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English 552

6 December 2024

### Building Better Brains Through Thought-Provoking & Creative Composition

This article discusses how relevant political and legal-based composition in all its various forms, including legal statutes, United States case law at the state and federal level, social media of several types, podcasts, and YouTube, have the power to effect change within the United States meaningfully. The article will highlight the importance of using composition skills not just for this class but for the students' entire lives while advancing the idea that any course/assignment's goal is to hear and recognize the composer's voice. The four-week unit will involve various forms of analysis, but all with the end of 1) improving critical thinking skills, 2) developing curiosity, and 3) active student engagement. The course curriculum is designed for an in-person four-week unit for first-year community college students.

The foundation of this entire unit is based upon the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*. The three guiding principles that will flow from that unit include curiosity, which the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* defines as "the desire to know more about the world," engagement, which it describes as "a sense of investment and involvement in learning," and final critical thinking which it defines as "the ability to analyze a situation or text and make thoughtful decisions based on that analysis, through writing, reading, and research" (Council of Writing Program Administrators 1). The entire unit will follow these three framework fundamentals. Good composition is gathering information, determining the question, researching options, and then making a definitive answer or response to the topic. If the

students can get through this process, they can begin to learn best practices for composition and life skills. While there are others, these build the bridge to the other technical skills that the framework mentions.

The rationale behind this stems from the idea that "community college English teachers... must make... [students] critical thinkers, improving their chances of being successful adults" (Shafer 602).

The three framework goals of critical thinking, creativity, and engagement sound excellent, but the implementation and execution of those goals are the unit's focus. In his research, Shafer noted that students typically were taught a specific and prescriptive way of writing that did not focus on the student's interests, thoughts, or interests (Shafer). Traditional five-paragraph pre-formatted themes drowned out the students' voices, and they were not allowed to share their voices and express creativity (Shafer).

To avoid the pitfalls of a similar mindset, the first week of the four-week unit will focus on the idea that students interact with composition daily, whether they like it or not. To do this, we will look at their constant bombardment of marketing. There is the use of verbal, written, and nonverbal language. (Gherasim and Gherasim 75). Gherasim and Gerasim mention other types of languages, but for this unit, the students will focus on these forms.

Gherasim and Gherasim define verbal language in marketing as being auditory "involving the presence of at least two people: one who speaks and one who listens" (75). Verbal language is as simple as conversing with someone but doing it verbally. Gherasim and Gherasim define written language as being especially important as "the meaning of communication can be distorted even by the most insignificant emissions, etc.... [because] people don't speak the way they write – but they don't write the way they speak" (76). Here, the form of communication is

more specific because there exists nothing to set a tone, volume, or facial expression to assist in the meaning of the text. With written communication, there are no visual gestures to aid the reader. Third, Gherasim and Gherasim define nonverbal language as "a wordless one, comprising all gestures, facial expressions, body postures, etc. accompanying, doubling or substituting speech" (76).

The students will then dissect a print marketing ad (like a billboard), a social media marketing ad, a podcast marketing ad, and finally, a video ad from either YouTube or another streaming service. Using Gherasim and Gherasim definitions, they will then create a short video presentation using either their phones or laptops to identify their specific advertisements of choice and explain the use of a composition for each of their selected advertisements. The students will be allowed to choose the marketing advertisements and the best method by which they wish to express their analysis to foster a sense of interest, creativity, and critical thinking.

This week's assignment encourages multimodal learning "whereby students mobilize a range of resources in their repertoires, including spoken and written language, image, and sound effects, and bring with them their identity and experiences" (Ho 1). Because it allows the students to create their own advertisements, compose their own music, and offer their own explanations, they use the framework of critical thinking, engagement, and creativity.

With a clear understanding of the various modes of communication, the following week, the student will be asked to choose one non-fiction event that has occurred or is occurring. This week's unit will focus on the students finding a relevant print magazine article of their choosing and a video clip of the same article. The student will be asked to compare the news written in the print article versus the video clip of the same news article, looking at written language, verbal language, and nonverbal language (body movement, facial gestures) in each ad. From here, the

student will be asked which composition was more effective in achieving the writer's and video caster's intended goal.

As a caveat, the student will be asked to pick an area of interest in which they feel strongly and have some emotional connection. While "many researchers assumed that emotions connected to students' life situations and individual psychology" cannot be integrated into their education, more recent research has found that incorporating the student's life experiences significantly benefits the student (Chandler 53).

In week three, the student will be armed with a clear understanding of the use of different types of composition, the goals of effective composition, and a genuine interest in the process and desire to learn more about composition and develop their original ideas. Keeping this in mind, I will then introduce the students to several generative AI tools and how they can be responsibly used in their research moving forward, not as a substitute for their original thoughts but as a tool for better engaging and researching their ideas. Chandler goes on to note that there is a strong connection between composition and the social constructs and experiences of students and their peers (Chandler 53). In short, connecting students to work they feel emotional and passionate about helps create better empathy and a better community for everyone involved.

The first few assignments will discuss the pitfalls and real-life examples of professionals using AI to downfall. This week will include several examples of AI improperly and irresponsibly used by people in a non-academic setting. For example, there is a situation where a lawyer used AI to write a brief that made up cases and misconstrued the law, and the lawyer did not see that the AI created fictitious case law. Ultimately, the Judge sanctioned the lawyer and faced possible revocation of his law license (Mangan).

Next, the students would read and access the article by Loepky to cite different examples of when AI got it wrong (Loepky). For this week's assignment, I would have the students use AI to help them create a "how-to" composition, either in video or written composition. The directive would be that the student would need to develop and be an expert in the "how-to" of something that interests them. It can be as specific or vague as they like, but again, it would have to be something they are passionate about, and they would be the resident experts.

The students would then make their presentations or present their videos with the class as their audience. In week three, the students would use AI to help them but still be responsible for being an expert subject to be questioned by their peers during the presentation. Ultimately, the goal is to show the students that AI can be a helpful tool; it is essential to conduct independent research as generative AI is not a replacement for critical thinking skills.

In the week four project, everything would be combined into the final culminating project, as written below.

The ultimate final vision involves students being able to formulate the reason or rationale for why they believe or advocate for something. Ultimately the idea is to create a confident, intelligent student who can resolve complex problems, gray areas of life, and formulate a well-rationalized opinion on anything that they deal with in life.

## CULMINATING PROJECT

Throughout the unit, we have studied composition in its various forms, including written and verbal language and nonverbal communication, such as body language, tone, diction, facial expressions, and voice inflections. We have studied in the context of persuasive arguments, marketing, news articles, and generative AI tools. For this final culmination project, we will combine all of these skills to see how they fit together.

Nothing is more American and valuable than the courts of law holding our fragile democracy together. Nothing impacts your way of life, your future, your friends' future, your family's future, and this country's future more than the laws that determine your freedoms, rights, and social construct with your community at the local, state, and federal levels. As such, your final culminating project will involve three distinct parts:

### Part I

Research at least five United States Supreme Court cases that you find interesting and feel some emotional connection. No matter your interests, there are cases that are not only interesting but relevant to all of us. I considered the idea of making the United States Supreme Court Cases that occurred within the last twenty years, but there are still many cases that are still relevant today that are hundreds of years old. So, take your pick.

Below, I have included a website from the official United States Courts website that highlights some of the major cases. But by no means is this all; it is just a starting point.

<https://www.uscourts.gov/about-federal-courts/educational-resources/supreme-court-landmarks>

### Part II

Next, you will do your best to write an amicus brief for the United States Supreme Court. An individual or organization not a party to the lawsuit will sometimes write an amicus brief, which advocates for one side or the other. A group or organization typically writes an amicus brief before the judges decide on a case. But in our case, the United States Supreme Court has already ruled, and you know why they chose. Knowing both sides will help you craft original ideas that you can clearly articulate in written and oral composition.

The amicus brief's goal is not to write legal citations or formatting. Instead, the goal is to develop persuasive, well-thought-out arguments about why the Courts should rule in your favor.

### Part III

Now that you have thought out your arguments, clearly written, you will use verbal composition skills to perform a closing argument. In the closing argument, you will use nonverbal language and verbal language to try to persuade the United States Supreme Court members why they should rule in your favor.

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