

Texts we Teach in ENG108: College Writing and Research

Kaye Adkins, Professor

English 108: I teach as a course primarily in academic research, but I also discuss the role that research will play in their professional lives. To this end, I have them look at published research in the journals in (what they think will be) their professional field. (I also emphasize "professional" a lot. I think many of our students don't really think about being professionals. They just think they are getting a job. You ought to hear the conversations we have when I talk about how professional my hair stylist is--about the professional standards she sets for all of the women who work for her.) While I want them to be able to conduct, synthesize, and report research, I also want them to become savvy consumers of research, so we talk about kinds of research that we don't have the time, equipment, or expertise to conduct during the semester. They learn things like the difference between reliability and validity, the value of qualitative and quantitative research, and what it means for research to be "empirical." I also emphasize the role of the computer--Internet and library resources--in their research. I still use Spatt's *Writing from Sources*. (The latest edition is much improved over previous editions.) I've thought about using other books, but frankly, Spatt does include good information, has many good tips, techniques, and activities, and includes some good examples. I also use Hacker's *Research and Documentation in the Electronic Age*. It includes good resources, including web sites of professional associations that students have found valuable in their projects.

A word about the assignments and how I structure the class:

The first part of the semester is spent just learning how to use sources in a paper--no research itself, just sources. I use the sources that the Cornell Univ library has on line about the Triangle factory fire: <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/trianglefire/>. It's an excellent archive, and includes a range of sources--traditional texts, photos, and recordings. It also raises some very interesting issues for them, as they read the description of what happened. First, they are asked to summarize a few major articles on the web site--to tell a reader what happened. Then, they are asked to synthesize sources to answer the question "What is the lasting impact of the Triangle fire?" Here, of course, they are getting at that academic favorite "significance."

The second part of the semester is spent researching a topic in their (planned) major. They first write an informative/review of sources paper that outlines the problem or issue. Then, they incorporate that into a longer paper that responds to the issue or problem with some kind of recommendation/argument.

One final note about my assignments--I always set the assignment up so that it is the answer to a question. For research writing, of course, this is a version of the research question. (Students have to create their own question for the major project/second half of ENG 108.) But I also find that it is easier for students in ENG 104 to respond to a question in their assignments.

Dana Andrews, Instructor

Bedford Introduction to Literature (\$)

I use literature and film to generate discussion on various sociopolitical issues. The BIL allows me to combine certain works of poetry and/or prose with particular films--all with very similar themes. For example, I might use Susan Minot's "Lust" with Sylvia Plath's "Mirror" and the film "Tootsie" to explore feminist issues, which then allows for a clear research path for the students. I might use "Death of a Salesman" to explore the idea of the American Dream, or "Oedipus, the King" to explore Freud and other avenues of research into sociology and psychology. In addition, though, I also use the "Green Pages" (really, the photocopied section of MLA style and rules) out of Lunsford & Connors'

New St. Martin's Handbook for proper in-text citation and works cited information.

In fact, I use a lot of different works in the book--too many to list--but Meyers also gives detail on the literary research paper, the approaches to analyzing literature (Formalist, Feminist, Marxist, etc.), although I DO NOT simply teach the "literary research paper."

Michael Charlton, Assistant Professor

The Craft of Research

Best American Science and Nature Writing

I use Booth's *The Craft of Research* because I think it is a helpful, concise, and (not incidentally) cheap introduction to academic research and arguments. It covers the paper-writing process from research questions to research gathering to drafting and revision and touches on aspects of audience and rhetoric. I use the *Best American Science and Nature Writing* anthology as a supplement to Booth, in that the articles serve as good examples of general interest research essays in a variety of fields and spur the annotated bibliography assignment. *Watchmen* was used for a paper about visually based and historical arguments. Booth's main flaw, honestly, is that it treats the research essay fairly traditionally and is light on elements like interviews, personal observations, and surveying - all of which I use in the final paper assignment.

Meredith Katchen, Instructor

Easy Writer

"*Easy Writer*" is fairly inexpensive but covers the basics, including MLA, APA, and other styles.

Current examples of bibliographic entries are numbered, which allows me to require students to refer to a specific number for each of their entries. Although this book does not provide examples of critical annotations, which I emphasize, it does address ways of evaluating sources necessary for writing effective critical annotations. "*Easy Writer*" also includes sections on grammar and mechanics, which practically help students with issues they have not, unfortunately, already mastered. Basically, I do not teach this book; rather, I find this book helpful, even if imperfect, for what I want to teach.

Kori Binette, Instructor

Class Matters

Working Poor

They Say/I Say

I chose the two non-fiction books because I know that students write best when they have some context for their writing, and I wanted to be able to devote a lot of time in this course to working on their critical reading and writing skills. Secondly, the topics--social class and poverty--are issues that affect all of us, and that are perhaps especially significant at MWSU, where so many of our students come from low-income environments. Thus, as opposed to teaching fiction or poetry, all of the students seemed to feel they have something significant to say about these issues, regardless of their political opinions. Finally, as the semester wore on, some of these issues, including unemployment and health care, were growing larger and larger in our current political and economic climate. In other words, they became more topical, and therefore provided more impetus for completing and discussing the reading. This also fueled their interest in writing the end of the semester research project, as they were encouraged to identify a point of interest from the reading to research in depth.

Class Matters works well because it is a collection of essays from the NY Times, and as such, the pieces are small, easy to read, and take a narrow focus on a particular person or issue. It's good exposure to journalistic feature writing. Some of the chapters pair very well with chapters from *The Working Poor*. It's easy to identify student interests and desires and assign select chapters to suit the needs of the

class, though it's also true that some chapters, while interesting to me, perhaps seemed to students too narrow to be of great use for them.

The *Working Poor* was a terrific hit with my class. We spent the most time with this book, and I think all students, even if they strongly disagreed with the author's conclusions, had a lot to say about it. It's extraordinarily well-written, compassionate, and thorough. Furthermore, David Shipler claims to be a "neutral observer" in his text, so it provided students the opportunity to debate that point and try to support their claims that he was/was not actually accomplishing his stated goals. Finally, beyond the content of the book, the writing itself works wonders. Because it's about poverty, there is a fair amount of statistics and more sociological information; but this is combined with a more humanistic feature-writing approach (including extensive narrative and interviews), creating a hybrid that makes for enjoyable reading. When my students wrote their prospectuses for their final projects, several indicated that their goal was to create a research piece like David Shipler's. This showed me that, through this example, they were able to identify and create rhetorical strategies for their own projects. All in all, I was simply blown away by how well this text worked in the classroom.

They Say/I Say worked well for me because it's concise and contains clear examples of rhetorical moves that students can get a handle on. It wasn't until reading this book that I realized how I am indeed expecting and looking for these particular "moves" in writing, and therefore it seems so important to help make those things both reachable and comprehensible for students to use in their own writing. Students seemed to grasp some of the key ideas--such as counter-arguments and saying why a topic matters--really easily, and to see how those moves could improve or add to their research projects.

Kay Siebler, Associate Professor

Branded

Female Chauvenist Pigs

I use these two books (*Branded* and *Female Chauvenist Pigs*) because the intended audience for these texts are within the demographic of most of my students (college aged consumers). *Branded* is about the capitalist consumerist culture and how companies market to people of younger and younger ages in order to create brand loyalty for the rest of their lives (individuals become "branded" by associating their identity with a brand). This book offers not only great opportunities for critical thinking, but it makes the act personal. How do we all collude with this culture of consumerism? How are we all branded? It also creates wonderful opportunities for research that students are interested in, creating arguments regarding capitalism, brand loyalty, the resistance to the same, the ethics of marketing to children, and things like product placement in films, television shows, and video games. We have complex discussions about context, audience, and purpose, not only with the chapters in the book and the films I use in class (*What Would Jesus Buy*, *This Film is Not Yet Rated*, and *Tough Guise*), but the meta rhetoric imbedded in the ads the students themselves consume and are influenced by without even realizing it.

Likewise, *Female Chauvenist Pigs* hits home with most of the students because it is an examination of the porn industry and how it has infiltrated mainstream America to the point of young women and girls internalizing the message that the only value they have is if they accept porn as "cool and hip" and act the part of the beloved porn star. The argument is complex and compelling and is one that the students can easily engage with and have opinions on. Ariel Levy does a great job of balancing ethos, pathos, and logos in her hard-hitting, but witty, argument. Discussions of context, audience, and purpose work well with this text and other films or texts that the students offer as examples in class. Research opportunities in relation to this text focus on creating an argument (with documented scholarly

research) for an audience of their choice (teens, parents of teens, young women, young men, magazine editors) about an issue that is brought up in the text (e.g. sexualizing young girls, post-feminist myths about the status of women, cosmetic surgery, the use of drugs or steroids to alter the natural body).

Dawn Terrick, Instructors

Class Matters

Class Matters is a compilation of New York Times articles focused on the theme of class and society. I have used the book as a textbook for my ENG 108 classes because it provides excellent material for class discussions and students' research papers as well as affords me effective examples for writing with research. Within the large issue of class, the articles encompass topics such as education, health care, religion, media, consumerism and immigration that our students relate to and have strong opinions about. Class discussions were always animated and students held a variety of opinions, which resulted in effective argument and debate. In addition, the authors use a variety of research – including primary research such as interviews, observations and surveys as well as quotes, data, facts and figures from secondary research – and, as a result, the articles are effective models for students on how to introduce, incorporate, analyze and synthesize research. And since the articles have a common thread, they also provide many opportunities for students to synthesize research from various articles and write a paragraph or even an essay. Class Matters contains articles about current and relevant issues and showcases professional writing that is informative, passionate, engaging and always supported with research.

The first semester I utilized the book, I was not happy with it; however, that had more to do with me than with the book or my students. Once I worked on really fitting it into the course, the book was highly effective in terms of instruction and student engagement. In order to make it work, I suggest making many of the articles the focus of class discussion and connecting the articles to students' own writing. Using the articles as models for students was quite useful.

Patricia Donaher, Professor

The Bedford Researcher

What's Language Got to Do With It?

When I teach composition (whether 104, 108, or 112), I see language as the fundamental component of the course, so I try to align all of the course, from the writing assignments and daily assignments to the readings to some aspect or issue in language. With ENG 108, I use the Bedford Researcher as a base text from which to teach research methods across the curriculum, and I use What's Language Got to Do With It? as a text to introduce ideas about the nature of language and to give the students ideas for their projects, which must focus on some aspect of language. Thus, this course is about the exploration of language, both oral and written, and about exploring our respective language heritages. We think, discuss, and write about where our language comes from, how our lives have been shaped by the language communities we inhabit, and what language issues impact our daily lives. The assignments, while revolving around language, teach critical thinking skills as students practice analyzing and synthesizing texts, and they give students necessary practice with structuring their own research studies, using the library, manipulating source material, understanding the function of documentation, and utilizing rhetorical and academic conventions.

In more detail:

For Project 1, I assign a social science research report in which they analyze a language artifact or group of artifacts and present their findings. Their research includes the use of surveys or fieldwork and library research, with the goal of practicing finding sources, utilizing sources in an academically

responsible manner, and synthesizing their ideas/opinions with both factual and theoretical source material. Each report must follow the conventions of the social science report, with appropriate headings and organization, and it includes formal citation and a Works Cited page in MLA style.

Projects 2 and 3 build on each other. For Project 2, students create a prospectus with annotated bibliography on an arguable language issue. The prospectus and formal annotations increase students' skills in the area of note-taking, summarizing, and synthesizing in support of their arguments, while the bibliography assignment expands on students' formal library research skills and provides additional practice in formal documentation.

For Project 3, the students write the researched essay on the language issue researched for Project 2. Students argue for a particular perspective on the issue using appropriate rhetorical conventions, cite critical source material, and include a Works Cited page in MLA style. This paper aims to fine-tune students' skills in synthesis, responsible source material manipulation, formal writing and argumentation, and academic documentation.

Tom Pankewick, Instructor

A non-fiction book published since 2004.

Graff, Gerald and Cathy Birkenstein. *They Say/I Say*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2006.

Hacker, Diana. *A Pocket Style Manual*. 5th Ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008.

My English 108 class, based on Dr. C.J. Jeney's course, requires students to select a non-fiction book to read closely and to use as the basis for their research. I have crafted the following research assignments:

- A Focused Summary of the book,
- A Review of the text which examines three substantive, published reviews,
- An Op-Ed article based on one of the major ideas from the text,
- An Annotated Bibliography.
- A Documented Concept Essay that examines a concept developed in the book,
- An argument for using this book as a Griffon Edge common reading.

While I plan to use a similar plan the next time I teach English 108, I will change the final assignment. The common reading assignment did not allow my students to connect with the topic or the audience; it became my assignment more than a research opportunity my students would have selected.

I feel that neither of the two required texts worked in this situation because they did not address the issues being researched by my students.