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Writing a Proposal Letter to make a difference, to reach a real audience with a real purpose

Introduction

The students that sign up for my Composition I class come from many diverse backgrounds and their writing ability tends to be at different levels. In my Composition I course, there are 15 weeks. The proposal letter assignment is intended for week 10 of the course. The week prior to week 10 is dedicated to introducing argumentative writing (reviewing Classical argument, Rogerian, and Stephen Toulmin's theory of argument). After introducing argument writing, the proposal letter is assigned, the course is formatted this way because in order for a student to be able to compose a strong proposal they must have prior knowledge about the components that make up an argumentative piece. Authentic writing is incorporated to help students think about argumentative components such as writing for a purpose and audience.

Questions to consider are:

1. Who is the addressed audience?
2. What impact will the writing have on the world outside of the classroom?

Assignment

“The better assignments asked students to write to an authentic audience in a genuine act of communication. When the audience is not real and the communication not authentic, the writing is often weak” (Peterson, 2004).

For the proposal letter assignment, students are assigned to a group of three and are asked to brainstorm a list of local issues. They must then select and research an issue that concerns them, using the internet and print sources. The most important concepts of proposal letters are purpose and audience which must be addressed clearly here.

To teach the concept of audience, students should argue a position on their selected issue in letters to two different audiences, addressing their own purpose and considering the needs of the audience in each letter.

Proposal Letter Outline:

1. Introduce proposal letter and provide information about techniques used in proposal writing (audience and purpose)
2. Show students samples of proposal essays to clarify that they must have an issue, problem and provide possible solutions to help fix the problem proposed.

3. Ask the students the following questions...
 - a. Did it help you change your mind about the particular issue or topic?
 - b. How does the writer establish herself as an authority?
 - c. How does the author use evidence and information (interview, survey, or source work)?
 - d. In what ways does the author account for opposing viewpoints?
 - e. Decide from this reading which of the two pieces you found most persuasive and why?
4. Once the students have considered all the questions listed above, have the students form groups of three and allow them to work on the assignment(make sure they have a claim of policy and specific audience; for example, policy makers in school, work, and their community)
5. Finally, assign the students to find a proposal in their local area as homework

Next week of our class: Students work with peer groups as they use an online tool to draft and revise their letters. Finally, letters are published using the online, interactive Letter Generator, and then sent to their intended readers.

Goals of Activity

The proposal letter completed in week 10 of the course incorporates many different important skills in writing. First, it forces students to research for a local issue and going beyond just library research. It helps expand their learning on what a well addressed letter is versus an insufficient and not well-researched based complaint about a local issue. Next, the assignment is used to help the students understand persuasive writing and how to incorporate ethos, pathos, and logos into their papers. Overall, this simple assignment interconnects valuable skills and techniques of inquiry that are so significant to students' learning. The goal of proposal letters is "Students are asked to design sophisticated proposal...to synthesize data to determine what will be most convincing for each audience" (Kixmiller, 2004).

Scholar Sources

There are many sources and theories that support the usefulness of completing proposal letters in class. I used sources such as the National Writing Project (NWP) and National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) websites along with searching for proposal essay writing in Google Scholar. "The researchers found that students wrote best when assignments gave them the opportunity to become engaged. Engagement was most likely to occur when writers had a choice over features of their work such as topic, format (whether **to write a letter** or an essay, for instance), and **audience**" (NWP, Peterson 2004). According to Lori Kixmiller, students need to have a free choice of topic. The topic must be something that interests them and they must be prepared to write for real life situations: specific audience for a specific purpose.

Works cited

Hallman, Heidi L. "Authentic, Dialogic Writing: The Case of a Letter to the Editor." *English Journal* 98.5 (May 2009): 43-47.

Kixmiller, Lori. A. S. "Standards without Sacrifice: The Case for Authentic Writing." *English Journal* 94.1 (September 2004): 29-33.

Peterson, Art. "NAEP/NWP Study Shows Link between Assignments, Better Student Writing." *The Voice* 6.2 (Mar.-Apr. 2001). 24 February 2008.