuinely love movies and I see the value in the ways that they construct their narratives. When I talk about movies with my students, it is true that I am somewhat doing it in service of the logic of the class, so that when we get to the argumentative essay assignment in Unit Three I have laid the groundwork and it makes sense to them to frame the assignment in this way. But it is also true that I talk about movies because I am passionate about them and I want to share my excitement with my students and I want them to feel encouraged to share their excitement with me.

I mention all this because I believe that the excitement and passion that I've described matter. If another instructor was not genuinely enthusiastic about this framework, while it is possible that the lessons I've detailed throughout this report could be effective, I believe it is also possible that they would feel artificial. I detailed in my Methods chapter some of the ways by which I established my credibility with my students regarding my knowledge of movies and similar narratives. Though I cannot know for certain, I suspect it is likely that without that established credibility, my results would be noticeably different than they are.

Going forward, I believe there is potential for exciting ways to extend the work I have reported here. I have mentioned earlier in this chapter a variety of paths that future research might take, from showing concrete examples of the ideas undergirding this approach to creating a truly interdisciplinary English 101 course in order to underscore the wide-ranging applicability of these concepts. I have also acknowledged multiple ways that I intend to adjust my teaching of this approach, and I do believe that my instruction should remain ever-changing and -evolving. I would be very disappointed with myself if I turned this framework into yet another robotic, stale formulaic structure for students to feel restricted by. In addition to my own plans in my future classrooms, I would like to encourage any instructors reading this to consider frameworks that you believe might be of use to help students engage with the importance of writing effective argumentative essays. Several of my participants have suggested their own – TV shows, books, plays, sales pitches – but there are countless other possibilities. As I mentioned above, the metaphors we use matter. My metaphor of choice is movies. I am enthusiastically excited to see what narrative frameworks future researchers might work with to help students understand how to effectively communicate their written thoughts, ideas, and arguments.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Preliminary Demographic Interview Questions

1. Have you had a chance to read through the Consent Form and do you, in fact, consent to this interview?
2. Would you please state your age?
3. Is there a particular pseudonym you would like to choose for yourself, or would you prefer I choose one for you?
4. Would you briefly tell me about your academic writing history?
5. Would you briefly tell me about your creative writing history?
6. How often do you choose to read argumentative essays when you're not required to do so?
7. How often do you choose to watch movies when you're not required to do so?
8. What is your major?

Main Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your experiences writing argumentative essays prior to our class.
2. Before our class, had you ever thought about argumentative essays in terms of narrative structure?
 - 2a. What did you used to think about when tasked with writing argumentative essays?
3. Having now approached an argumentative essay in this way, in what ways, if any, is this beneficial and in what ways is it a hindrance?
4. Do you think you will use any elements of this approach when writing future argumentative essays?
 - 4a. Which elements and in what ways?
 - 4b. Why or why not?
5. Are there other narrative structures other than movies that you think would have better helped you while writing your argumentative essay?
6. I noticed in your paper that you did **[SPECIFIC ELEMENT OF PAPER]**. Can you tell me a bit about what went into that choice? **[REPEAT AS APPROPRIATE]**
7. In your Self-Reflection you mentioned that **[SPECIFIC ELEMENT OF SELF-REFLECTION]**. Could you expand on that? **[REPEAT AS APPROPRIATE]**
8. Is there anything else you can tell me about your experiences with this approach to writing argumentative essays that could help me to teach this in the future or that could help future students with their own writing experiences?

APPENDIX B

Dear [STUDENT NAME],

Hello! I hope your semester is wrapping up nicely. I'm reaching out to you because I'm doing a study that I would love for you to be a part of, and I'm hoping you'll agree to a short interview. Very briefly, I'm interested in learning a bit more about your experience writing your Academic Position Paper in our class, with the approach that we used. If you agree to be interviewed, I'd love to schedule a time that works well for you. The length of the interview will depend on your answers to the interview questions, but it likely wouldn't take more than half an hour of your time, and almost certainly no longer than an hour. I am also interested in using your Self-Reflection for this assignment in my study. If you agree to an interview and/or to my usage of your Self-Reflection, both would be anonymized, and your name would not appear anywhere in the study.

[SUGGEST DAYS/TIMES]

I am also attaching an informed consent document to this email that explains the interview protocols. If you have any questions about the interview process, please feel free to email me. My contact information is below. There will also be time before the interview to discuss any questions or concerns you might have.

Thank you so much for your time.

Eric Loya, mloya@vols.utk.edu

APPENDIX C

Consent for Research Participation

Research Study Title: Narrative Screenplay Structure as Argumentative Essay Structure

Researcher(s): Eric Loya, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Why am I being asked to be in this research study?

You are being asked to participate in this research because you are a former student in Eric Loya's ENGL 101 class and your insights regarding this approach to writing argumentative essays are very valuable.

What is this research study about?

The purpose of the research study is to better understand how student writers think about writing argumentative essays, and more specifically whether thinking about such essays in terms of narrative screenplay structure is beneficial.

How long will I be in the research study?

If you agree to be in the study, your participation time will be determined by the length of your interview answers, but it is reasonable to assume that your time commitment will not be longer than one (1) hour nor shorter than thirty (30) minutes.

What will happen if I say "Yes, I want to be in this research study"?

If you agree to be in this study, I will contact you to set up an interview, which will most likely take place as soon as possible. The interview will take place via Zoom and will be recorded. Your involvement will be concluded at this point. After the interview, I will play back the recording and create a transcription. A pseudonym will be created to represent you and your name will not be attached to the study.

What happens if I say "No, I do not want to be in this research study"?

Being in this study is up to you. You can say no now or leave the study later. Either way, your decision won't affect your standing with the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, nor will it impact your grade in my class.

What happens if I say "Yes" but change my mind later?

Even if you decide to be in the study now, you can change your mind and stop at any time.

If you decide to stop before the study is completed, you will need to contact me. Any data that I have collected from you will be destroyed and not used for the study. You will not receive compensation if you do not complete the study.

Are there any possible risks to me?

Your risks related to participating in this study are minimal, though it is possible that your privacy may be violated or that confidentiality may be breached. Even though I will mask your identity by referring to you using a pseudonym and by redacting identifying features related to your identity in any reports of this research, there is a chance that something you say or write could reveal your identity.

Are there any benefits to being in this research study?

Participating in this study has several benefits. As a student, you may gain insight into your own writing process by talking about them with me. You will also help me to complete my study by talking about your experiences and practices related to writing argumentative essays using this approach. And finally, you will be awarded a fifteen (15) dollar gift card to your choice of amazon.com or coffee shop The Golden Roast upon completion of your interview as a show of my gratitude.

Who can see or use the information collected for this research study?

Information in the study records will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely in password-protected Google Drive folders and will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless participants specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link participants to the study.

Recorded data will be transcribed using otter.ai and user data may be used for machine learning for the purposes of testing, tuning optimizing, validating, or otherwise enhancing the analytics, models, or algorithms underlying the service.

What will happen to my information after this study is over?

After the research is completed, your recorded interviews will be deleted. Confidential interview transcriptions will be retained, but they will not have any identifying features (e.g., they will use pseudonyms as opposed to your real name). Final research reports may be retained by me and my thesis committee members, and may be published in the future.

Will I receive compensation for being in this research study?

Yes! In addition to earning my undying gratitude, you will be awarded a fifteen (15) dollar gift card to your choice of amazon.com or coffee shop The Golden Roast upon completion of your interview.

Who can answer my questions about this research study?

If you have questions or concerns about this study, you may contact Eric Loya at mloya@vols.utk.edu.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the chance to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have more questions, I have been told who to contact. By signing this document, I am agreeing to be in this study. I will receive a copy of this document after I sign it.

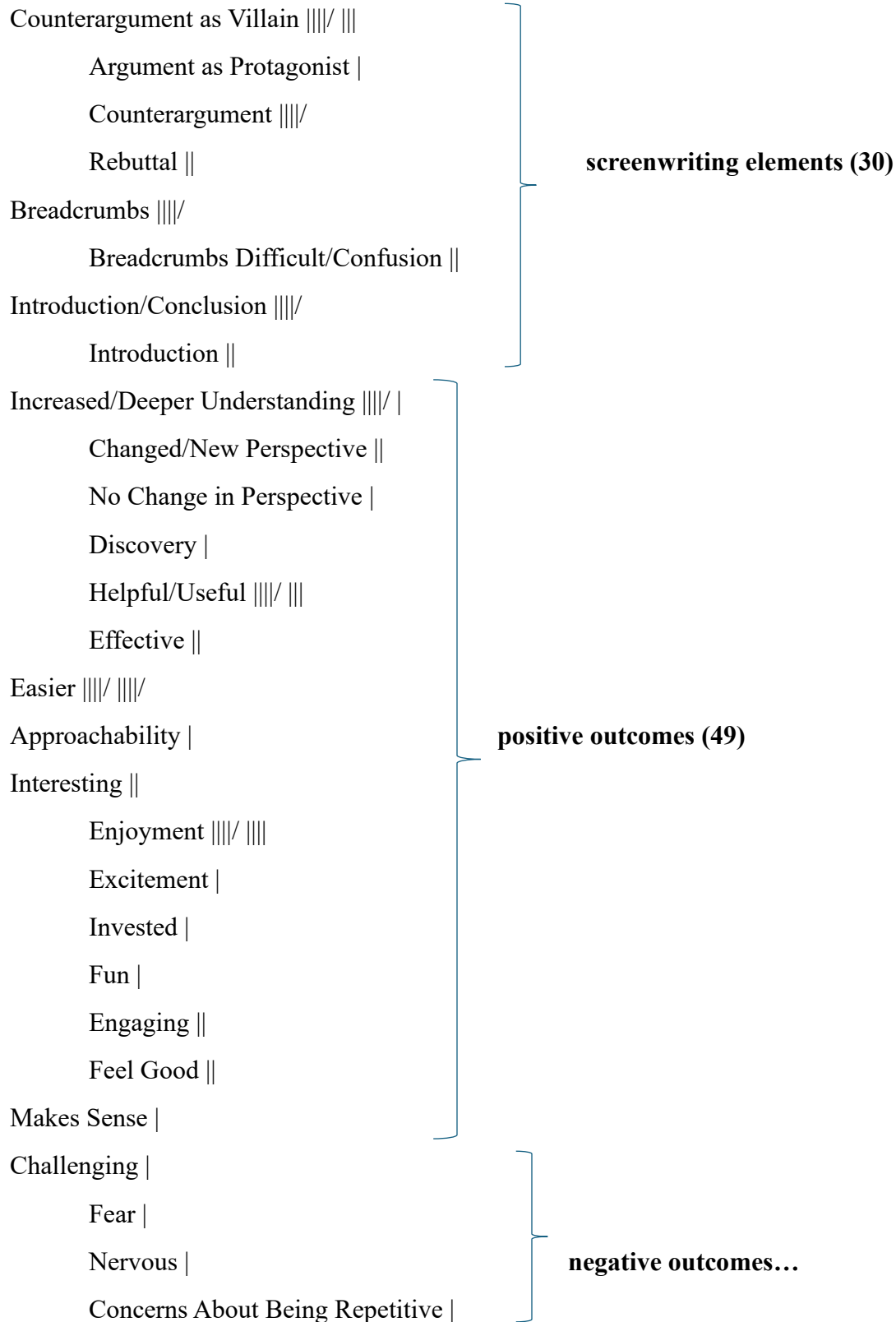
Name of Adult Participant

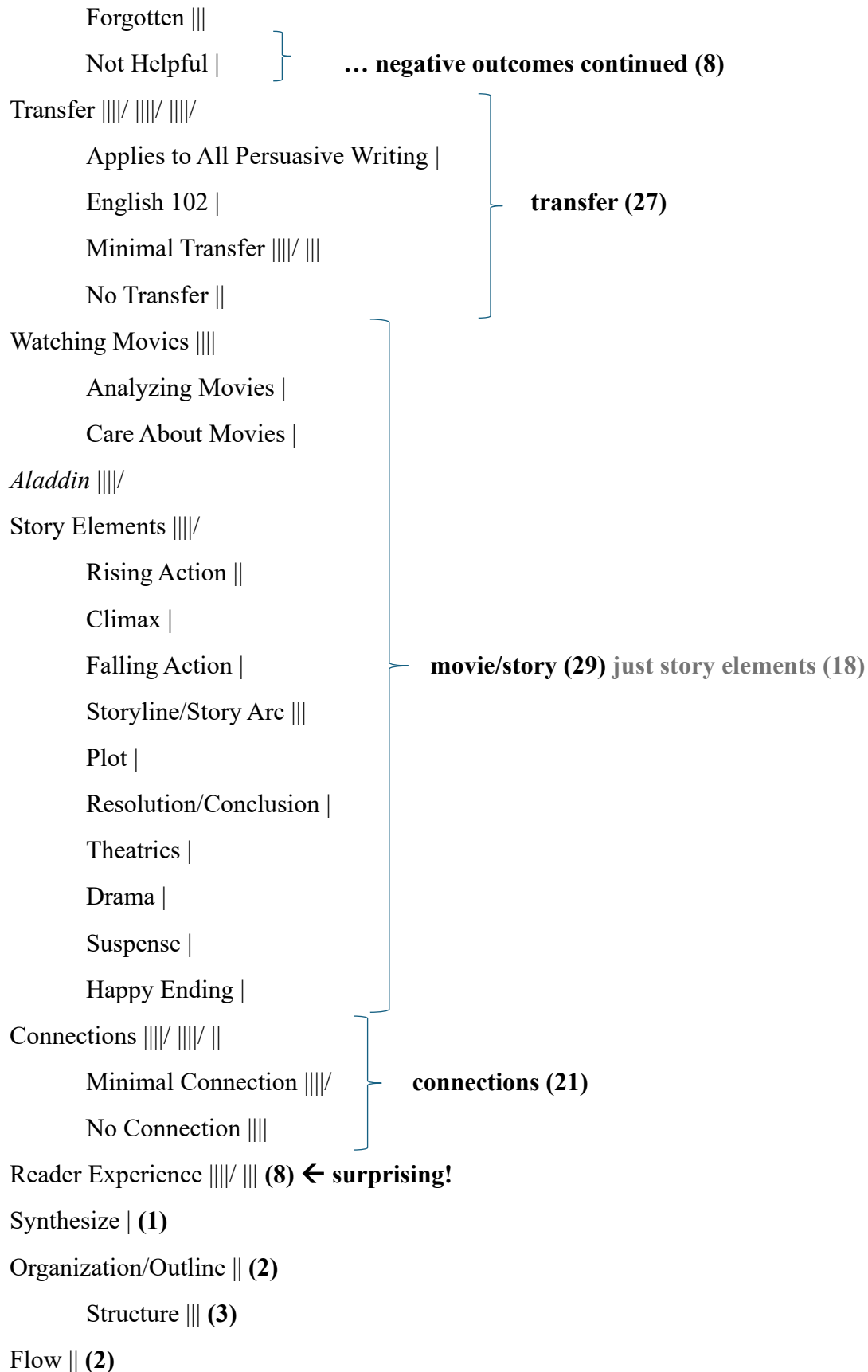
Signature of Adult Participant

Date

APPENDIX D

Thesis Codes (Weekly Engagement Updates and Self-Reflections)





Writing Process | **(1)**

Zoom Out | **(1)**

Clever | **(1)**

Embrace the Weird | **(1)**

AXES | **(1)**

APPENDIX E

Thesis Codes (Cumulative Interviews)

Limited Writing History ||||\||||\|||

Prior Argumentative Essay Writing |

Group Argumentative Essay |

Standard Academic Writing History |

Research Paper |||

Rhetorical Analysis |

Synthesizing Essays |

Thesis |

Compare and Contrast |

Case Study |

Portfolio |

Journalism |

Journalling ||

No Creative Writing ||||

Minimal Creative Writing History ||||\|

Significant Creative Writing History |

Short Story Writing ||||

Poems |

Narratives |

Conversational Writing |

Personal Narrative |

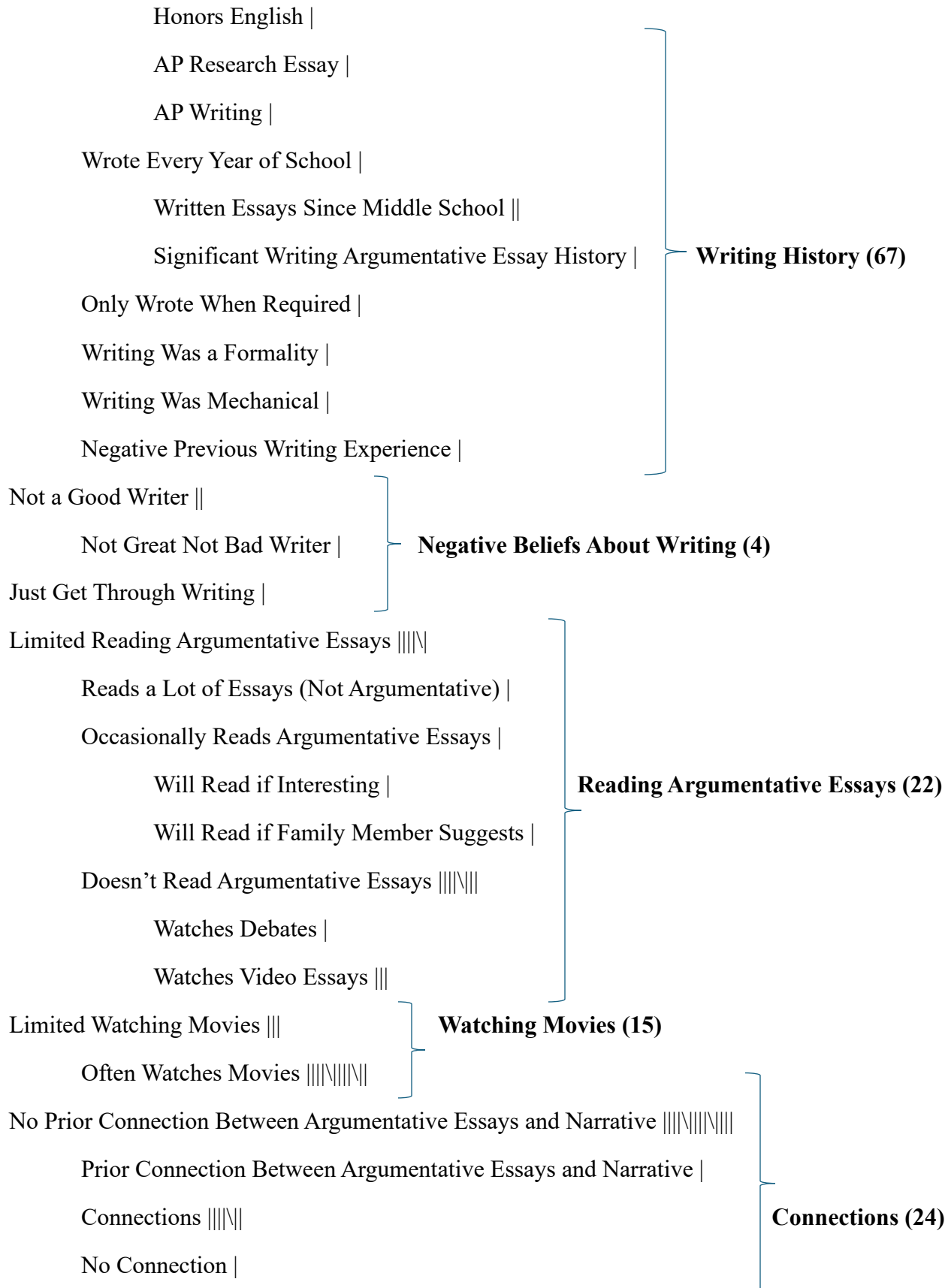
Competitive Writing |

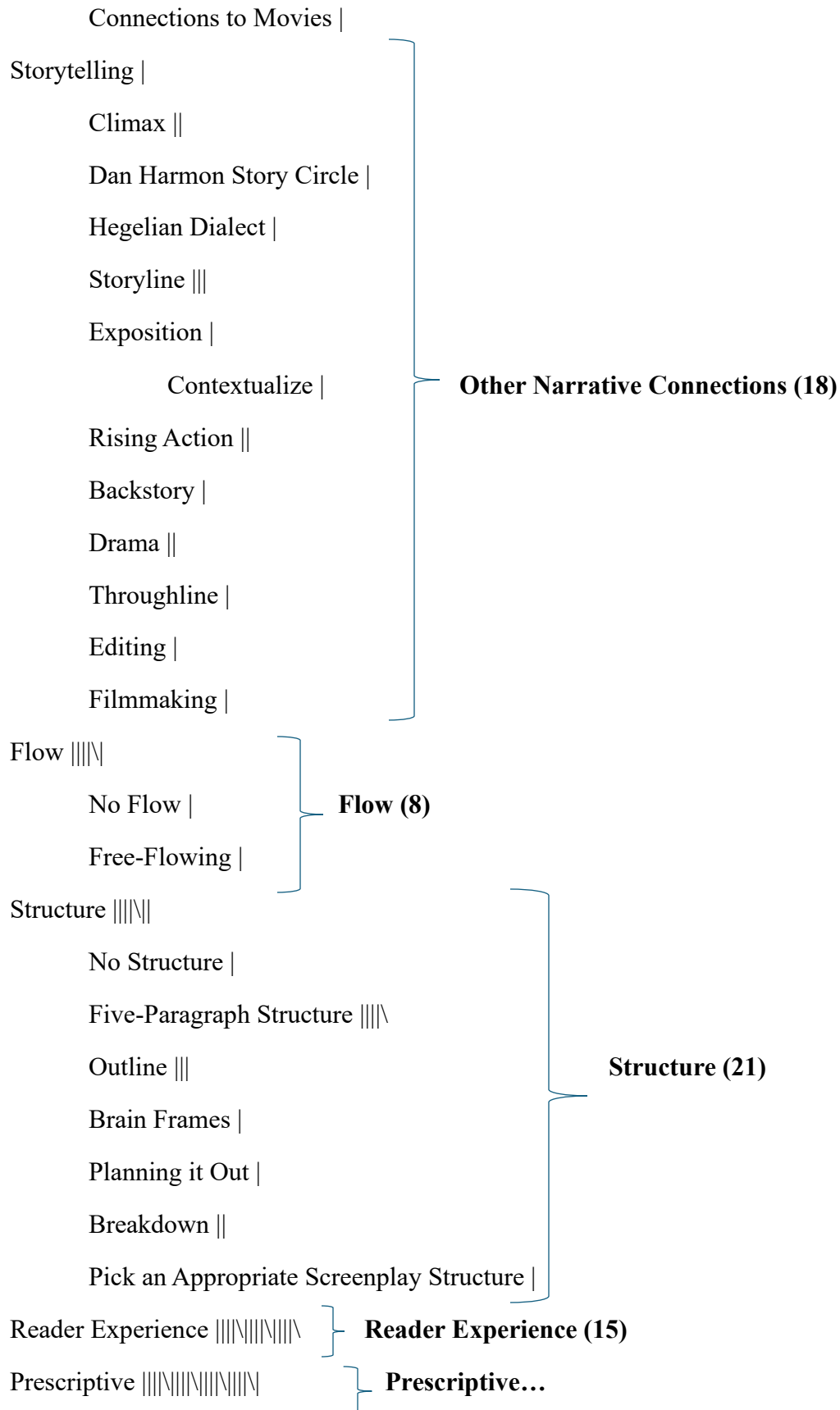
Competitive Debate |

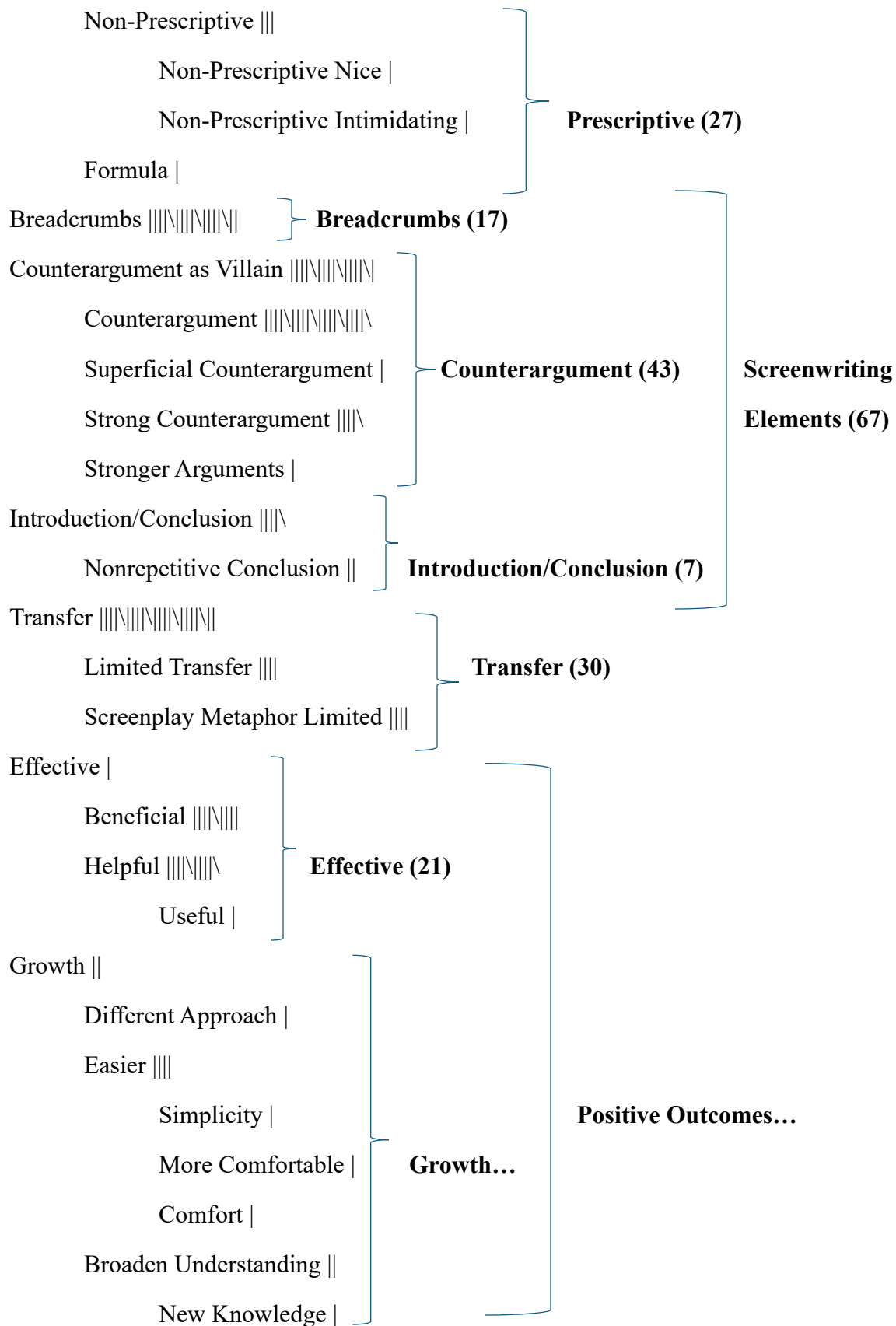
Texts to Mom |

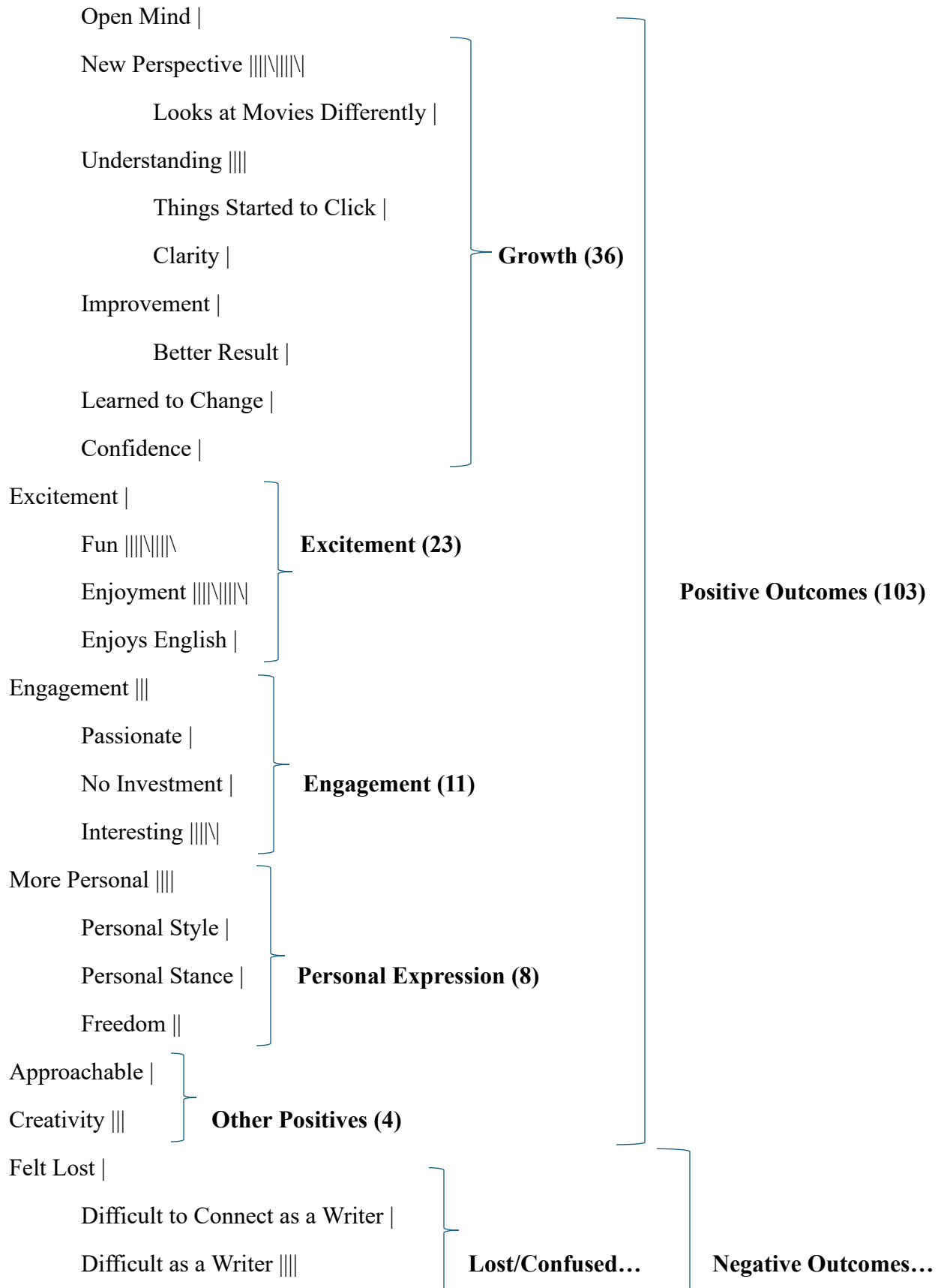
AP Classes ||||

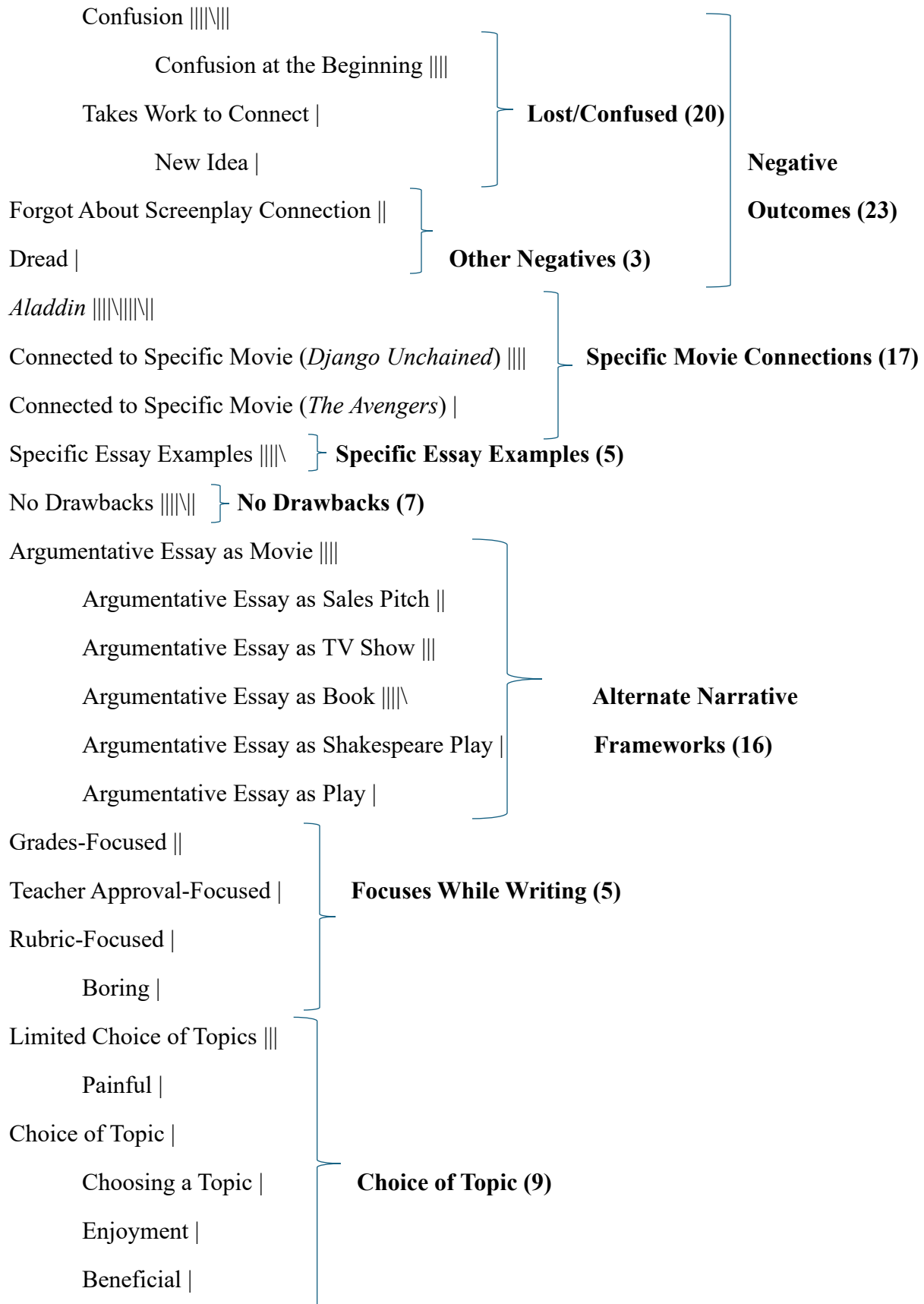
**Writing History
(Academic and Creative)...**

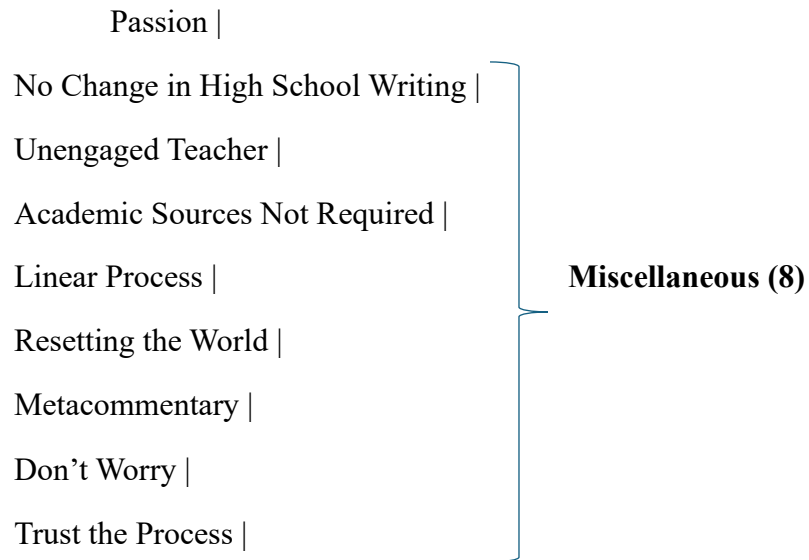












APPENDIX F

Thesis Codes and Descriptions

CODES	DESCRIPTIONS
WRITING HISTORY (ACADEMIC AND CREATIVE)	Students' previous writing experiences
Limited Writing History	Mentions of limited prior writing
Prior Argumentative Essay Writing	Mentions of previous essay writing
Group Argumentative Essay	Mentions of group essay writing
Standard Academic Writing History	Mentions of typical or standard writing history
Research Paper	Mentions of research papers
Rhetorical Analysis	Mentions of rhetorical analyses
Synthesizing Essays	Mentions of synthesizing essays
Thesis	Mentions of theses
Compare and Contrast	Mentions of compare/contrast writing assignments
Case Study	Mentions of writing case studies
Portfolio	Mentions of writing portfolios
Journalism	Mentions of journalism
Journalling	Mentions of journalling
No Creative Writing	Mentions of no prior creative writing history
Minimal Creative Writing History	Mentions of minimal prior creative writing
Significant Creative Writing History	Mentions of significant prior creative writing
Short Story Writing	Mentions of prior short story writing
Poems	Mentions of prior poem writing
Narratives	Mentions of prior narrative writing
Conversational Writing	Mentions of prior conversational writing
Competitive Debate	Mentions of prior competitive debating
Texts to Mom	Mentions of prior writing texts
AP Classes	Mentions of attending AP classes
Honors English	Mentions of attending honors English classes
AP Research Essay	Mentions of prior writing AP research essays
AP Writing	Mentions of prior AP writing
Wrote Every Year of School	Mentions of writing every year of school
Written Essays Since Middle School	Mentions of writing essays every year since middle school
Significant Writing Argumentative Essay History	Mentions of significant prior argumentative essay writing
Only Wrote When Required	Mentions of only having previously written when required
Writing Was a Formality	Mentions of writing previously being only a formality
Writing Was Mechanical	Mentions of writing previously being mechanical
Negative Previous Writing Experience	Mentions of negative prior writing experience
NEGATIVE BELIEFS ABOUT WRITING	Students' negative beliefs about their own writing abilities

Not a Good Writer	Mentions of respondents believing themselves to not be good writers
Not Great Not Bad Writer	Mentions of respondents believing themselves to be neither good nor bad writers
Just Get Through Writing	Mentions of writing being something to just get through
READING ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAYS	How often students read essays when not required
Limited Reading Argumentative Essays	Mentions of seldomly choosing to read argumentative essays
Reads a Lot of Essays (Not Argumentative)	Mentions of reading a lot of essays, though not argumentative ones
Occasionally Reads Argumentative Essays	Mentions of rarely choosing to read argumentative essays
Will Read if Interesting	Mentions of reading argumentative essays if the topic is of interest
Will Read if Family Member Suggests	Mentions of reading argumentative essays if a family member recommends them
Doesn't Read Argumentative Essays	Mentions of not reading argumentative essays
Watches Debates	Mentions of watching debates instead of reading argumentative essays
Watches Video Essays	Mentions of watching video essays instead of reading argumentative essays
WATCHING MOVIES	How often students watch movies when not required
Limited Watching Movies	Mentions of rarely watching movies
Often Watches Movies	Mentions of often watching movies
CONNECTIONS	Previous connections between narrative and essays
No Prior Connection Between Argumentative Essays and Narrative	Mentions of not having previously connected narrative and argumentative essay structures
Prior Connection Between Argumentative Essays and Narrative	Mentions of having previously connected narrative and argumentative essay structures
Minimal Connection	Mentions of identifying minimal connection between narrative and argumentative essays
No Connection	Mentions of not presently connecting narrative to argumentative essay structure
Connection to Movies	Mentions of connecting argumentative essays to movies
OTHER NARRATIVE CONNECTIONS	Narrative connections students made that we didn't directly talk about in class
Storytelling	Mentions of essays as storytelling
Story Elements	Mentions of story elements connected to argumentative essays
Climax	Mentions of essays as a story climax
Dan Harmon Story Circle	Mentions of the Dan Harmon Story Circle

Hegelian Dialect	Mentions of the Hegelian dialect (not named explicitly)
Storyline	Mentions of essays as a storyline
Plot	Mentions of essays as a plot
Exposition	Mentions of essays as exposition
Contextualize	Mentions of providing context in essays
Rising Action	Mentions of essays as rising story action
Falling Action	Mentions of essays as falling story action
Resolution/Conclusion	Mentions of essay conclusions connected to story resolution
Backstory	Mentions of essays as backstory
Drama	Mentions of essays as drama
Suspense	Mentions of essays as suspense narratives
Throughline	Mentions of essays as a narrative throughline
Editing	Mentions of revision as editing
Filmmaking	Mentions of essays as filmmaking
Theatrics	Mentions of essays as theatrics
Happy Ending	Mentions of essays providing a happy narrative ending
FLOW	Mentions of flow in student writing
No Flow	Mentions of lack of flow in previous writings
Free-Flowing	Mentions of free-flowing writing
STRUCTURE	Mentions of structure in student writing
No Structure	Mentions of previous lack of structure
Five-Paragraph Structure	Mentions of previous five-paragraph essay structure
Outline	Mentions of outlines for writing
Brain Frames	Mentions of brain frame outline structure
Planning it Out	Mentions of planning out writing assignments
Breakdown	Mentions of breaking down writing assignments
Pick an Appropriate Screenplay Structure	Mentions of picking out a screenplay structure appropriate for writing assignment
READER EXPERIENCE	Mentions of reader or audience
PRESCRIPTIVE	Mentions of prescriptive writing
Non-Prescriptive	Mentions of APP not being prescriptive
Non-Prescriptive Nice	Mentions of the positives of APP not being prescriptive
Non-Prescriptive Intimidating	Mentions of feeling intimidated by non-prescriptive writing assignments
Formula	Mentions of formulaic writing
SCREENWRITING ELEMENTS	Mentions of Breadcrumbs, Counterargument as Villain, or Introduction/Conclusion Connection
Breadcrumbs	Mentions of breadcrumbs
Breadcrumbs Difficult/Confusion	Mentions of difficulty or confusion regarding breadcrumbs
Counterargument as Villain	Mentions of counterargument as villain

Argument as Protagonist	Mentions of main argument as protagonist
Counterargument	Mentions of counterarguments (not as villains)
Superficial Counterargument	Mentions of prior superficial counterarguments
Strong Counterargument	Mentions of strong counterarguments
Stronger Arguments	Mentions of this approach strengthening counterarguments
Rebuttal	Mentions of rebuttals to counterarguments
Introduction/Conclusion	Mentions of the introduction/conclusion connection
Introduction	Mentions of introduction (and not conclusion)
Nonrepetitive Conclusion	Mentions of writing nonrepetitive conclusions
TRANSFER	Mentions of using this approach in the future
Applies to All Persuasive Writing	Mentions of broad transferability of this approach
English 102	Mentions of transferability to following semester's class
Minimal Transfer	Mentions of transferability of this approach being minimal
Limited Transfer	Mentions of transferability of this approach being limited
Screenplay Metaphor Limited	Mentions of transferability of the screenplay metaphor being limited
No Transfer	Mentions of no transferability of this approach being present
POSITIVE OUTCOMES	Mentions of positive outcomes of using this approach
Effective	Mentions of respondents finding this approach effective
Beneficial	Mentions of respondents finding this approach beneficial
Helpful	Mentions of respondents finding this approach helpful
Useful	Mentions of respondents finding this approach useful
Effective	Mentions of respondents finding this approach effective
Growth	Mentions of respondents identifying that this approach helped their writing grow
Different Approach	Mentions of respondents identifying a new approach to their writing
Discovery	Respondents connecting discovery to this approach
Easier	Mentions of respondents finding this approach easier than previous writing approaches
Simplicity	Mentions of respondents finding this approach simpler than previous writing approaches
More Comfortable	Mentions of respondents being more comfortable with this approach than others

Comfort	Mentions of respondents finding comfort with this approach
Broaden Understanding	Mentions of respondents identifying that this approach broadened their understanding of writing essays
Increased/Deeper Understanding	Mentions of respondents identifying that this approach deepened their understanding of writing essays
New Knowledge	Mentions of respondents identifying that they have gained new knowledge with this approach
Open Mind	Mentions of this approach opening respondents' minds
New Perspective	Mentions of students identifying that this approach gave them a new writing perspective
Looks at Movies Differently	Mentions of respondents viewing movies differently because of this approach
Understanding	Mentions of students identifying increased understanding
Things Started to Click	Mentions of respondents identifying when ideas and concepts began to click into place for them
Makes Sense	Mentions of students identifying that this approach helped writing make sense
Changed/New Perspective	Mentions of respondents identifying change in perspective because of this approach
Clarity	Mentions of students gaining conceptual clarity with this approach
Improvement	Mentions of students identifying their own improvement in their writing
Better Result	Mentions of students identifying that their writing ended up better because of this approach
Learned to Change	Mentions of respondents identifying changes that they've made to their writing
Confidence	Mentions of respondents gaining confidence in their writing
Interesting	Mentions of respondents finding this approach interesting
Excitement	Mentions of respondents being excited because of this approach
Fun	Mentions of respondents having fun because of this approach
Enjoyment	Mentions of students enjoying this approach
Feel Good	Mentions of respondents feeling good with this approach
Enjoys English	Mentions of students enjoying English class because of this approach
Engagement	Mentions of students being engaged in writing because of this approach

Passionate	Mentions of students being passionate about writing because of this approach
No Investment	Mentions of students previously not being invested in writing
Invested	Mentions of this approach increasing respondent investment in writing
Interesting	Mentions of respondents being interested in writing because of this approach
More Personal	Mentions of this approach allowing respondents' writing to be more personal
Personal Style	Mentions of this approach allowing respondents' personal style to come through
Personal Stance	Mentions of this approach allowing respondents' personal stance to come through
Freedom	Mentions of respondents feeling free to make writing choices because of this approach
Approachable	Mentions of respondents feeling like writing is more approachable because of this approach
Creativity	Mentions of students feeling like this approach allows creativity in their writing
NEGATIVE OUTCOMES	Mentions of negative outcomes using this approach
Felt Lost	Mentions of respondents feeling lost with this approach
Challenging	Mentions of respondents finding this approach challenging
Difficult to Connect as a Writer	Mentions of respondents having trouble connecting this approach to their writing
Difficult as a Writer	Mentions of respondents having trouble writing their assignment
Fear	Mentions of respondents connecting fear to this approach
Nervous	Mentions of respondents connecting nervousness to this approach
Concerns About Being Repetitive	Mentions of respondents expressing concerns about being repetitive with this approach
Confusion	Mentions of respondents being confused with this approach
Confusion at the Beginning	Mentions of respondents being confused with this approach at the beginning of the process
Takes Work to Connect	Respondents noting that it takes work to connect narrative and argumentative essays
New Idea	Respondents mention difficulties grappling with this approach as a new idea
Forgot About Screenplay Connection	Respondents simply forgot about this approach
Not Helpful	Mentions of this approach not being helpful

Dread	Mentions of respondents feeling dread about this approach
SPECIFIC MOVIE CONNECTIONS	Mentions of specific movies
Aladdin	Respondents mention the movie Aladdin
Connected to Specific Movie (Django Unchained)	Respondents mention the movie Django Unchained
Connected to Specific Movie (The Avengers)	Respondents mention the movie The Avengers
SPECIFIC ESSAY EXAMPLES	Mentions of specific elements of respondents' essays
NO DRAWBACKS	Mentions of there being no drawbacks to this approach
ALTERNATE NARRATIVE FRAMEWORKS	Mentions of narrative frameworks other than screenplay structure
Argumentative Essay as Sales Pitch	Mentions of sales pitch as narrative framework
Argumentative Essay as TV Show	Mentions of TV show as narrative framework
Argumentative Essay as Book	Mentions of book as narrative framework
Argumentative Essay as Shakespeare Play	Mentions of Shakespeare play as narrative framework
Argumentative Essay as Play	Mentions of play as narrative framework
FOCUSES WHILE WRITING	Mentions of respondents' previous focuses while writing for school
Grades-Focused	Mentions of students focusing on grades while writing
Teacher-Approval Focused	Mentions of students focusing on teacher approval while writing
Rubric-Focused	Mentions of students focusing on rubric while writing
Boring	Mentions of students focusing on boredom while writing
CHOICE OF TOPIC	Respondents' thoughts on choosing their own writing topic
Limited Choice of Topics	Students mention having limited choice of writing topic
Painful	Respondents associating pain with choosing writing topic
Choosing a Topic	Respondents mention choosing their own topic
Enjoyment	Respondents associate enjoyment with choosing writing topic
Beneficial	Respondents associate benefits with choosing writing topic
Passion	Respondents associate passion with choosing writing topic
MISCELLANEOUS	Other codes that did not fit elsewhere
No Change in High School Writing	Respondents note that their writing did not change throughout high school
Unengaged Teacher	Respondents talk about unengaged teachers

Academic Sources Not Required	Respondents mention not needing academic sources in previous writing assignments
Linear Process	Respondents talk about linear writing process
Writing Process	Respondents talk about their writing process
Resetting the World	Respondents mention resetting the world of their writing
Metacommentary	Respondents mention the self-referential quality of their writing
Don't Worry	Respondents advise future students not to worry about embracing this new approach
Trust the Process	Respondents advise future students to trust the process of this new approach
Zoom Out	Respondents mention that this approach helps them see the bigger picture of their writing
Clever	Respondents identify this approach as clever
Embrace the Weird	Respondents mention my framing buy-in to this approach as "embracing the weird"
AXES	Respondents mention the AXES organizational tool

APPENDIX G

Unit Three Course Calendar

Week 9	Oct. 17 Intro to APP READ: EE, "Introduction to Unit 3" + APP Assignment Sheet (Canvas) Zoom Office Hours 1-2pm	Oct. 19 Writing Research Questions READ: EE Chapter 6: "Developing and Revising an Essay"	Oct. 20 Zoom Office Hours 10-11am	Oct. 22
Week 10	Oct. 24 Library Resources Evaluating Academic Articles WATCH: <i>Aladdin</i> (Canvas) READ: Screenplay Structure Breakdowns (Canvas) Zoom Office Hours 1-2pm	Oct. 26 Writing the APP Proposal READ: WHH, 11e-11h (pp. 231-242) Sign up for Writing Conference Submit thesis/outline draft before your <u>conference</u>	Oct. 27 Zoom Office Hours 10-11am	Oct. 29 Library Tutorial & APP Proposal DUE
Week 11	Oct. 31 No Class – Writing Conferences Bring thesis/outline draft to your <u>conference</u> NO REGULAR OFFICE HOURS	Nov. 2 No Class – Writing Conferences Bring thesis/outline draft to your <u>conference</u>	Nov. 3 NO REGULAR OFFICE HOURS	Nov. 5
Week 12	Nov. 7 Integrating Quotations READ: WHH, 10, pp. 211-220 Zoom Office Hours 1-2pm	Nov. 9 APP Sample Analysis Collaborative Rubric READ: Sample APP Essays by Alex Esposito & Alexis Paine (Canvas)	Nov. 10 Zoom Office Hours 10-11am	Nov. 12 APP Draft DUE
Week 13	Nov. 14 Peer Review READ: "Revision Is Central to Developing Writing" by Doug Downs (Canvas) Bring printed copy of APP Draft to class for peer <u>review</u> Zoom Office Hours 1-2pm	Nov. 16 In-class <u>work day</u>	Nov. 17 Zoom Office Hours 10-11am	Nov. 19 APP & Reflective Essay DUE

VITA

Eric Loya was born in West Covina, California on October 17, 1982. He attended elementary school and junior high school at various locations in Southern California, and he graduated from Covina High School in 2001. He took several years off from school following his high school graduation, during which time he was a screenwriter in Los Angeles, California. He graduated with his Associate's degree from Pellissippi State Community College in 2020, and with his Bachelor's degree from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in 2022. He received a Master of Arts degree from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in May of 2024.