

# *INSTRUCTORS' PREFACE*

## *Modes, Genres, and Critical Thought*

This book assumes that each of our everyday writing tasks -- an insurance report, medical chart, software manual, etc. -- embodies specific modes. We understand the modes as category names for two aspects of writing: 1) the major ways in which we *can* write, and 2) the major ways in which we *do* write. By emphasizing that modes arise out of the genres that the world asks us to use, the connection between genres and modes becomes intrinsic.

While connecting modes and genres recognizes the increasing demand for pragmatic composition courses, that demand can become self-defeating without further understanding the modes as aspects of critical thinking. For example, description often embodies the need for the concrete evidence from which inferences can be made. Narration offers meaning through temporal sequences. Thus, while the modes serve various genres, they do so as distillations of specific critical tactics. By emphasizing the modes as aspects of critical thinking, students can improve their ability to generate substantial insights into complex issues and tasks.

## *Assignments that Serve Varying Degrees of Readiness*

This three-way connection between the modes, genres, and critical thinking energizes the teaching task because thinking of the modes as a scaffolding for critical analysis lets us approach writing skills through practical assignments. Throughout, students learn to write by performing rhetorical skills in the context of real-world assignments that require an understanding of critical strategies. The book offers sets of tiered assignments for each mode that address the varying needs of first year students. The first-tier assignments serve inexperienced writers; second-tier assignments place more emphasis on connecting writing to established knowledge about a topic. The third-tier assignments frequently ask students to both perform the mode and to think about the mode itself.

These tiers speak across the range of students who take composition courses. Most Writing Program Administrators and instructors find that many students are neither ready for the first semester nor in need of a developmental course. Students often straddle traditional

categories; the needs of its students are differences in degree, not differences in kind. This book recognizes the underlying commonalities through a modes strategy that connects reading, thinking and writing with carefully staged genre assignments. Our experience teaches us that such a strategy works for students from across the spectrum of readiness; the papers it produces are performances of critical thinking skills.

### *Tools for Strengthening Critical Thinking and Writing*

First, the modes are mapped against stages of the critical thinking process. Second, we focus the modes by emphasizing their role in the critical thinking steps that lead to the skilled completion of genre assignments. Each chapter addresses that connection, and it is a connection reinforced by readings, reading techniques, genre assignments, rubrics, and examples that have proven successful in our own classrooms. We see ourselves as “enablers” in the best sense of that word, i.e., colleagues whose strategy is to enable our students to think and to write in ways that bespeak their intellectual potential.

### *The Conceptual Metaphor*

The book uses a cartographic model: mapping the discourse, identifying gaps in the map, and re-drawing the map to include the writer’s discoveries. We find it useful to develop writing through the following moves:

#### I. Mapping the Discourse

Writers must map the discourse of their subject. They must somehow navigate their craft to the world they’re exploring, and they have to know their predecessors’ routes and discoveries. Writers build their voyages on the maps created by others, and thus they must recognize basic tasks such as identifying trustworthy sources, developing acute reading skills, and sifting important information from the non-essential.

This mapping of the discourse anchors students in the social, public nature of genuine writing. It assumes there is an audience that shares their interests, and it emphasizes the functional nature of traditional modes such as Description, Illustration, Comparison, and Classification. Within this framework, the modes

make visible the shape of the known world. The evidentiary power of Description, the structuring power of Narrative, the creation of Comparative categories, and the Classification of novel events and objects become obvious to students. This approach to the modes embeds them in the processes of intellectual discovery.

## II. Identifying Gaps in the Map

Explorers explore because the existing maps are incomplete. The blank mobilizes the exploration, gives it focus, and attaches it to the existing network of discoveries. The gaps are an invitation to propose a new geography that respects the coherence of prior discovery but demands original additions to the field. Some modes are especially suited to this task. For example, a mode such as Definition helps to create boundaries in the discourse. A mode such as Process addresses the “how” of the relationship, and a mode such as Cause and Effect asks for a “why” that more directly identifies the constellation of choices that shape the map’s potential revisions.

Identifying gaps gives writers autonomy and power, but it constrains the direction of their claims. Because the gaps are always in relation to the established coordinates of the discourse, writers stay within the boundaries of a discourse without simply repeating it. The responsibility of choice carries an ethical charge that constrains idiosyncrasy but simultaneously requires judgment, analysis, and insight.

## III. Re-drawing the Map

The writer’s discoveries reshape the world; they make it into a different place that has to be shared with others. The explorer/writer speaks from within a specific discourse and to an external audience. The writing context motivates the mastery of the skills that enable the audience to understand the writer. The exploration requires that the writer make her case, that is, argue in ways that *both* reflect prior discovery and offer routes to additional discovery. The result is a sort of writing that offers itself as a moment in the dynamic growth of knowledge.

The fundamental task of writers is to connect the existing discourse -- “the map” -- to their own responses to that discourse; they must identify and name the blanks that invite their curiosity

and intelligence. The modes then become steps in the processes that move from mapping and identifying gaps into disciplined writing. What matters most is that writers see their job as connecting what is known with something new that they have discovered.