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Being Social: Social Media Genres Activity

Introduction

While working on Project Two, Genres in the Wild, I wanted to help my students see that they interact with different kinds of genres every day. They follow conventions without recognizing it. I thought the best way to do this was to analyse social media genres that they most likely use frequently. I hoped that by engaging with familiar genres, they would learn how to analyze genres in a way that seemed relevant to them. My ultimate goal was that they would leave the class understanding how to identify genre conventions.

Timing

We did this activity the second half of class the same day we discussed Kerry Dirk's "Navigating Genres". This was the second day of Unit Two. I wanted my students to have concrete examples of what genres they encounter in their lives early on in this unit.

Course Outcome

Identifying and analysing genre conventions.

Lesson Plan

As part of their homework, students were to gather examples of tweets, text messages, emails, and Facebook posts and bring them to class. In class they worked in groups to identify the goals and conventions of these genres. Each group worked with one genre. In their groups they were to identify the goal and conventions of their genre and be ready to share their examples. After about 15 minutes of working in groups, two representatives from each group came to the front of the class to share their findings. One group member spoke about the goal and conventions as the other wrote them on the board. After each group shared, I asked the rest of the class questions and led a short group discussion about how the conventions help meet the genre's goal.

During the group time I shared a few of my own text messages and Facebook posts as examples of these genres in action. The added personal element engaged them.

For Project Two, each student was to write about a genre used frequently in his or her field of study. A few paragraphs of each student's paper were to be dedicated to identifying his or her genre's conventions and how those conventions met the goal of the rhetorical situation. This activity was a first step toward this ultimate analysis. During this activity, my students learned

skills that were critical to understanding and writing about their genres. I believe this activity helped them learn how to identify conventions and goals for genres in an interesting and accessible way.

Sources

Dirk, Kerry. "Navigating Genres." *Writing Spaces*. 2010.

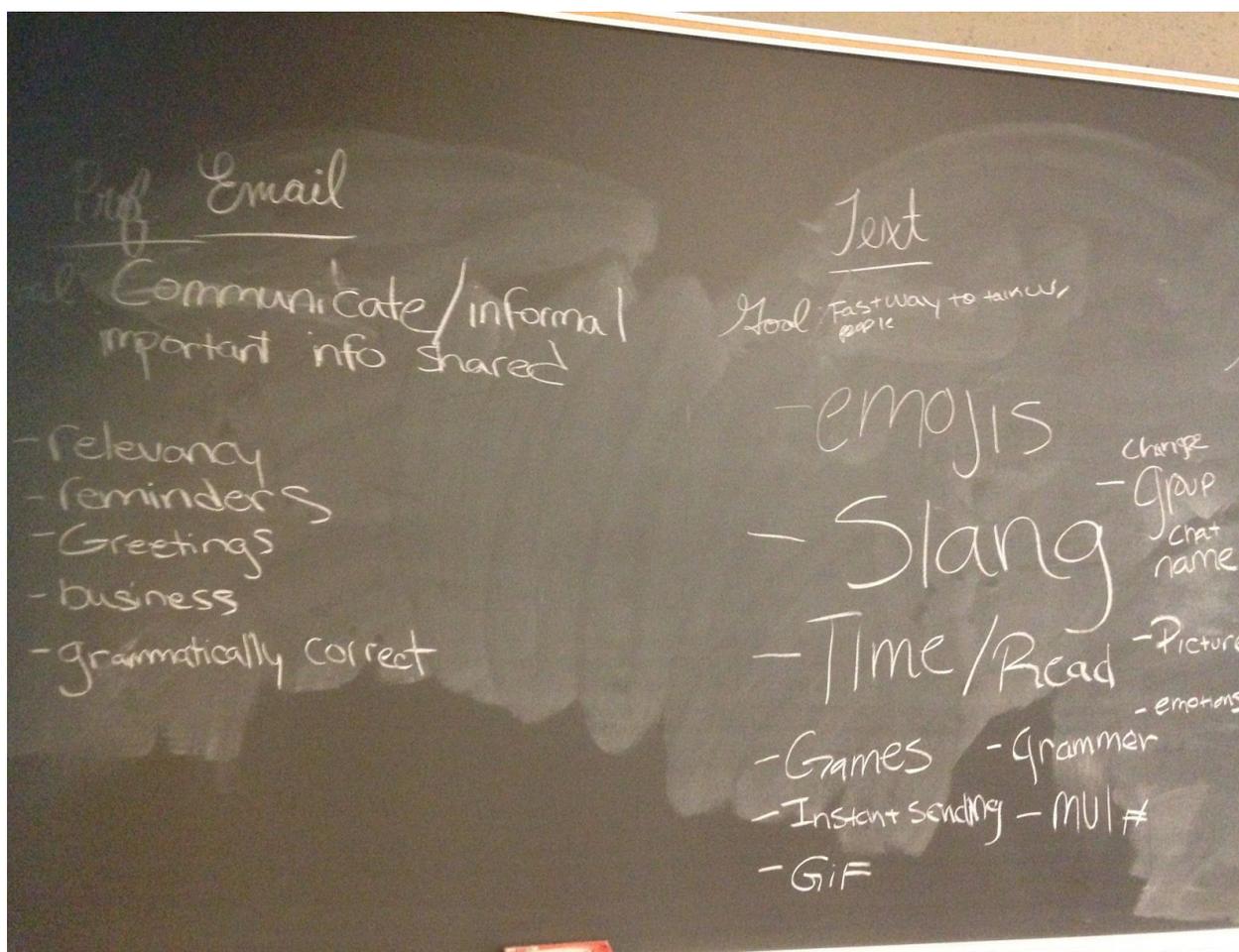
<http://writingspaces.org/essays/navigating-genres>

Moxley, Joseph. "Genres: An Introduction." *Writing Commons*. 2010.

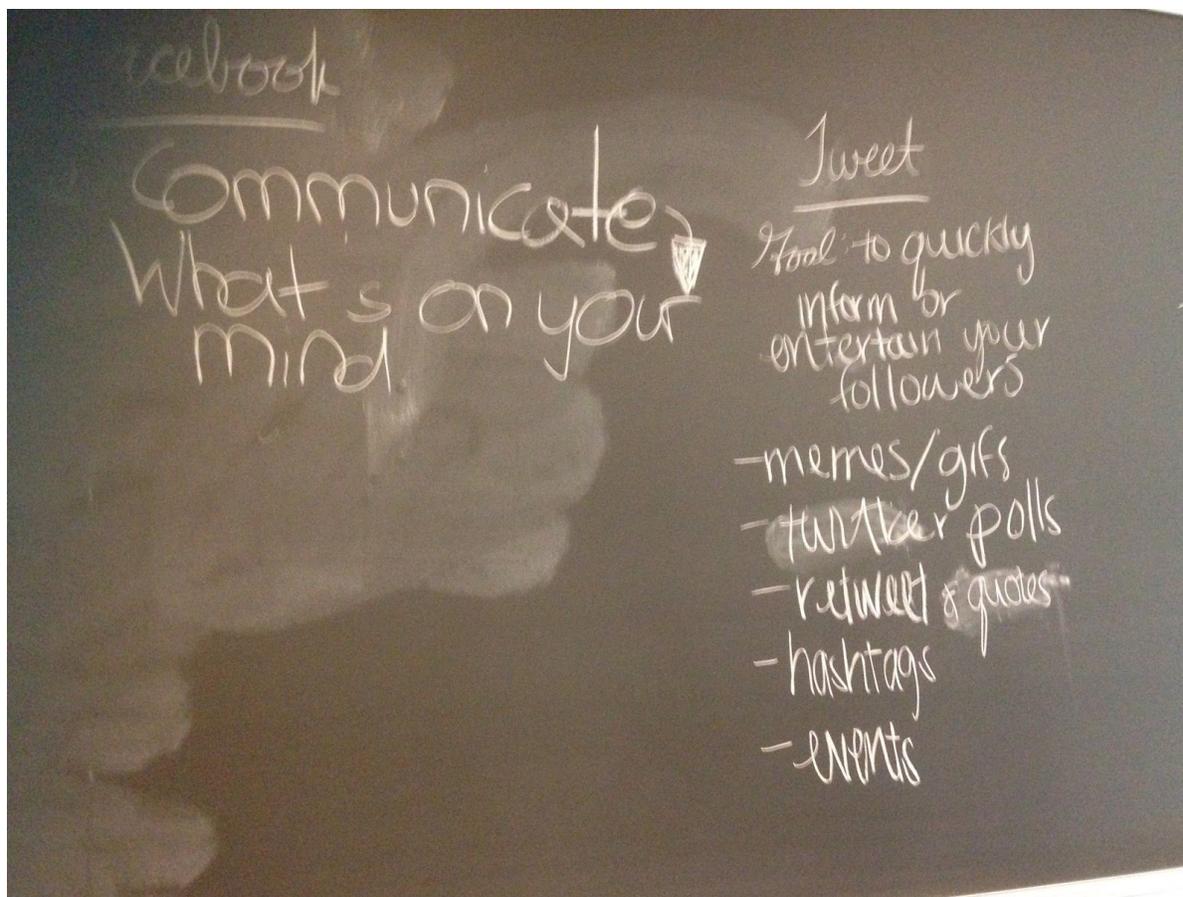
<http://writingcommons.org/open-text/genres>

Appendix

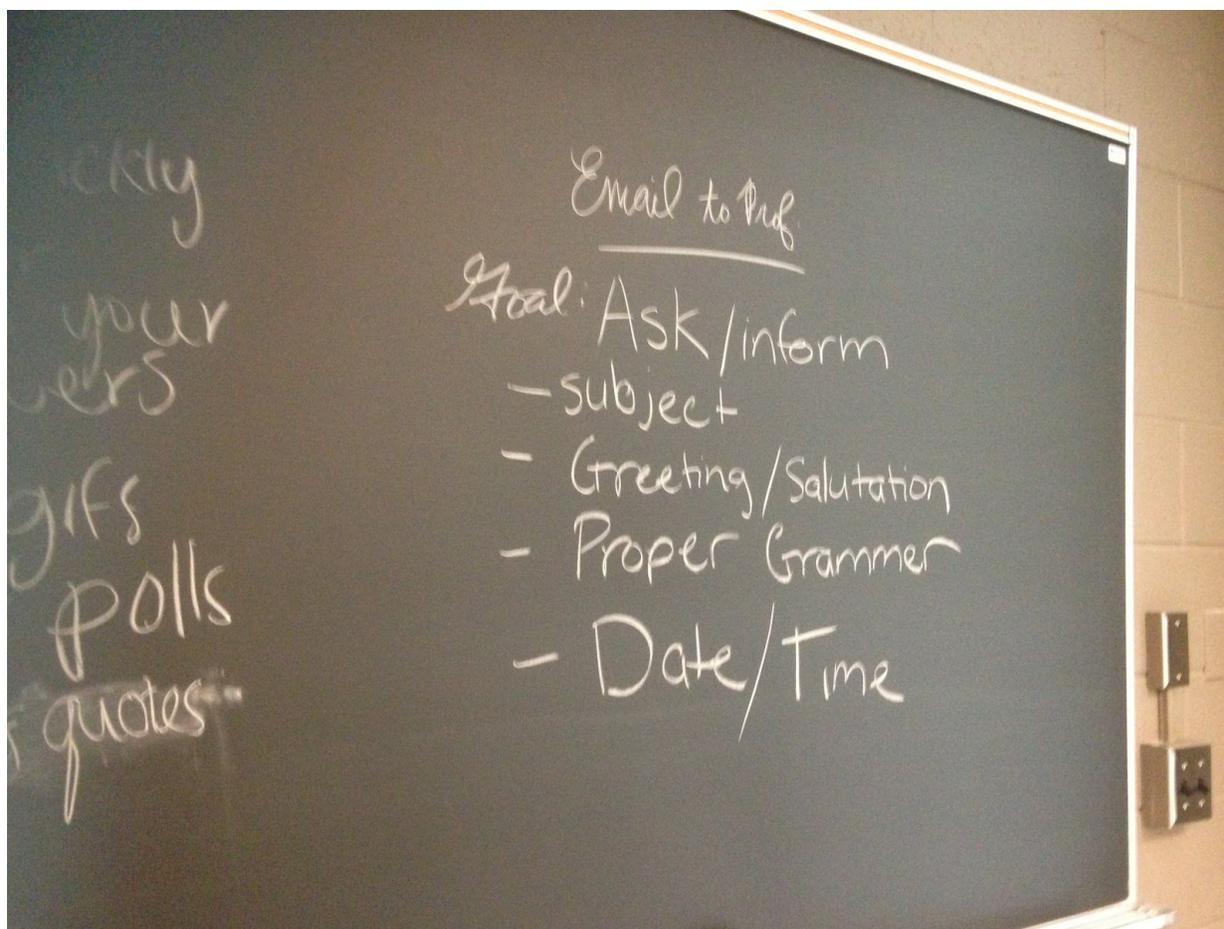
Photos of the board at the end of class.



The first group examined emails sent by professors to students. This group identified that the goal of this genre is to communicate important information to students. The group also identified some of the conventions found in this genre. Interestingly, the group said “informal” communication was a part of the goal, but the conventions seem to suggest a formal email. The group working with the text message genre found it to be a very diverse genre full of possibilities. The newer iOS for the iPhone had just come out so as a class we were able to discuss features recently added to the genre.



The goal the Facebook group identified could play out in many different ways. Communicating what is on your mind could be a post about politics, one's family, new movies, food, funny quotes, or profound thoughts. The genre of the Facebook post has a very flexible goal. The Tweet's structure and conventions demand a brief post. The group working with the Tweet genre considered brevity a key aspect of the Tweet's goal. They concluded that saying something quickly was the *intent* of the Tweet, not just a bi-product of a convention.



Unsurprisingly, the two email genres involving professors were the only ones in which students believed proper grammar should be used. The students knew from life experience that the audience affected the conventions. The email to the professor is less flexible than some of the other genres. In this genre the “rules” seemed more strict to my students.