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Cover Page Footnote

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Emotions, because they often interfere with critical or rational thought while simultaneously enhancing our writing, need to be more fully addressed in our research. In our Western rationalistic critical thinking, we tend to “objectify” subjects. Thus, by recognizing the role of emotions in student-authored texts, we begin to advance as well as complement more conventional composition agendas. To do this, we must help teach students to identify and analyze their personal affective language within their texts. By doing so, we not only acknowledge the importance of critical thinking, but also learn that effective pedagogy, when framed by critical thought, considers emotions which are necessary for, although frequently disruptive of, better critical thinking development. Thus, we better promote critical thinking and healthier attitudes which in turn produce more emotionally and intellectually balanced individuals.

As many researchers in the social sciences point out, emotions are an integral part of the human experience. Without them, each human ceases to be truly unique because emotions “lend significance to things, to events, and to ideas” (Brand, “Writing” 290). Yet these affective responses go largely ignored in composition pedagogy. While we all acknowledge the importance of affect in writing, we are less effective at 1) identifying affective discourse markers in student writing and 2) recognizing how and where emotive discourse interferes with rather than assists writing and writing pedagogy. Thus, the purpose of this essay is to present and explain a taxonomy of emotive-response discourse markers that helps teachers identify points in student-authored texts where emotion or affective language confuses, even flattens, the critical thinking and rhetorical abilities of students. Designed to help students identify inappropriate explicit emotions (or emotive-response discourse) within their own and others’ texts, the taxonomy presents students with a visual guide by which they can begin to identify these complicating and flattening affective language areas within their analytical pieces. By locating and identifying the presence of affective interference, they are better equipped to revise accordingly. Additionally, because there is a need for emotions in critical thinking, teachers also need to be able to identify points where emotion both facilitates and interrupts student writing. By following the taxonomy, teachers can more effectively incorporate proper, non-interfering affective elements into their teaching.

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I define emotive-response discourse (ERD) as emotional or affective language that complicates the reading of a text. To expound, when emotional language (hatred, love, fear, happiness), themes (death, birth, abortion), and/or icon imagery (war, hospitals, death) are integrated into a text, the results often lead a writer off track and off topic because he or she subconsciously desires more fully to explore, explain, or release the pain, anger, or other emotion connected to the event, regardless of whether the event is causing them emotional hardship, aggravation, trauma, or even joy. Consequently, any indication that there is an emotional response to a topic, reading, or event that does not continue the flow of the text represents a point of emotive-response discourse.

The Importance of Critical Thinking and Emotions in Composition

In our classrooms, we often see the role emotions play in relation to our students' writing. In my experience, student writing at the start of the semester tends to run on the side of egocentric or predominantly "writer-based" prose, not the more balanced, rational "reader-based" (Flower) that includes some emotion, but relies more heavily on logic and rationality. By semester's end, while my students are still struggling with the myriad ideas, concepts, and marginalia with which I continue to bombard them, they are producing more competent and more critical prose.

The development of critical thinking skills is important because it helps to build more focused students; thus, critical thinking is a "logical and natural element of speaking, listening, reading, and writing" (Paul qtd. in Weinstein 284). "The ability to reason back and forth between the concrete and the abstract" in order to "follow an extended line of thought" (Lazere 1) is an important means by which to "foster development from egocentric to reciprocal and from conventional to autonomous moral reasoning" (2). As Donald Lazere notes, Mina Shaughnessy and Andrea Lunsford have both attempted to show this in their respective research. In fact, in some schools, the student development of critical thinking skills is so important that laws have been passed to ensure that they receive explicit instruction. In 1980, for example, California's nineteen state universities were mandated in Executive Order 338 to begin "formal instruction in critical thinking"; the universities were quickly followed by the state's community colleges and high schools (1). Additionally, "several reports of the National Assessment of Educational Progress have indicated that student writers' main weakness occurs in the progression from narrative and descriptive modes to modes directly requiring critical thinking" (2). The purpose and reward of such an agenda are to develop students who have "the desire and confidence to think carefully and responsibly for themselves" (Weinstein 287). This is a noble goal at the very least and, as Diane F. Halpern points out, "College students who have been taught general problem-solving skills showed significant gains in . . . cognitive growth and development" (279).

Too often, when we try to develop this cognitive growth, emotions seem to block many of our attempts. For example, students frequently encounter writer's block due to emotions they cannot or do not know how to rationalize. Thus, what eludes us and what needs to be further explored is a process of teaching students how to begin rationalizing emotions. After all, Brand tells us, "Skilled critical thinkers transcend the printed word and the here and now" ("Why" 436). Additionally, when "looking at critical thinking, we are also looking at moral

orientation . . . at belief systems . . . at attitude . . . at preference . . . at the fundamental polarities of good and bad and are expected to choose the good over the bad. . . . [When] we are deciding on the goodness and badness of things, we are trading in the affect” (438).

To help us better understand the emotional outbursts that are so natural and that also interrupt thought, we can turn to the works of Charles Anderson, Marian MacCurdy, Michelle Payne, Mark Bracher, Emily Nye, and Gillie Bolton, all of whom suggest that students often write themselves *into* any and nearly all forms of standard academic writing, regardless of whether it is done consciously or unconsciously. Many studies have shown—to varying degrees—that this phenomenon, the act of emotional placement into a text, actually does occur. These same studies indicate that inappropriate, personalized language is frequently found embedded in student-authored texts and can also be seen reflected in general topic selection, therefore creating the writer-based prose we frequently see (Comber; MacCurdy; Payne; Pennebaker).

The most obvious affective related problem in student-authored texts is the improper or inappropriate use of emotions in such writing as rhetorical analysis and research or problem/solution essays; these insertions are what are at the core of emotive-response discourse. Typically, no emotions are required in the text of these kinds of essays and, when these insertions are present, the reader usually perceives them as inappropriate. This inappropriateness also extends to tone and sentence phrasing that may interfere with the effectiveness of the writing. While the topic of an essay is often chosen for emotional allure, the texts themselves are not meant to contain the *emotional* opinions of the student writer. And though some assignments require rationalized opinions, in which the texts will include the use of pathos as a persuasive tool that may also include anecdotal information, these types of assignments are meant as exercises in analysis and critical thought. They are not places in which to express one’s emotions, especially in the form of personal opinion. This is not to say that emotions do not have a place in writing; they most definitely do. As such, when attempting to locate these areas of inappropriateness, areas of emotive-response discourse should only be looked at in terms of rhetorical appropriateness with respect to the intended audience and purpose of the assignment.

Additionally, emotive-response discourse accounts for the reason a topic is selected and for such things as the presence of emotional baggage, “venting,” or zealotry and enthrallment. Accordingly, ERD does not assume the presence of or attempt at any conscious or unconscious “healing” as is assumed under the currently used term “healing discourse.” Writing is a daunting task for many people, not just our students, and the frustrations involved in writing can often carry over into the text itself. So, as a composition instructor who recognizes these feelings, I associate such ideas as “venting” more with frustration, stress, confusion, aggravation, and similar feelings and concepts, and recognize that these emotional responses often complicate writing and block students from fully developing their critical thinking skills.

To better illustrate what I mean, I offer two examples. The first example arose during my M.A. thesis work; the second is a hypothetical situation. The first instance is as follows: a female student analyzing an article on children and guns digresses into a story of how one of her friends was shot by the police:

I can’t believe he killed the dog, but if that dog was running at

me I would've been really scared too. What evidence did the police have that he was shooting at them? The bullet hit the dog like it was intended. I think in a lot of cases, the newspaper tries to protect people like the police, who in this case could've made a mistake killing [her friend]. He only fired one bullet and that was at the dog. They fired 8 shots at [him], 4 hit him. Obviously their intention was to kill him.

The preceding example could easily be seen as a paradigm of a bruised or traumatized ego/psyche asserting itself (Bracher). But consider this hypothetical second example. A male student researches reported rapes on his campus; he has never been raped, does not know anyone who has been or is the perpetrator of a rape, nor does he recall anyone reasonably emotionally close to him who has been raped, yet he becomes emotionally enthralled with the topic. As a result, he begins to insert egocentric or writer-based language into his work (e.g., "I can't believe how," "I am shocked at," and so on). Is he "healing," or has the student simply realized the topic's depth? Both of these are examples of emotive-response discourse: the first because of the obvious emotional connection the author has to the *topic*, the second because the emotive-response discourse markers developed *as a result of* the research, assignment, or composing of the text. In these cases, emotive-response discourse reveals the validity or relevance of the authors' emotional digression(s); the authors would, in later drafts, seek to assimilate them effectively into the essay. Both examples also clearly illustrate how emotional response complicated the students' cognitive abilities, thus flattening their critical thinking. The taxonomy is designed to help identify these occasions.

Examples of ERD Interference with Critical Thinking

The examples that follow illustrate the natural occurrence of emotions in student writing. Thirty-two of my students participated in the project aimed at determining whether young college students could easily and effectively use the taxonomy. I wanted to determine if the taxonomy could help students identify emotive-response discourse markers and thus begin to develop critical thinking skills through critical writing, becoming more emotionally and intellectually analytical. By asking them to analyze and reflect upon their own writing, biases, and emotions as a result of their lives and beliefs, I hoped my students could overcome many of the "basic" errors commonly made by first-year composition students, as Mark Bracher suggests is possible. I believed that the taxonomy would help my students develop four key learning skills; they would learn to understand appropriate and inappropriate affective language features, to think about their topic choices and texts to develop critical thinking skills, to identify the vast array of external and internal influences that affect writing, and to combine the affective and to create more effective texts.

The development of these acquired learning skills became more apparent during my study. To better illustrate the development of these skills, the next few examples reflect this growth. The examples are both narrative-style critical essays; the personal "I" was allowed in both instances.

The first essay assignment for the participants was to find one to three events (local, national, or global) that happened on or near the writer's birthday. As part of the body paragraphs, they were to explain how that event influenced their family

and how the world has changed since in relation to the event. The intent of the assignment was to start students looking analytically at their lives, helping them realize the poignancy of how even a local event can sometimes have a profound impact.

As I had anticipated, most students struggled to find events they “liked” or thought were interesting or were “easy” to write about; all of these are clear emotional responses to the assignment. Eventually, they all did find topics they *felt* suited them. As might be expected from such an assignment, emotive-response discourse permeated the texts, with an astounding 94 percent having at least one clear spot in which emotions caused trouble, such as sudden and uncharacteristic misspelling in one or two paragraphs; digression away from the original topic or from the requirements of the assignment; sudden problems with fragments and run-ons; and/or similar rapid declines in sentence phrasing, focus, and tone.

The best and most representative example of emotive-response discourse and truncated critical thinking skills came from one of my better students. “Tracy’s” essay focused on the following: “Terrorist attacks on America have become an increasing concern in the years since [her] birth.” Her introductory paragraph wonderfully summarized the events (the bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut in 1984 and the continued terrorist attacks throughout that period) Tracy intended to discuss in her text. However, at the start of the essay’s body she mentioned the embassy bombing briefly in the first body paragraph, only to dedicate the rest of the paragraph to the events of September 11, 2001. In her next paragraph, Tracy did the same. After this point all references to Beirut and the “increasing concern” of terrorism disappeared entirely for two pages, only reappearing in the conclusion.

The language in the body strikes a rather somber chord as well. Statements, such as “Americans have been living in fear since the September 11 attack,” “We have a false sense of security,” and “we are naïve,” riddle the text, appearing on average every three to four sentences. Additionally, she continues her digression by talking about anthrax, the “shoe-bomber,” and Al-Qaeda. However, not once does she indicate how any of this is indicative of an “increasing concern in the years *since* [her] birth” (emphasis added). Obviously, the events of 9/11 had, to varying degrees, an impact on all of America. What this student’s work shows is how profoundly those events have affected her. The impact has been so deep that she cannot see that she has wandered off into a vent or rant of sorts about September 11, 2001. While there may be several other factors responsible for her off-topic narrative (e.g., a learned pattern from high school or the choice to focus on other things because doing so is easier than supporting her thesis), it is, nonetheless, such venting or ranting that clearly illustrates how emotions interfere with the critical thinking process. It is for this reason that we must teach students to refocus their attention, to help them move away from wandering emotions, and to focus those ideas more clearly. In this case, after one use of the taxonomy, Tracy acknowledged the emotive-response discourse and attempted to integrate more effective emotions into the text by refashioning the thesis and showing the writer the points that digress.

The second example comes from a student who was first in my basic writing course the semester before I began this project. In that class, “Rich” had written one of his essays about trouble he was having with a roommate. To many researchers and teachers, such a topic is considered superficial; however, in this case, it was not. The student had (and apparently, as will be seen, still had at the

time of this project) a serious concern about the tidiness of one of his roommates, and that legitimate complaint makes it less superficial or easy than we might first believe.

When Rich came into my first-year composition class, we spoke briefly about the roommate, mainly because I discovered he had encouraged his other two roommates to take my class as well. I assumed from our conversation that everything had been resolved; since all three said the roommate had “shaped up,” it seemed a logical conclusion. Rich and I were incorrect.

Our second assignment was a reflection upon a text, specifically a short story taken from one of the books in the *Chicken Soup* series. Rich chose a roommate story that was commonly reflected upon. This story reopened the supposedly “dealt with” situation. Emotions came out that echoed the previous semester.

Rich attempted throughout the essay to integrate his experience with that of the short story and, while clearly and wonderfully attempting to “go to the next level” throughout 90 percent of the essay, he failed twice. In these two areas emotive-responses interfered with his plot development. In the first instance, Rich discussed how untidy one of his three roommates was, the same topic chosen in our previous class together. This first example illustrates how Rich’s emotional involvement with the topic interrupts his flow and ideas:

One day I came into our common area to find all of John’s papers all over the floor and couch. Lynch says that one of her shoes found its way underneath Kim’s bed, and it made Kim furious. For example Lynch stated. . . . With depth in my voice I said, ‘What is all this shit on the floor and whose is it?’ Believe me; I had already known whose mess it was. I just wanted my rational [sic] to look fair that I was referring to all of my roommates. Lynch has a similar experience with her roommate. He [John] didn’t seem to understand why I was so upset. The reason I was so upset was [it was a mess]. The biggest reason I was so upset was because I felt embarrassed when we would have guests over [because they couldn’t sit down].

In this passage, we can see several things happening. The attempt at integrating the read text with what he is writing is the most apparent problem. The skipping around is representative of the interruption. Rich knows that as part of the assignment requirement he is continually to refer to the story he read, but he also wishes to vent. None of the remaining paragraphs are nearly as choppy as this one, nor do they have nearly as many basic errors. In addition to the faulty integration, Rich also fails to fully explain his reasons for feeling so strongly. He mentions that the room is a mess and that he would be embarrassed to have guests over, but he does not detail why this is such a “big deal.” Rich seems to fail to consider how easily such items could be moved out of the way or how he might again approach his roommate. And, while this lack of paragraph development may be the result of not yet fully understanding how to develop each paragraph, we can still see his utter frustration as it pertains to his roommate, thus indicating a point of emotive-response discourse.

The second example of emotional interference in Rich’s essay provides additional evidence of emotive-response discourse:

When you leave the dorms for a break, you have to clean up the whole room and make sure all the trash is out. . . . During our

second meeting with John just before break, we told him . . . to clean the bathroom. . . . Instead he vacuums and checks the windows to make sure they were locked. John left on a Tuesday and the rest of us were still going to be here for the remainder of the week. Since then, we have witnessed a substantial change in his cleaning ways. Now everything is [sic] our room gets cleaned with the added help of John.

Obviously, this passage does not make sense. There seems to be an inference throughout the piece that he and the other roommates have spoken with John on numerous occasions, but here, depending upon reading, Rich states that they have either spoken to John only one other time prior to break or two times during break week. Additionally, this issue doesn't seem that big of a deal after all because when the roommates told John to clean the bathroom, he shirked that responsibility, as it seems he has every other time as well, and opted to do the easiest clean-up chores. Also confusing is the fact that John took off earlier than the others, yet somehow this has made for a vast improvement in his helpfulness and cleanliness. Here we see how the writer has become confused and turned around in circles. Rich almost seems to be attempting to state that he's made a big deal about all this and that his messy roommate really isn't that bad of a guy. While this too reflects a failure to develop the one topic-one paragraph concept we attempt to teach our students, Rich's turn in opinion is representative of an affective response that confuses the reader and further interrupts the flow of his essay.

These examples reflect with reasonable clarity inappropriate emotions. The above example is not only easily identified, but noticeably out of place. In this instance, Rich has done fairly well at including his emotional response to a messy roommate into the reflection, but has failed to truly integrate the images through clear explanation so the text flows smoothly. As in example one, this again illustrates how emotional-response discourse interferes with the cognitive abilities of the student. In this case, the asides are not simple matters of venting or rambling. Here we can see how the examples relate to and to some extent reflect back on the overall topic; thus, the emotive-response discourse has a place in the actual text, but the text requires revising in order to incorporate the interruptions.

A final example is more difficult. In assignment three, my students were required to analyze a recent (within the three months prior to the assignment) opinion piece/editorial from either Time.com or Newsweek.com. No personal language—specifically “I”—was allowed, and the students were to determine if the article was effective or not in persuading readers through its use of Aristotle's rhetorical concepts of ethos, logos, and pathos and the five arguing styles (anecdote, analogy, authority, assertion, and allusion). I believe the reason for the difficulty in finding suitable examples is because by this time my students had become much more adept at finding explicit and inappropriate emotive-response discourse; they had more fully developed the key learning skills they were supposed to have learned. Only a surprising three of the thirty-two respondents included “I” and/or attacked the author of the piece being reviewed in their initial instructor-read drafts. By the time the final drafts were turned in, the students had succeeded in removing those references. This was a noticeable change from previous semesters where I would typically have upwards of ten or more students writing from the “I” or opinion perspective. The only emotion

remaining in the case study group's texts was the implicit.

This conclusion, and a further indication that the students did develop the critical learning skills needed for more balanced affective-cognitive texts, is perhaps best illustrated by what students had to say in their final journal entries about the taxonomy. One student wrote: "It was different than what I was used to and that gave me a new perspective. The taxonomy grid also laid everything out in front of me and it was a constant reminder of what I was looking for. . . . It made me more aware of what I was looking for and how it can be fixed." Another valid point that reflects the opinions of numerous other students are comments similar to these: "[I learned that] [e]motion can take on different levels which makes it harder to identify," and "I feel that I can identify points of inappropriate emotions in my essays now because I can put myself in the reader's shoes. I think I can write in an unbiased way without inappropriate emotions." These comments are all clearly reflective, with a handful being near epiphany. The difference shows in that, overall, the participants' first essays contained about ninety-four percent clear emotive-response discourse markers; the second essay dropped to a remarkable fifty-nine and a half percent. This indicates an astonishing thirty-four and a half percent drop after only two uses of the taxonomy during peer- and self-revision of two similar essays.

Interestingly, much of the language in the responses also reflects the "I think" statements Robert J. Stahl states we need to work toward. These "I think" statements indicate that our students have taken a crucial step to traversing the abyss between too much emotional involvement without reflection and entering the realm of critical thought in which they have started to analyze their emotional responses. It is in large part a result of these realizations that the participants were able to remove successfully so much explicit emotive-response discourse from their third essays. The taxonomy appears to have hastened the development of student critical thinking abilities in this study. Any affective related material that remains in the student-authored texts was completely acceptable; the students, after all, made an emotional investment in choosing the topic as well as in writing their analyses. Thus, as a result of the removal of inappropriate explicit emotions, what I received in their third essays were more balanced, more logical, and more critical pieces than I have had in previous semesters.

While we are able to identify emotions in our students' writing, the difficulty here is determining if students have developed the ability to do the same in both their own and their peers' writing. The volunteer End-of-Project Surveys indicate that most of the students believed they had learned to identify explicit and inappropriate emotions in the various texts reviewed over the course of the project. Additionally, the majority stated that the taxonomy did help their writing and that the more they practiced using the taxonomy the easier it became to use and understand.

Of the thirty-two student responses, 56 percent stated they had learned to identify ERD while 31 percent admitted to either being "clueless" or having learned nothing. The remaining 13 percent stated they really did not know if the taxonomy helped, admitted they just didn't use it or care about it, or confessed it was too hard for them to understand. The numbers were more clearly separated for the question concerning whether the taxonomy helped students write better: 56 percent stated yes; 41 percent said no; 3 percent indicated they didn't know. Finally, when asked if the taxonomy became easier over the course of the semester,

the students overwhelmingly indicated that it did. 91 percent of the participants stated they had found the taxonomy easier to understand after each use. Only nine percent stated the taxonomy and grid did not get easier or they hated it so much that they didn't really do the taxonomy (which interestingly reflects their emotive response to the taxonomy itself, an area worth exploring more).

These statistics indicate the use of a taxonomy does allow students, through a visual guide, to look more deeply and critically at writing. As for the emotional identification, I believe the reasonably close split indicates a need for more in-depth instruction and explanation of what inappropriate emotions are as well as how emotions might be implied; however, the scope of this project was intended only to help students *identify* explicit emotions.

That most students (nearly two to one) realized how and why certain emotions are inappropriate or out-of-place for certain writing scenarios is a clear indication that a change in student thought processes had started. Additionally, many students had started more clearly to articulate, analyze, and identify the affective side of writing. As could be seen from the results for assignment three, students also began to take appropriate steps to integrate emotive-response discourse into their texts. Though problem areas still existed in the students' texts, overall their work became more concise and critical and the affective domain of composition more controlled. These improvements were demonstrated by better mechanics, grammar, diction, explanation, in-depth thinking, and attempts at more profound conclusions. Clearly, the use of a taxonomy on emotive-response discourse motivated students to improve by looking deeply at texts.

Conclusion

Critical thinking and emotions are obviously inextricably connected; one must have a passion for something to think about it in a critical fashion. Thus, the key question that this research has answered is how do we help students grow out of their tendency to insert *inappropriate* emotive-response discourse into their texts (again, emotions *are* appropriate in some cases). One way is by teaching students to use a taxonomy designed to help them identify these insertions.

While having students work through their own essays to find emotive-response discourse places a greater burden on students, thus taking some of it off teachers, this activity also acts as a tool for helping students develop the critical thinking skills they will need for the future. By examining and analyzing their own work, students begin to learn to work through their own problems and to rely more upon themselves, thus steering away from too much teacher involvement. Through a taxonomy designed to help students identify areas of emotional transgression and digression in their essays, students learn to think through any emotional baggage, biases, and/or prejudices as these areas appear in their own essays. As a result, the teacher is released from the weight of assuming the dreaded therapeutic/therapist role while students have the opportunity to peer within themselves, hopefully learning to change or readapt their thinking in a more critical manner. Finally, teachers need to understand the emotional states of their students because, as Bracher and James W. Pennebaker indicate, students who are mired in their own emotions often are sicker, miss more class, make more basic writing mistakes, and/or become frustrated and give up on writing more frequently than their more emotionally healthy counterparts. Any of these problems has the potential of

causing the student not to improve upon his or her writing skills and to fail the class needlessly.

This study supports the idea that emotional maturity does directly influence student ability to think critically and objectively. Emotions inappropriately inserted into student texts are clear indicators of students' subjective thought processes. Their preoccupation with egocentric or "me" thought—the initial habit of many first-year composition students to write more writer-based prose—illustrates a lack of intellectual maturity. So, in order to move beyond this egocentric writing style, students must learn to recognize these inappropriate emotional areas in both their own writing and that of others (Bishop; Bracher; Comber). In doing so, we "recognize that feelings are products of thinking. . . . We cannot ignore the fact that students are *motivated* toward that which they *think* is important to them" (Elder 41). Through the identification of emotive-response discourse markers, students develop a clearer sense of which emotions are and are not acceptable in certain types of written discourse. As a result, students learn to think through their topics and texts more thoroughly, which then leads to improved critical thinking skills. Such an activity also allows us to teach students to recognize a vast array of external influences. It is in this manner that we teach "our students to think critically . . . detect the manipulations of advertising, analyze the fallacious rhetoric of politicians . . . [and] resist . . . stereotypes" (Tompkins 19). We also begin more fully to "reconcile the cognitive and the emotional structures of written discourse . . . and factor them all into a common conceptual framework" (Brand, "Social" 403). Additionally, because writing "objectifies" a subject, an act of Western rationalistic critical thinking, recognizing emotions and emotive-response discourses goes hand-in-hand with more conventional composition agendas—for example, the idea that a good liberal arts education teaches students to think critically—and thereby this research suggests that teaching students to identify emotive-response discourse markers promotes critical thinking and healthier attitudes which in turn produce more emotionally and intellectually balanced individuals. ☐

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Appendix A

Taxonomy: Identifying Emotive-Response Discourse Markers**1. Personal Speech Patterns:**

- a. *Inappropriate or misplaced use of personal language or “I.”*
- b. *Consider: Are opinions of author called for or allowed as part of the assignment?*

2. General Topic Problems/Conflicts in Form and Content:

- *Overall Topic/Subject Matter: Is it controversial or a “hot” topic or a general “no-brainer” topic? Is it an easy or complicated/complex topic or subject?*
- *Development: Is the topic subjected to generalities? Is there a noticeable amount of repetition and/or shifting of verb forms or tenses? Is there a logical progression of the text? Is it organized?*
- *Transitioning/Topic Cuing: Do numerous transitioning problems exist?*
- *Conflicts: Are there two or more conflicting topics “activating” (or playing off) one another (e.g., does the writer go from describing a baseball game to talking about his/her experience with a coach although the assignment does not call for reflection)?*

3. Language Features/Conflicts in Style:

- a. *General Language:*
 - i. *Voice and Tone: Is the essay predominantly of one voice/tone, or does it skip around (e.g., does it go from happy to sarcastic and back; or is it overly or falsely academic/formal; does the author use “big words” or odd word groupings)?*
 - ii. *Level of Thinking: Is there active or in-active/Low-Level Thinking or Problem-Solving? Does the author seem preoccupied with superficial ideas/topics and/or generalizations, or is there a flattened or monotone voice? Is the essay emotionally and/or stylistically flat (very basic sentence structure, grammar, language, etc)?*
- *Self/Labeling: Is the writer intimately involved with or passive about the topic? Is the piece overly abstract or does it label people and things in such a way as to obscure or conceal the writer’s identity?*
- *Proof/Development and Clarity/Coherence: Is the thesis “proven”/developed, or is there a lack of movement/proof? Does it follow and develop the topic clearly and coherently?*
- *Clichés and Metaphors: Is there an overabundance of these which aid the writer in not having to think as deeply?*
- *Iconic Imagery and “Re-experiencing the Past”: Are/Is there (a) point(s) which seem(s) to be a flashback, a re-experiencing of the past? Is there evidence of something deeper going on under the surface (e.g., describing a dorm as being analogous to a hospital)?*

Appendix B

Taxonomy Grid

Criteria	Essay
<p><u>Language Features or “Inferring Conflict from Style”:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 General Language: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> –Voice and Tone: –Level of Thinking: 4 Self/Labeling: 4 Proof/Development and Clarity/Coherence: 4 Clichés and Metaphors: 4 Iconic Imagery and “Re-experiencing the Past”: 4 Wording/Spelling and Diction/Syntax: 	
<p><u>Personal Speech Patterns:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Inappropriate/misplaced use of personal language or “I”: 4 Consider: 	
<p><u>General Topic Problems:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Overall Topic/Subject Matter: 4 Development: 4 Transitioning/Topic Cueing: 4 Conflicts: 	