



Vision Quest
guidebook

Vision Quest

guidebook

on Writing, Reading, & Research

Composition
Spring 2007



(* ˆ *)
©

2007

We get used to the chains we wear, and we miss them when removed.

—John Dewey, *The Child and the Curriculum* (1902)

...if the corruption of the human race is to be remedied, this must be done by means of the careful education of the young.

—John Amos Comenius, *The Great Didactic* (1637)

Omnium expetendorum prima est sapientia. [“Of all things to be sought, the first is wisdom.”]

—Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon* (1128)

The only significant method is the method of the mind as it reaches out and assimilates.

—John Dewey, *The Child and the Curriculum* (1902)

...let the students learn to write by writing, to talk by talking, to sing by singing, and to reason by reasoning.

—John Amos Comenius, *The Great Didactic* (1637)

If words constitute worldviews rather than simply restate reality in language, what teachers say and write matters and what students say and write matters.

—Linda Brodkey, *Writing Permitted in Designated Areas Only* (1996)

Look, observe, think and assimilate and thus create your own book.

—Elizabeth Ferm, *Freedom in Education* (c. 1920)

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introduction

the ‘vision quest’

Education is often compared to a journey—and one that lasts a lifetime. Albert Einstein, for example, wrote that intellectual growth “should commence at birth and cease only at death” (“Quotations”). Our time in school may be seasonal and terminal, structured as it is in units like semesters and grade levels and ending with rituals like graduation. But education—learning as a deep process of intellectual growth—doesn’t stop there, and the journey, as Einstein and others have said, never ends. This course takes the learning-as-journey metaphor seriously and structures the work you’ll do this semester as the continuation of a “quest” that began before our first meeting and which you will carry on long after this class is over.

The “vision quest,” as both a practice and a literary metaphor, has a long and rich history. In traditional Native American cultures, the vision quest functioned as a rite of passage or initiation wherein the traveler would go off alone into the wilderness seeking personal growth and spiritual guidance. In the Middle Ages, monks and religious adepts would take similar journeys in search of the place where heaven and earth meet. These journeys, when written down, inspired a new literary genre known as the “vision quest” (Erickson).

Medieval vision narratives often combined “several dimensions of reality into a single and continuous landscape” (Erickson 5). These journeys, in other words, were as much a “passage backward,” through time, as a physical (perhaps virtual) excursion in space (Erickson 5). Crucial to a successful vision quest story was the *vision* itself. However, the Medieval monks who told and wrote these stories never claimed that they had, as planned, reached the point on the horizon where heaven and earth meet. (In fact, there’s some doubt as to whether many of these journeys ever

happened in the first place.) Nonetheless, they did have plenty of good stories to tell about their travels (real or imagined) along the way, and these ‘stories within a story’ made the narratives both entertaining and enlightening to their Medieval audiences.

construct a vision

This course invites you to go on a “vision quest” and to *construct a vision* in writing. Here’s what I mean:

All writing is a kind of research—or *search*—that begins with what you know and takes you places you haven’t been before. As human beings we live in the world and experience things in a manner unique to each one of us. This experience grounds our thinking and, therefore, our writing. In this course we take that experience as a starting point for our respective journeys in search of a “vision.”

What kind of vision will you construct in this course? I can’t honestly say. My job, though, is to do what I can to offer up appropriate tips, suggestions, warnings, clarifications, and revelations to help you along the way. In fact, this guidebook is meant to do some of that work of ‘guiding’ you on your journey. To that end, I’ve included some documents to give you a better sense of where I’m coming from and what’s expected of you, as well as a better understanding of how the methods and concepts adopted in this course will help you as a writer, researcher, thinker, professional, and citizen. Use this book as you would any other guidebook (a trail guide for example) as a way to get started on your journey and, perhaps, as a useful reference along the way.

writing, reading, & research

As a writing teacher, I operate from the premise that “what students say and write matters” (Brodkey, *Writing Permitted* 17). Your spoken and written communication matters to me not just because I am the one responsible for grading and evaluating your

work. That relationship—the one that authorizes me to evaluate your writing and your performance in this class—is certainly important and I take it very seriously. However, more important to me are those relationships that grow up around common pursuits, interests, and obligations, in school and elsewhere. In this class, I’m in search of a “vision” too, and so I begin with the idea that I have as much to learn from you as you from me. So I will read your work as a *reader* and not just as a teacher. As a reader of your work, I become part of the audience (along with your classmates and others) that you will want to keep in mind as you write.

I also understand that this “journey” or “vision quest” idea may not work for you. That’s okay. I won’t insist that you go through this course in strict alignment with the way I’ve laid it out here. This course, at heart, is about writing, reading, and research—three activities common to most composition courses and three skills you’ll want to develop in order to do well in college and beyond. Writing, reading, and research will therefore be our main concerns in this course for the next few months. The vision quest metaphor is simply a convenient, and I think relevant, way into those concerns.

In fact, one of the reasons I like the vision quest metaphor is that it offers—in the words themselves—a way to think about two activities crucial to the work you’ll be doing in Composition: *revision* and *questioning*. Writing may begin in scribbling, scratching, typing, and inscribing (see the “writing” essay below), but it also involves a lot of *revising* or ‘looking again’ at what’s been written in an effort to improve upon, refine, and rethink. To go in search of a *vision*, then, means in part that you will be learning something about *re-vision* as a key step in the writing process.

Secondly, research is just another word for ‘asking questions.’ As I discuss further in the “research” essay below, when we read for research purposes we do so in order to find something, usually an answer to a question or set of questions. To go on a *quest*

in this course, therefore, is to learn how to ask useful *questions* and then go off in search of answers. This too is a skill that will come in handy no matter what coursework you pursue or what occupation you choose.



What does the “vision quest” metaphor mean to you?

Are there other metaphors that come to mind as you think about your work as a student, a writer, a learner?

Have you ever come across any “vision quest” narratives before—in books, movies, video games, religious stories, family legends, etc.)?

Do you have a plan for your ‘journey’ as a student? If so, where are you right now?

the plan

*a kind of road map or itinerary
not to restrict or confine
but to show the flow
and guide our actions
with space between lines
reserved for play
and improvisation*

1. first steps

writing: what's important?
technology awareness week (comm survey, blog set up, categories)
how to liberate your laptop (Word, Publisher)

2. setting out

writing: journal, responses, quest/ions, designing assignments
first F2F (conferences)
101 assignments project

3. field reports, critical documents

writing: drafts and 'aerial feedback'
how to interpret my messages, warnings, revelations, etc.
blog: examples

4. looping & regrouping

writing: reading, research, writing
all quests have their questions, all vision's revisions
community handbook project

5. second reports, documents

writing: drafts, aerial feedback, techniques and technologies
making a point, incorporating research, citing sources
re-vision, taking a second look (over the horizon?)

6. construct a vision

writing & research: 'enlightenment'
your 'vigil with the visible world'
publication & production project

7. bring it home

writing: final reports and documents
communication survey
recovery and return, reflections

materials, resources, equipment

Materials you'll need:

- one dedicated spiral notebook (100-150 sheets)
- one plastic pocket folder
- this guidebook (\$5)
- \$20 misc. expense fund (copies, etc.)
- a dedicated 'research blog'
- your laptop, always charged

Resources to help you along the way:

- this guidebook
- the course
- discussion board
- your teacher
- the library
- the internet
- wireless connection
- the Writing Center
- other students, friends, relatives
- computer labs
- my office
- your university

Anything else?

some notes on



*the writing center
our classroom
my office
the discussion board
assignments
grading zones (a poem)*

the writing center

Writing centers in the past often functioned like writing ‘clinics’ where unskilled or undeveloped writers would go (or be sent) to ‘cure’ their bad writing habits. Whether designed intentionally for student remediation (remedy, cure) or not, many teachers and professors reinforced this notion of the ‘clinic’ by encouraging only their weakest writers to pay a visit. In some cases, writing clinics were located in the dustiest, gloomiest corners of the university, and this physical placement of the clinic at some remove from campus life made it less than appealing to students.

The Writing Center at St. John’s is located on the first floor of the library (St. Augustine Hall) in the Institute for Writing Studies. As the website states, the new writing institute is the “centerpiece of the University’s commitment to writing” and is designed to “facilitate collaboration and interaction” among students and faculty. As the campus “nexus for student writing,” the institute features conference tables, workstations, a lounge, a seminar room, an up-to-date library of materials in composition and rhetoric, and offices for me and other faculty teaching composition (see “my office” below).

In many ways, the Writing Center revitalizes the institutional mission that most centers adopted in the early days of writing ‘clinics.’ Put simply, the WC invites everyone and not just ‘poor’ or ‘bad’ writers. Nor is the WC an editing station where you can get your papers corrected or ‘fixed’ by a writing tutor. To the contrary, the Center is a place where all writers go, at any and all stages of the writing process, to get feedback from other writers who function, in this case, as writing and research consultants. Whether you think of yourself as a good writer or a bad writer or something in between, you will want to hang out at the Writing Center.

As mentioned above, the Writing Center at St. John's houses an extensive library of materials that will definitely come in handy as you do the work for this course. Think of the WC as a micro-library dedicated to writing, reading, and research. It is also an extension of our classroom, my office, our class website, and all the other spaces (virtual and real) that we'll occupy this semester. I encourage you to think of the Writing Center as just that—the “center,” or at least one of the key locales, for your writing activities at St. John's. It is also an important “outpost” or “way station” available to you as you venture out on your vision quest.



Did any of your former schools have a writing center?

Have you ever gone to a writing center? If so, what was it like?

How can the Writing Center here at St. John's help you with this course (journal writing, commonplace book, preparing reports and documents)?

What facets of your writing do you want to work on?

If a WC consultant asked you to describe your writing process, what would you say?

Have you hugged your Writing Center today?

our classroom

Along with the Writing Center, our classroom is just one of the ‘spaces’ (and one of the resources) we will use this semester. Only a fraction of the time you spend on your writing journey will transpire in our classroom, so rather than think of it as the main location for this composition class, we should regard it (like the Writing Center) as just one of several outposts or stops along the way.

I believe that one of our goals as learners should be to cultivate a degree of *self-direction* in our actions and activities. However, odd as it may sound, self-direction is not easily learned by oneself. Pause for a moment and think about how few of your daily activities—particularly your learning activities—are done in isolation. In the words of the famous philosopher and educator, John Dewey, “all activity takes place in a medium, in a situation, and with reference to its conditions” (*Child* 30). In other words, contrary to the messages we might get from advertising and popular entertainment, individuals are not solo actors on a stage of their own making. In fact, to be an individual means that we always “exist and operate in association” with others (Dewey, *Public* 23); it is only through deliberate and thoughtful “association” with others that we grow and prosper as individuals.

So, I propose that we use our classroom not just as a place for the class to meet but also as a *medium for association*, as a point of contact, a space for interaction, inquiry, and reflection. I propose, as well, that for this class to work we have to agree on certain key principles, like *community*, *solidarity*, *collaboration*, and *reciprocity*, all of which align pretty squarely with basic democratic ideals. Rather than dictate from above those “rules” that you (as good students) must follow, I’d rather we work together to determine what makes for a good class, a good classroom, and a good learning experience overall. Obviously this will require some work; we’ll need to converse and communicate, that is, and do so

in solidarity. Indeed, like Dewey said, all fruitful association takes place through “communication,” and it’s only by communicating that we can “create a great community” (*Public* 142).



How do you like our classroom?

How does it compare to classrooms you’ve been in before?

How’s the light? the air? the view out the window (if there is one)?

How are the chairs arranged? How could they be arranged to facilitate our writing “community”?

How do you think we should use our classroom space?

What might be some good general rules for classroom conduct?

my office

...is yet another space, or resource, to be used often throughout the semester. Make it a habit to stop by my office—it's nice!—and feel free to bring along some questions so we have something specific to talk about. My office is located in the back of the Institute for Writing Studies, adjacent to the new Writing Center. Feel free to use my office as yet another learning zone (like the Writing Center, like our classroom). Don't be bashful about visiting me in my office. Or, if you choose to be bashful, come be bashful in my office.

Some people at St. John's University refer to me as “Doctor” Marsh. You don't have to call me that (‘Professor Marsh’ or ‘Mr. Marsh’ or just ‘Professor’ will do—‘Dr. Bill’ will not), but there are certain advantages to the ‘doctor’ title that I will hereby pass along to you. Doctors in the medical profession are often on call, so I too will be “on call” this semester. In fact, to simplify things, let's just say that I'm on call twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. That's right—my office hours are 24/7, and that's a promise. I won't be in my office all of that time (it's nice but not *that* nice), but I will be on call.

Now, being on call 24/7 doesn't mean that you'll be able to reach me directly at 2 o'clock on a Saturday morning. But you can leave a message (on voice mail, email, or my cell phone), and I'll be sure to get back to you as soon as possible. My office, therefore, is not limited to the actual physical space set aside for me in the Institute for Writing Studies. I like my office, but offices in general can be a little confining or overly formal, so I prefer to think of “my office” as anywhere you and I might meet F-2-F (face-to-face) to talk about your writing, your research, and your experience in the course. We might meet online; we might meet on the phone; we might meet on a bench outside, on the bus (it happened once!), or on YouTube. Who knows.

My office, in sum, is a pleasant place to hang out. Some might say it needs a little sprucing up, a few touches here and there. I won't disagree. In fact, if you have any ideas, I'm all ears. Stop by and help me figure out how to improve the look and feel of my office.



Any questions?

the discussion board

As the entries above on the Writing Center, our classroom, and my office try to make clear, there is no *one space* that we could rightly call the “center” of this writing course. If anything, the course occupies several spaces and we will travel around from one locale to another depending on what we have planned for the day.

Thus, the “discussion board” (on WebCT) is best understood as yet another site, or medium, for the kind of focused interaction and community-building we’ll be doing in this course. Much of our class discussion will take place on the WebCT board, and much of that discussion will be student-directed. I may get you started with a prompt or two, but your basic objective in that discussion space is not to write in answer to my questions, nor even to write ‘to me’ at all, but rather to participate in a larger, ongoing class conversation in which you are as much a discussion leader as me or anyone else.

Sometimes online discussions will be group-based, with anywhere from three to six people in each group; other times we’ll meet as a class. In both cases, online discussions will likely continue conversations that began in the classroom. On occasion, you will have opportunities to start your own conversations; in fact, you are strongly encouraged to do so at any time in the course.

Obviously, online “discussion” is not verbal, like it is in class, but written. In other words, the discussion board gives you yet another opportunity to practice your *writing*. The discussion board is also (like the classroom) a key site for student *participation*. This might bode well for those of you who aren’t big chatters and who, given the choice, would rather participate online than in class. If that’s true for you, then don’t miss this chance to ask questions and start conversations. Your “talk” in this case will not go unnoticed, I assure you.



Have you ever participated in online discussions—for school, work, or fun? When? Under what circumstances?

How is online 'discussion' different from F-2-F conversation?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of online discussion?

Do you prefer one to the other?

assignments

Dictionary.com defines ‘assignment’ [*uh-sahyn-muhnt*] as “something assigned” (duh!) “as a particular task or duty.”

Example: *She completed the assignment and went on to other jobs.*

An assignment can also be “a position of responsibility, post of duty, or the like, to which one is appointed.”

Example: *He left for his assignment in the Middle East.*

In legal discourse, an assignment refers to “the transference of a right, interest, or title” or “a transference of property to assignees for the benefit of creditors.”

Example: *The judge assigned ownership of the estate to her surviving heirs.*

In all three cases (assignment as task assigned, as post of duty, as transference of right or property), the assignment at heart assumes a power relation in which someone with authority exercises a right of transfer with regard to whatever is *assigned*.

Assignments given in writing classes are no different. In this case, a teacher might assign a paper or some other writing task with the expectation that the assignee (the student) will assume a “position of responsibility” from which that particular “task or duty” will get done. The teacher’s assignment also transfers a particular kind of “right” to the student. But the student writer’s rights in this case are a little fuzzy, since the student must also (usually) transfer his or her right—his or her “interest”—back to the teacher for the purpose of getting a grade or “credit” in exchange for the completed task.

Some questions surface at this point: Are assignments equivalent to a kind of “property” transferred to assignees “for the benefit

of creditors”? And if so, who are the “creditors” in the case of writing assignments—the teachers? the students? the school or university? For whose “benefit” are assignments assigned?

Because of this inherent fuzziness, I have a hard time with assignments, as much as I like to take them on, from time to time, when they’re put in front of me. You, too, might like assignments precisely because they present you with a challenge, a “task or duty” to perform. Performing assignment tasks *well*, in fact, might be the key to your success as a student. It certainly helped me along the way.

On the other hand, you might find assignments (like I do sometimes) stifling and restrictive. You might be more comfortable in situations where the assignment power dynamic slips into the background and you’re allowed a certain freedom or latitude in determining the nature and scope of your “task.”

In either case, let’s agree that assignments are a necessary part of college life, in writing classes and elsewhere. As for how the tasks and duties of this course will be assigned and completed—well, I’ll leave that question open for now and will opt instead to introduce a few others:



Do you like your assignments spelled out for you explicitly?

Would you rather come up with your own assignments, on your own terms?

What assignments (writing in particular) have you enjoyed in the past?

What assignments have you not liked so much?

If you were given the assignment to come up with a dozen or so writing assignments, how would you respond? Would you like that assignment?

Is there another word, other than ‘assignment,’ that might serve better to indicate the kind of work you’ve done or will do in this course?

grading zones (a poem)

Grades are not given; they are assigned (see “assignments” above).

In this course, grades are assigned in accordance with specific criteria with which you will soon become familiar.

In learning those criteria—in becoming familiar with them—
you will probably become pretty good
at assigning your own grades.

I, too, will assign grades from time to time—that’s my job, after
all. Or is it?

Heads:

Grades reduce human beings to bundles of effort
sorted in accordance with how well or how poorly
each performs a given task.

Tails:

Grades motivate human beings to do a task better—
better than they would have done
in the absence of grades.

Grades are a carrot.

Grades are a stick.

Grades are like candy.

Grades make me sick.

In the seam between ‘candy’ and ‘sick’ I dream of a grading
zone. The grading zone does not correspond necessarily with a
particular space or place. It shifts and slides, appearing now here,
now there. It opens and closes erratically, like a worm hole or
time portal on one of those old *Star Trek* shows.

We don't know when a grading zone will show up, but if or when one does, we'll have to decide (you and I, and in that moment) whether or not to jump into it.

Once in a grading zone, there's no turning back.

Fade to black.



Do you like this poem?

What does it mean for you?

What parts of the poem are clearest to you?

What parts are fuzzy?

If you were to write your own poem about grading, what would the first line be?

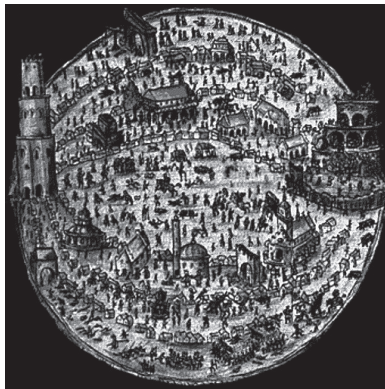
How do you feel about grades?

The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart

(abridged and slightly modified)

by John Amos Comenius

[1623]



[needs proofreading and artful illumination]

TO THE READER

Every creature, even an irrational one, naturally inclines to delight in pleasure and comfort, and to desire them; so much the more man, by reason of his innate rational powers, aspires to the good and the comfortable. Indeed, his reason not only awakens the desire, but spurs him to seek and aspire to a thing more assiduously, the greater its proportion of the good, the pleasant, and the comfortable. Therefore, the question arose long ago among the wise wherein and what is the highest good (*summum bonum*) which could completely satisfy all human desires; that is, what could give a man such a complete satisfaction, that having obtained it, his mind could and must rest, for there would be nothing else he could desire.

Considering this matter carefully, we find that the problem has always been and is now engaging the attention not only of philosophers, who have been striving to solve it; but in addition, every man concerns himself with the problem where and how he may find complete happiness. We find, however, that almost all men seek it outside themselves, in the world and its possessions, imagining thus to pacify their minds: one in property and wealth, another in pleasure and indulgence, another in glory and honors, another in wisdom and learning, another among boon companions, and so forth. In short, all strive for things that are external, and seek in them their happiness.

[...] Desiring to portray this more vividly both to myself and to others, I have devised this peregrination or wandering through the world, recounting the perversities which I saw and encountered, and how I finally had discovered the desired solace, so vainly sought in the world. All this I have depicted in the present treatise. How wittily it was done, I do not care; may God grant that it be of benefit both to myself and to my fellow-men.

What you will read, dear reader, is no fable, even though it may have the appearance of one: it describes real life, as you will perceive when you have gained insight into it, particularly such among you as are somewhat acquainted with my life and circumstances. For I have described, for the greatest part, the

vicissitudes of the few years of my own life; for the rest, the incidents were observed in other lives, or I have been told of them. I have not, however, narrated all my experiences, partly from a sense of shame, and partly because I did not consider them of edification to others.

My guides, who are the guides of every man groping through the world, are indeed these two: insatiability of Mind, which pries into everything, and Custom, which lends a color of truth to all the frauds of the world. Nevertheless, if you apply your reason to them, you will perceive, as I did, the miserable confusion of our race; should it appear otherwise, you may feel sure that you are looking through the eye-glasses of general deception, which present all things to your view upside down.

« CHAPTER 1 »

Having reached the age when human intelligence begins to distinguish between good and evil, and having seen the various classes, orders, callings, occupations, and professions that men engage in, it seemed to me highly desirable to consider well which of these groups of folk I should join and which profession I should choose for my life work.

After spending much time and thought on this problem, and having earnestly considered it, I finally decided to live with the least amount of trouble and labor with the greatest degree of comfort, peace, and good cheer.

However, I found it difficult to discover which profession this might be. Moreover, I did not know with whom to take proper counsel about the matter. For I was unwilling to ask the advice of just anyone, presuming that each would naturally praise his own calling. On the other hand, I was loath to undertake anything in a hurry for fear of erring.

Nevertheless, I confess that I secretly attempted to take up now one, then another or a third thing, but soon dropped them all again, perceiving (as I thought) difficulties and trivialities in all of them. Meantime, I feared that my fickleness might bring me into derision; accordingly, I knew not what to do.

After much inward struggle and hesitation, it finally occurred to me to investigate first all human affairs under the sun, and after I had intelligently compared them one with another, to choose the profession that would enable me to live pleasantly and peacefully. The longer I thought of this plan, the better I liked it.

« CHAPTER 2 »

Thereupon I sauntered out by myself and began to consider where and how I should begin. Then suddenly, I know not whence, there appeared before me a brisk-gaited, spry-looking, and loquacious fellow whose feet, eyes, and tongue were as if on a turn-table. He approached me, inquiring where I had come from and whither I was going. I answered him that I had left my home to travel about the world in order to gain knowledge.

He approved, but added: "But where is your guide?"

"I have none; I trust God and my eyes not to lead me astray," I answered.

"You will accomplish nothing," he replied; "have you ever heard of the Cretan labyrinth?"

"Yes, a little," I assented.

"It was one of the wonders of the world," he continued; "a building with so many rooms, partitions, and passages that anyone entering it without a guide was doomed to wander and grope about it without ever finding his way out. That, however, was a mere joke in comparison with the arrangement of the labyrinth of this world, especially in our day. Take the advice of an experienced man and do not trust yourself into it alone!"

"But where shall I seek such a guide?" I inquired.

"It is my work," he answered, "to conduct those whose desire to see and investigate the world, and to guide and show them whatever there is; that is why I came to meet you."

"Who are you, my dear fellow?" I asked in amazement.

"My name is Searchall, and I am nicknamed Ubiquitous," he replied. "I go up and down the world peering into all its nooks and inquiring into what men say and do. I see all that is to be seen and ferret and spy out all that is secret. In short, nothing

should be done without me, for it is my duty to oversee all things. If you follow me, I would let you into many secrets which you otherwise could never find alone.”

Hearing such news, I was overjoyed to find such a leader and begged him not to consider it troublesome to guide me through the world.

“Gladly I serve others,” he replied, “gladly shall I serve you.” Thereupon, taking me by the hand, he said: “Let us go!” So we started, I remarking: “I am indeed curious to see the course of the world, and whether one can safely rely on anything.”

Hearing this, my companion stopped and said: “My friend, if you are undertaking this journey, intending to judge what you see in accordance with your own opinions instead of being pleased with whatever you find, I know not how Her Majesty, our Queen, will be satisfied.”

“And who is your Queen?” I inquired.

“She who directs the world and its entire course from one end to the other,” he replied. “Her name is Wisdom, although some dunces dub her Vanity. Let me warn you beforehand against prying overmuch into things, when we journey about and investigate, or you will come to grief, and so may I!”

◀ CHAPTER 3 ▶

While he was thus conversing with me, someone appeared at our side—I could not tell whether it was a man or a woman (for the fellow was strangely disguised and as if in a haze). “Where are you taking this man, Ubiquitous?” s/he inquired.

“On a world tour,” replied my companion; “for he desires to examine it.”

“Why without me?” queried the stranger, “you know that it is your duty to guide, while it is mine to show whatever there is to see. It is Her Majesty’s will that no one, having entered her realm, should himself interpret, as he pleases, what he sees and hears, indulging his own wit. For the scenes should be explained to him and he remain content therewith.”

“Is there anyone so insolent as not to accept our order, just as all the rest do?” retorted Ubiquitous, “nevertheless, it seems to me that this fellow may require a bridle. Come along, then!” The stranger joined us, and we continued our journey.

I, however, thought to myself: “I hope to God that I shall not be misled. These fellows intend to place some sort of bridle on me.” Thereupon, I spoke to the newcomer: “Friend, do not be offended; but I would like to know your name.”

“I am the interpreter of Wisdom, Queen of the world, and am under her orders to instruct men how all things in the world ought to be understood,” he answered. “Accordingly, I instill into the minds of all you will meet, both old and young, well-born and commoners, foolish and learned, all that pertains to true worldly wisdom. Thus I give them joy and contentment. For without me even kings, princes, nobles, and all the most distinguished people would find themselves in a strange state of despondency, and would pass their earthly days in sorrow.”

“How fortunate that God has sent you as my guide, dear friend, if what you say is true!” I exclaimed, “for I have started on this journey in order to find the most reliable and delightful thing in the world, so that I may lay hold of it. Having you for my counsellor, I shall be able to choose more easily.”

“Have no doubt about it,” he rejoined, “for although you will find everything in our kingdom excellently and splendidly ordered and jolly, and will learn that all who are willing to obey our Queen never fail of a comfortable living; it is, nevertheless, true that some professions or businesses have more comfort and leisure than others. You will be able to choose among them as you please. I shall explain all that is necessary to you.”

“What then is your name?” I inquired.

“My name is Delusion.”

Hearing this, I was horrified at the thought of what fine companions I had acquired. One of them (I mused) had made mention of a bridle. The other was named Delusion. He spoke of his Queen as Vanity (although that seemed to have been an unguarded slip of the tongue). What next?

Accordingly, as I walked on in silence, with downcast eyes and unwilling, halting steps, Searchall exclaimed: “How now, you weathercock, I suspect you are minded to turn back!” Before I had time to answer, he threw a bridle over my neck, the bit of which slipped quickly into my mouth. He remarked at the same time: “Now you will be more willing to persevere in what you have begun.”

I examined the bridle and found it was made of the headstall of Curiosity, the bit having been forged of the steel of Tenacity in undertakings. Then I understood that I should no longer journey through the world of my own will, as I had intended, but should be forcibly driven on by my mind’s curiosity and my insatiable thirst for knowledge.

Just then Delusion on the other side remarked: “For my part, I present you with these glasses through which you must examine the world.” After he fixed the glasses on my nose, everything immediately assumed a changed aspect. For they had the power (as I have tested many times afterwards) of making distant objects appear near and the near distant, of the small large and the large small, of the ugly things beautiful and the beautiful ugly, of the black white and the white black, and so on. Hence, I realized that it was not without good reason that he was called Delusion, since he could not make and impose such glasses upon mankind.

As I learned later, the lenses were ground from the glass of Assumption, and were set in horn-rims called Habit.

Fortunately, he placed them askew on my nose, so that they did not fit me properly and did not prevent me, when I raised my head, from looking under them and thus seeing things in their proper, natural aspect. This gladdened me, and I thought to myself: even though you stop my mouth and cover my eyes, yet I trust God that you will not be able to restrain my reason and my mind. I will go and see what kind of world this is that my Lady Vanity desires us to examine in her own fashion, but forbids us to look at with our own eyes!

[...]

« CHAPTER 5 »

While I was thus musing, we suddenly found ourselves (I know not how) upon an exceedingly high tower, so that I seemed to touch the clouds. Looking down from this tower, I saw a city beautiful in appearance, shining, and prodigiously wide-spread, but not so great that I could not discern its limits and boundaries all around. The city formed a circle, and was surrounded with walls and ramparts, but instead of moats there yawned a gloomy abyss, to all appearances boundless and bottomless. Light shone only above the city, while beyond the walls it was pitch dark.

The city itself, as I perceived, was divided into innumerable streets, squares, houses and buildings both large and small. It swarmed with people as if with insects. Toward the east I saw a gate, from which an alley ran toward another gate facing the west. The second gate opened upon the streets of the city. I counted six principal streets running from east to west, parallel with each other. In the midst of these streets was a very large ring or marketplace. Farthest toward the west, upon a steep and rocky eminence, stood a lofty, magnificent castle toward which the inhabitants of the city frequently gazed.

My guide, Mr. Ubiquitous, remarked: "Behold, my pilgrim, here you have that fine world that you were so anxious to see! I brought you first to this elevation that you might survey it all and thus might understand its arrangement. The eastern gate is the gate of life, through which all who dwell on earth must enter. That other gate which is nearer to us is the gate of division, where all receive their lot in life and turn toward one or another calling.

"The streets which you see are the various classes, orders, and professions in which men are settled. Observe the six principal streets: in the one toward the south dwells the domestic group—parents, children and servants; in the next dwell the craftsmen and the tradesman; in the third, nearest the market-place, are found the learned professions, devoted to the intellectual labors; on the other side, opposite them, is the clerical order, to which the rest resort for religious ministrations; beyond them are the governing

and magisterial classes; and farthest to the north is the order of knights engaged in military affairs. How excellent it all is! The first beget all; the second sustain all; the third teach all; the fourth pray for all; the fifth judge and preserve good order among all; and the sixth fight for all. Thus all serve one another, and all live in harmony with each other.

“The castle toward the west is Arx Fortunate , the Castle of Fortune , where only the most distinguished people dwell in the enjoyment of wealth, pleasure, and glory.

The central square is common to all. There men of all classes come together to transact their necessary business. In the center of it, as the hub of everything else, stands the residence of Wisdom, the queen of the world.”

I was pleased with this excellent arrangement and began to praise God for having disposed all classes in such splendid order. But one thing I disliked, namely, that streets intersected each other in many places, so that here and there they ran together. It seemed that this might result in confusion and straying. Moreover, as I gazed at the global shape of the world, I palpably felt it move and whirl in a circle until I feared to be overcome with dizziness. For wherever I cast my glance, everything to the least mote seemed to swarm before my eyes. Moreover, when I stopped to listen, the air was filled with the sounds of pounding, striking, shuffling, whispering, and screaming.

My interpreter, Delusion, remarked: “You see, my dear fellow, how delightful this world is, and how splendid are all things in it, even though you view it only from afar. What will you say when you examine it in detail and with all its delights? Who would not be happy to live in such a world?”

“I am much pleased with it from a distance,” I answered: “how it shall be later on, I cannot tell.”

“All will be well, believe me,” he replied: “but now let us go.”

“Wait,” Mr. Ubiquitous interposed, “let me show him from here what otherwise we do not intend to visit. Turn back toward the east: do you discern something crawling out of the dark gate and creeping toward us?”

“Yes, I see it,” I replied.

“Those are human beings,” he continued, “just entering the world. They themselves know not whence (for as yet they are not self-conscious) nor do they know themselves to be human. Hence, darkness envelopes them, and they merely wail and cry. But as they proceed up the street, the darkness slowly disappears and the light increases, until they reach the gate beneath us. Let us now go and see what transpires there.”

« CHAPTER 6 »

We descended a dark, winding staircase and entered the gate in which a large hall was filled with young people. On the right sat a fierce-looking old man holding a large copper pot in his hand. I noticed that all who arrived from the Gate of Life presented themselves before him and each, putting his hand into the pot, drew out a piece of paper inscribed with a word. Thereupon, he went toward one of the streets, either running and joyfully shouting, or walking with a sorrowful mien, complaints, grimaces, and backward glances.

I approached nearer and took a look at some of the slips. One read, Rule!; another, Serve!; or Command!; or Obey!; or Write!; or Study!; or Hoel!; or Judge!; or Fight!; and so on. I was amazed at the scene. Mr. Searchall explained it by saying: “Here are distributed the callings and occupations in accordance with which each person is allotted his lifework. He who directs these lots is called Fate, and all who enter the world must receive his assignment.”

Just then Delusion nudged me, indicating that I, too, should draw a lot. But I begged that I might not be assigned to any particular occupation (until I had first examined it) in order not to entrust my lot, come what may, to blind chance. I was told, however, that without the knowledge and consent of the lord regent, Fate, such an exception was not permitted. Stepping up to him, therefore, I humbly presented my petition: that I came with the intention of examining all things before I would make my choice of what would most appeal to me.

“Son,” he answered, “you see that others do not do so, but abide by what they receive or what happens to fall to them. But since you desire it so much, I consent.” Having then inscribed on a slip of paper the word *Speculare!* (i.e., Examine or Investigate), he handed it to me, thus dismissing me.

« CHAPTER 7 »

Thereupon, my guide remarked: “Since you wish to investigate all things, let us begin by visiting the market place.” He immediately led me there. And behold! such countless multitudes were gathered there that they seemed like a mist. People of all nations and languages of the world, of every age, stature, class, order, and profession, as well as both sexes, were gathered there. As I gazed at them, they were milling about hither and thither like bees at swarming time, or even more strangely.

For some were wandering about, others were running or driving, or stood still, while another group was sitting or lying down. One group was rising while another was lying down, or was squirming about. Some were alone, others in large or small companies. Their costume and appearance also differed most widely: some indeed were stark naked, gesticulating queerly. When some of them met, they gestured with their hands, mouths, knees and otherwise, or huddled and cuddled....they cut all kinds of capers.

“Here you see the noble human kind, those delightful, reasonable, and immortal creatures, bearing the image and likeness of immortal God, as may be learned from the great variety of their glorious deeds,” my companion declaimed: “here you may behold as in a mirror the dignity of your kind.”

I examined them more keenly, therefore, and observed, in the first place, that each one of those milling in the crowd wore a mask on his face, but when he was alone or with his equals, he took it off. However, as soon as he rejoined the crowd, he put it on again. I inquired what this meant. My guide answered: “That, my dear son, is human prudence, so as not to appear to everyone as one really is. Alone, one needs not constrain himself:

but among people it befits one to appear decorously and to give a seemly appearance to one's affairs." I was seized by a desire to examine more diligently how these people appeared without artificial make-up.

And watching them attentively, I saw that they were all variously disfigured, not merely in their features, but in their bodies as well. Most of them were pimply, scabby, or leprous. Besides, one had a swine lip, another dog's teeth, or ox horns, or ass ears, or basilisk eyes, or a fox tail, or wolf claws. Some, I observed, strutted about with a proudly erected peacock's neck, others with an erect lapwing crest, or with horse-hoofs, and so on. Most of them resembled monkeys. Horrified, I exclaimed: "But I see monsters here!"

"Of what monsters are you babbling, you meddler?" remarked my interpreter, threatening me with his fist; "if only you look properly through your glasses, you will recognize them as human!"

Moreover, some of the passers-by overheard my calling them monsters and stopped, threatening and reviling me. I realized that it was useless to argue. Therefore I remained silent, thinking to myself: if they wish to regard themselves as human, so be it. But I see what I see. Moreover, I was afraid lest my companion should readjust the glasses and thus delude. I decided, therefore, to be quiet and rather to concentrate on those fine things of which I had seen the beginning. I looked about me again and noticed that many people were dexterous in the manipulation of their masks, quickly snatching them off and donning them again, so that in an instant they could assume any appearance which befitted their need. Then I began to understand the course of the world. Nevertheless, I held my peace.

I also observed and heard that they spoke to each other in different languages. Consequently, for the greatest part they did not understand each other, and either did not answer or replied each one differently. In some places a large crowd gathered, all speaking at the same and each holding forth, none listening to the rest, although they tried to secure a hearing for themselves by pulling others toward them. Nevertheless, even so they failed,

often bringing on fights and scuffles. "In God's name, is this the Tower of Babel?" I exclaimed: "everybody plays his own fiddle, could there be any greater confusion?"

There were among them but few idlers, for the majority occupied themselves with some work or other. Yet their occupations (and I should have never suspected) were but childish games, or at most drudgery. For some of them were gathering rubbish and distributing it among themselves; others were rolling timber and stones back and forth, or hoisting them on pulleys and lowering them again; others were digging in the ground, or conveying or carrying soil from place to place; the rest were working with bells, mirrors, bellows, rattles, and other trinkets. Some were even playing with their own shadow, measuring, chasing, or grasping at it. All this was done so assiduously that many sighed and perspired, while others fainted with fatigue. Moreover, there were officers stationed everywhere who directed and allotted the tasks with great zeal, while the workers obeyed with equal alacrity.

Filled with astonishment, I exclaimed: "Alas! was then man made for wasting the keenness of his divinely-given talents upon such vain and petty toil?"

"What is vain about it?" retorted my interpreter; "does it not appear as in a mirror how all problems are solved by human ingenuity? One engages in one thing, another in something else."

"But all," I said, "are busied with useless drudgery which is unworthy of their glorious eminence."

"Do not play the wiseacre," he replied; "they are not in heaven yet, but are still on earth and must deal with earthly things. Observe, by the way, in what an orderly fashion everything is done."

Again examining them, I noticed that nothing more disorderly could be invented. For while someone was staggering and stumbling under a load, another came and meddled with him; this led to brawls, fights, and scuffles. Then they became reconciled, only to tear each other soon afterwards. Sometimes several caught hold of the same thing; then they all dropped it and

ran away, each in a different direction. Those who were subject to officers and overseers did what they were told willy-nilly, because they had to; but even there I saw much confusion. Some broke ranks and fled, while others grumbled at their foremen, refusing to do what they had ordered. Some snatched the overseers' cudgels from them and robbed them. Hence, all was in a hubbub. But since they were wont to call it orderly, I dared not say them nay.

[...]

« CHAPTER 9 »

Proceeding, we entered the street inhabited by craftsmen, which was subdivided into many narrow alleys and smaller squares, and all about us we observed various halls, workshops, forges, benches, stores, and booths full of quaint-looking implements. Men plied these tools in a curious manner, with clattering, striking, squeaking, squealing, whistling, piping, blowing, blasting, jingling, and rattling. I saw some digging in the earth, either tearing up the surface of digging underneath like moles. Others were wading in water, rivers, or the sea; yet others were tending fires, gaping into the air, fighting wild beasts, dressing wood or stone, or carrying and hauling various commodities from place to place.

My interpreter said to me: "Behold these brisk and cheerful occupations! Which of them do you like the best?"

"There is doubtless some cheerfulness here," I answered; "nevertheless, I also observe much drudgery and hear many groans along with it."

"Not all work is so arduous," he answered; "let us look closer and examine some these trades." So they led me through them one after another, and I scrutinized them all and tried my hand at one or another to test them; but to describe them all I am neither able nor willing. I shall not, however, keep secret what I concluded in general.

In the first place, I saw that all these human occupations were but toil and drudgery, and each had some disadvantages and dangers of its own. I saw that those who were working with fire

were scorched and blackened like Moors: the clatter of hammers was ever jangling in their ears and had rendered them half-deaf; the glare of the fire had blinded their eyes; and their skin was perpetually singed. Those who were working underground had darkness and terrors for companions, and, as happened not infrequently, were liable to be buried alive. Those working in water were constantly soaked like roof-thatch, were shivering with cold like an aspen leaf, suffered from sclerosis of the viscera, and not a few of them fell a prey to the deep. Those who were working in wood, stone, and other heavy substances, were full of callouses, sighing, and exhaustion. Indeed, I saw some engaged in such asinine drudgery that they struggled and toiled to perspiration, exhaustion, collapse, injury, and finally to total breakdown; but despite all their miserable toil, they were hardly able to earn bread for themselves. Indeed, I observed others whose livelihoods were easier and more remunerative; but the less drudgery, the more vice and fraud there were.

Secondly, I observed that men toiled only to feed their mouths; for whatever they earned, they crammed it all down their throats or the throats of their families, save in the rare cases when they stinted their mouths in order to put it into their bags. But, as I perceived, their bags were either torn, so that what they had put into them fell out again and others picked it up; or another came and snatched it out of their hands; or he himself, having tripped, dropped the bag or tore, or otherwise lost it. Thus I plainly saw that these human toils resembled water being poured from one glass into another; money was earned to be spent again, with the only difference that it was easier spent than earned, no matter whether it was crammed down the throat or hoarded in money coffers. Consequently, I saw everywhere many more poor than rich.

Thirdly, I saw that every occupation required the whole man. If anyone but looked back or acted a little slowly, he was soon left behind and everything dropped from his hands. Hence, before he realized it, he found himself on the rocks.

In the fourth place, I observed many obstacles in the way. Before some one was started in business, a good portion of his

life was gone; and after he was started, it did not look closely to his affairs, everything went against him; moreover, I noticed that even the most diligent among them met with loss as often as with profit.

In the fifth place, I saw everywhere (especially among those engaged in the same kind of business) much envy and ill-will. If work piled up for one of them, or he enjoyed brisker trade than another, his neighbors gave him sour looks or gnashed their teeth at him, and whenever they could, wrecked his business: hence quarrels, disaffection, and cursing; some out of sheer despair threw away their tools and lapsed into idleness and voluntary poverty.

In the sixth place, I noticed everywhere much falsehood and fraud. Whatever anyone did, especially for a customer, was done shoddily and carelessly; yet he extolled and praised his own work to high heaven.

In the seventh place, I found here a great deal of superfluity; and became firmly convinced that most of the occupations were but crass futility and useless folly. For the human body requires but frugal and plain food and drink, need be clothed with but plain and unostentatious garments; and be sheltered in a modest and simple house; but little and easily discharged care and labor are required, as was customary in ancient times. But I found that the world either could not or would not comprehend this simple truth, for now it is customary that stuffing and filling of the belly requires so many and such rare delicacies that the greater part of mankind is employed in their gathering on land and sea, and in this drudgery men waste their strength and hazard their lives; moreover, for the preparation of this food specially-trained masters must now be employed. Similarly, not a small part of humankind is engaged in building shelters and procuring materials for clothing and in tailoring them in various preposterous styles; all this is useless, superfluous, often even sinful. Likewise, I saw craftsmen whose entire art and occupation consisted of making childish trifles and other playthings, intended merely for amusement and the wasting of time. Others there were whose task was manufacturing and multiplying instruments of cruelty, such as swords, daggers, battle-maces, muskets, and so forth, all for

the killing of men. How people can conscientiously and with a cheerful mind ply such trades I know not. But I know that if the useless, superfluous, and the sinful were excluded and eliminated from these trades, the greater part of the business of mankind would collapse. For this, as well as for the above-mentioned reasons, my mind could find no pleasure in any of them.

My conclusion was strengthened when I saw that all these occupations were only of the body and for the body; while man, possessing a greater thing than the body—namely a soul—ought rather to bestow his principal care upon that and seek its well-being above all other things. [...]

« CHAPTER 10 »

Thereupon my guide said to me: “At last I understand where your mind draws you: among the learned with you, among the learned; that is the bait for you, an easier, more peaceful, and for the mind a more useful life.”

“That is indeed so,” said my interpreter; “for what can be more delightful for a man than to withdraw from, and to ignore unprofitable manual toil and give himself wholly to the investigation of all splendid causes? That is indeed what makes mortal men like, if not equal to, immortal God, so they may become as though omniscient, knowing and understanding what is, has been, or is to be in the heavens above, upon the earth, and in the abyss beneath; true, such perfection is not attained by all to an equal degree.”

“Lead me there, why do you tarry?” said I.

We then came to a gate called Discipline : it was long, narrow, and dark, full of armed guards, to whom every one desiring to enter the street of the learned had to report and request his guidance. I observed that the crowds of those who presented themselves, for the greatest part young men, were immediately put through various severe examinations. The first of these, required of all, aimed at ascertaining what kind of purse, posterior, head, brain (which they judged by the nasal mucus), and skin each of the candidates brought. If the head were of steel, the brain of

quicksilver, the posterior of lead, the skin of iron, and the purse of gold, they praised him and willingly conducted him farther; if he lacked any of these five prerequisites, they either ordered him back or admitted him grudgingly, foreboding ill success for him.

I was amazed and inquired: "Does so much depend upon these five metals that they search for them so diligently?"

"Very much, indeed," replied my interpreter; "the head that not of steel would crack: without the brain of quicksilver the pupil could not make a mirror of it; without the skin of sheet-iron he would not survive the formative process; not possessing the seat of lead, he would hatch nothing but miscarry everything; and without the purse of gold, where would he obtain the necessary leisure or teachers, both living and dead? Or do you imagine that such great things may be obtained without cost?"

Then only did I understand that this profession requires health, intelligence, perseverance, patience, and expenditure of money. "It may therefore be truly affirmed," I said, "*Non cuivis contingit adire*. Not every log is fit to serve for grained veneer."

We proceeded further into the gate where I observed that each guard, choosing one or more of the candidates, led them on, blew something into their ears, wiped their eyes, steamed their nose and nostrils, drew out and trimmed their tongue, taught them to clasp or extend their hands and fingers, and coached them in I do not know how many more ways. Some guards even attempted to bore their pupils' heads and to pour something into them. My interpreter, seeing frightened thereat, said "Be not amazed; the learned must possess hands, tongue, eyes, ears, brain, and all other external and internal organs of a different order from those of the ignorant masses of manking; for that purpose they are here reformed, and that cannot be accomplished without toil and pain." Then I looked and saw how deadly those poor wretches had to pay for their re-formation. I do not speak of their purses, but of their skins which they had to expose. For they were beaten with fists, pointers, canes, and sticks on their cheeks, head, back, and seat until they shed blood, and were full of bruises and scars, weals and callouses. Some seeing this, before they surrendered themselves to the guards, cast but a hasty glance inside the gate

and ran away: others tore themselves out of the hands of the would-be re-formers and likewise fled. Only a small remnant persevered to the end, to proceed further into the square; desirous of joining that profession, I too underwent the formation in a like manner, although not without hardships and bitterness.

When we left the gate, I noticed that each of those who had acquired something of the preliminary training, received a device by which he could be recognized as belonging to the scholars: an ink-horn stuck under his belt, a pen behind his ear, and a blank book for recording knowledge in his hand; I too received those articles. Mr. Searchall thereupon said to me: "We are now confronted with four paths: philosophy, medicine, law, and theology; where shall we go first?"

"Do as you judge best," I replied. "Let us first go to the square where they all meet," he suggested; "you will there see them all together, then let us visit their lecture rooms separately."

Thereupon, he led me to a square and behold! a crowd of students, masters, doctors, priests, both youths and grey-beards! Some were congregated in groups, conversing and disputing among themselves; others hugged out-of-the-way nooks, away from all the rest. Some (as I clearly perceived, although I dared not speak of it) had eyes but no tongue; others had tongue but no eyes; some had only ears, but no tongue or eyes; and so forth; then I realized that deficiencies existed even here. Seeing that they all issued from a certain place and again re-entered it, like bees swarming in and out of a hive, I prompted my companions to go in as well.

So we entered; and behold, a large hall the end of which was out of sight; on all sides were ranged such long rows of shelves, sections, cases, and containers that a hundred thousand wagon loads could not remove them all, and each had its separate designation and title.

"What kind of apothecary's shop have we come into," I inquired.

"One which deals in medicines for mind-diseases," answered my interpreter: "such a place is properly called a library. Behold these endless stores of wisdom!" I looked around and watched

groups of scholars approaching and handling the equipment. Some selected the best and wittiest, and drawing out a piece, ate it, slowly chewing and digesting it. I went up to one of them and asked him what he was doing.

“I am cultivating myself.”

“And how does the food taste?”

“While I am chewing it,” he replied, “it tastes bitter and acrid; but later it turns sweet.”

“But why are you eating it?” I continued.

“I find it more convenient to carry it within,” he answered; “for I am then surer of it. Do you not observe the benefit?”

I scrutinized him more carefully and saw that he was stout and fat, with a healthy complexion; his eyes shone like candles, his diction was carefully chosen, and everything about him had an air of liveliness.

“Look at these!” my interpreter told me.

I looked and behold! some men behaving very greedily, glutting themselves with anything they could lay their hands on. Observing them more carefully, I noticed that they neither improved their complexion nor gained flesh or fat, save that their belly was blown and swelled out; I also perceived that whatever they crammed in, passed out at both ends undigested. Some of them became dizzy or lost their minds; others grew pallid, pined away, and died. Others seeing this, singled out these men as a warning against the dangers in the use of books (as they called the boxes); thereupon, some ran away; others exhorted all to deal carefully with those things. Hence, these latter did not consume them inwardly, but packed them into sacks or bags which they kept suspended before or behind their persons (for the greatest part, they selected the following titles: the Vocabulary, the Dictionary, the Lexicon, Illustrations, Quotations, Loci communes, Postils, Concordances, Herbaria, and such others as they deemed the most appropriate to their needs) and these they carried about, and whenever they had occasion to speak or write, they drew them out of their pockets and culled out whatever was needed for their tongue or pen.

Perceiving this, I said: "I notice that these people carry their knowledge in their pockets."

"Those are merely aids to memory," my interpreter answered; "have you not heard of them?"

I have, indeed, heard some praise this custom on the ground that such men brought out only generally approved knowledge. That might very well have been the case. I observed, however, that the custom had this disadvantage. It happened in my presence that some misplaced boxes, while others, having laid them aside, lost them in fire. What running about, wringing of hands, lamenting, and imploring of aid then ensued! For the time being nobody was willing to dispute, or write, or preach; but walking about with downcast eyes, cringing and blushing, he begged or purchased from his acquaintances a new outfit; those, however, who had inner store of knowledge, were not afraid of such a mishap.

Moreover, I observed certain of them who did not even trouble themselves to carry the boxes in their pockets, but stored them in their rooms; I followed them and saw that they made beautiful receptacles for the books, painting them various colors, some daubing them with silver and gold; then they placed the books on or took them off the shelves, pleased with looking at them; they continued putting up and taking down the books, approaching or retreating, pointing out to each other or to strangers the excellent appearance of them, all superficially. Some occasionally looked at the titles to memorize the names of the works.

"What are these folk playing?" I inquired.

"My dear fellow," replied the interpreter, "it is a fine thing to possess a fine library."

"Even when it is not used?" I remarked.

"Lovers of books are also counted among the learned," he rejoined.

I thought to myself: just as well might a man be counted among blacksmiths if he possessed a heap of hammers and pincers, but did not know how to use them! Nevertheless, I forebore to speak for fear of catching something.

[...]

« CHAPTER 12 »

Thereupon, Mr. Ubiquitous remarked: "Now come along, for I shall take you to a place where you will find the highest peak of human ingenuity, and show you an occupation so delightful that anyone who has once turned to it is never again willing to abandon it as long as he lives, because of the charm and delight which it affords his mind." I begged him not to delay in showing me. Thereupon he led me down into some cellars where I saw several rows of fireplaces, small ovens, kettles, and glass instruments, all shining brightly. Men tending the fires were gathering and piling on brushwood and blowing into it, or again extinguishing it, filling and pouring something from one glass into another.

"Who are these folk, and what are they doing?" I asked.

"They are the most ingenious of philosophers," my interpreter answered, "effecting instantly what the celestial sun with its heat can effect in the bowels of the earth only after a considerable number of years: they transform various metals into their highest category, namely, gold."

"But for what purpose," I asked, "since iron and other metals are of more frequent use than gold?"

"What a dunce you are!" he exclaimed, "don't you know that gold is the most precious of metals, and that he who has gold need fear no poverty?"

"Besides, that which has the potency to change metals into gold possesses other most astounding properties: for instance, it can preserve human health to the end of life, and ward off death for two or three hundred years. In fact, if men knew how to use it, they could make themselves immortal. For this stone is nothing less than the seed of life, the kernel and the quintessence of the universe, from which all animals, plants, metals, and the very elements derive their being."

I was affrighted, hearing such astounding news, and asked: "Are these people, then, immortal?"

“Not all are so fortunate as to discover the stone,” he answered, “and those who find it do not always know how to use it effectively.”

“If I had the stone,” I remarked, “I would take care to use it in such a way as to keep death away, and would procure plenty of gold for myself and others. But where is the stone to be found?”

“It is prepared here,” he answered.

“In these small kettles?” I exclaimed.

“Yes.”

Full of curiosity, I walked about scrutinizing everything to learn what and how the thing was done; but I observed that not all fared equally. The fire of one was not hot enough: his mixture did not reach the boiling point. Another had too intense a fire, and his glass retorts cracked and something puffed out. As he explained it, the nitrogen had escaped; and he wept. Another, while pouring the liquid, spilled it or mixed it wrongly. Another burned his eyes out, and was thus unable to supervise the calcination and the fixation: or bleared his sight with smoke to such an extent that before he cleared his eyes the nitrogen escaped. Some died of asphyxiation from the smoke. But for the greatest part they did not have enough coal in their bags and were obliged to run about to borrow it elsewhere, while in the meantime their concoction cooled off and was utterly ruined. This was of very frequent, in fact of almost constant, occurrence. Although they did not tolerate anyone among themselves save such as possessed full bags, yet these seemed to have a way of drying up very rapidly, and soon grew empty: they were obliged either to suspend their operations or to run away to borrow.

After watching them, I said: “I see a good many here toil vain; but perceive none who succeeds in getting the stone. I also see that these people boil and burn both their gold and their lives, and often squander and burn both; but where are those with the heaps of gold and immortality?”

“Naturally, they do not reveal themselves to you,” my interpreter answered, “nor would I advise them so to do. Such a priceless thing must be kept secret. For if one of the rulers learned of such a man, he would immediately demand his surrender and

the poor fellow would become no better than a prisoner for life; consequently, them must keep themselves in hiding.”

Then I observed some of the scorched ones gather together, and turning my ear toward them, I heard them discuss the causes of their failures. One blamed the philosophers for their too involved description of the art; another lamented the brittleness of the glass implements; a third complained of an untimely and inauspicious aspect of the planets; a fourth was disgruntled with the earthly impurities of the mercury; a fifth complained of lack of capital. In short, there were so many causes of failure that I saw that they were at a loss to know how to mend their art. Thus when they left one after another, I left also.

[...]

« CHAPTER 14 »

Having been conducted through some alleys between the physics and the chemistry lecture rooms into another square, I beheld a gruesome sight. There men stretched out a corpse before them and cutting off one limb after another, examined the viscera, with keen relish exhibiting to each other what they found.” What cruelty to deal with a human being as if he were a beast!” I exclaimed.” It must be done; this is their school,” my interpreter replied.

Thereupon, abandoning that task and dispersing into gardens, meadows, fields, and mountains, they plucked whatever they found growing there and piled it into such heaps that many years would scarcely suffice for its mere sorting and scanning. Then each snatched from the heap what he saw fit or happened to lay his hand on and running to the ripped-up body, measured it with the limbs as to their length, width, and thickness. One said that it fitted; another denied it. Then they shouted at each other in dispute; they had great controversies about the very names of the herbs. He who knew the greatest number of them and how to measure and weight them, was crowned with a wreath of those herbs, and was to be called the doctor of the art.

Then I saw a number of wounded, both externally and internally, with putrid and rotting limbs, brought or conducted to the physicians; they approached them, examined the putrefications, smelling the stench emitted from them, and scrutinized the evacuations proceeding from both above and below, until the sight was disgusting; this they called diagnosis. Then they cooked, steamed, roasted, broiled, cauterized, cooled, burned, hacked, sawed, stabbed, sewed again, bound, annointed, hardened, softened, wrapped, or moistened, and I know not what more they did in order to effect the cure. In the meantime, their patients had been expiring under their hands, not a few of them lamenting the doctors' ignorance or carelessness as the causes of their death. In a word, I saw that although the art of these fine salve-mongers brought them a certain gain, it also involved them, on the other hand (if they wished to do justice to their calling), in a great deal of very strenuous and partly even disgusting labor, and in the end brought them as much blame as praise. This made it distasteful to me.

« CHAPTER 15 »

In the last place, they led me into still another very spacious lecture room where I saw a greater number of distinguished men than anywhere else. The walls around were painted with stone walls, barriers, picket-fences, plank-fences, bars, rails, and gate staves, interspersed at various intervals by gaps and holes, doors and gates, bolts and locks, and along with it larger and smaller keys and hooks. All this they pointed out to each other, measuring where and how one might or might not pass through.

“What are these people doing?” I inquired. I was told that they were searching for means how every man in the world might hold his own or might also peacefully obtain something from another's property without disturbing order and concord. “That is a fine thing!” I remarked. But observing it a while, it grew disgusting to me.

For, in the first place, I noticed that the barriers enclosed neither the soul, the mind, nor the body of man, but solely his

property, which is of incidental importance to him; and it did not seem to me worthy of the extremely difficult toil that was, as I saw, expended upon it.

Besides, I observed that all this science was founded upon the mere whim of a few men to whom one or another thing seemed worthy of being enjoined as a statute and which the others now observed. Moreover (as I noticed here), some erected or demolished the bars or gaps as the notion entered their heads. Consequently, there was much outright contradiction in it all, the rectification of which caused a group of them a great deal of curious and ingenious labor; I was amazed that they sweated and toiled so much upon most insignificant minutiae, amounting to very little, and occurring scarcely once in a millenium; and all with not a little pride. For the more a man broke through some bar or made an opening that he was able to wall up again, the better he thought of himself and the more was he envied by others. But some (in order to show the keenness of their wit) rose up and opposed him, contending that the bars should be set up or the gaps broken thus so. Hence arose contentions and quarrels, until finally separating, they painted each his case in his own way, at the same time attracting spectators to themselves.

Observing this tomfoolery sufficiently, I shook my head, exclaiming: "Let us hurry away! I feel distressed here!"

"Is there anything in the world to your liking?" my interpreter angrily retorted. "You find fault even with the noblest of callings, you weathercock!"

"It seems that he is religious-minded; let us take him to see the clerical professions; perhaps he will find it to his liking," Mr. Ubiquitous suggested.

[...]

« CHAPTER 19 »

We then entered another street where I saw on all sides a great number of high and low seats, and heard the occupants addressed as the honorable constable, the honorable mayor, the

honorable burgomaster, the honorable magistrate, the honorable regent, his lordship the burgrave, his lordship the chancellor, his lordship the viceregent, the honorable judges, his grace the king, or the count, or the lord, and so forth.

“Here you see men who pass judgements and sentences in lawsuits, punishing the evil-doers, protecting the good, and thus preserving order in the world,” my interpreter remarked.

“This is indeed a splendid thing, and no doubt for mankind a necessary one,” I replied, “but where do such people come from?”

“Some are born to their office,” he answered, “while others are selected either by the former, or by their communities, being acknowledged as the wisest and the most experienced of all and the best versed in justice and the laws.”

“That is also splendid,” I said.

Just then my attention was attracted to some who were acquiring seats by bribery, or by importunate solicitation, of by flattery, while some seated themselves therein by force. Seeing this, I cried out: “Look, look, the corruption!”

“Keep still, you interfering fool!” warned my interpreter, “or if they should hear you, you would catch it!”

“But why do they not wait till they are elected?” I expostulated.

“Well, what of it?” he retorted; “doubtless they are confident of being equal to the task. Moreover, as long as others accept them as such, what business is it of yours?”

Thereupon, I kept still, and adjusting my glasses, I observed them closely. Thus scrutinizing them, I made an unexpected discovery; for scarcely a single one of them possessed all bodily organs, but each lacked some most necessary limb. Some had no ears with which to hear the grievances of the subjects; others lacked eyes to perceive the evils about them; others lacked the nose wherewith to scent the machinations of crooks plotting against the law; others lacked the tongue with which to defend the mute, oppressed masses; others lacked arms with which to enforce the pronouncements of justice; many even lacked the heart to dare to act in accordance with the dictates of justice.

Those, however, who possessed all their bodily organs appeared to me greatly harassed; for they were constantly importuned by petitioners, so that they could hardly eat or sleep in peace. The former, on the contrary, spent more than half of their time in idleness.

“But why is law and justice entrusted to people who lack the necessarily bodily organs for the task?” I queried. My interpreter retorted that it was not so, that it only appeared so to me.

“For,” he said, “whoever knows not how to feign knows not how to rule. He who rules others must often see not, hear not, and understand not, even though he does in fact see, hear, and understand. But you, being inexperienced in politics, cannot understand these things.”

“Nevertheless, in truth I perceive clearly that they do not possess what they should have,” I persisted.

“As to that, I advise you to keep still,” he replied; “otherwise I promise you that unless you cease your impertinent cavils you shall find yourself where you scarcely wish to be. Do you not know that contempt of court is a capital offense?” Thereupon I kept still, but observed all quietly....

[...]

« CHAPTER 28 »

I began to fear that the true satisfaction, in which alone my mind could feel wholly secure and certain, was to be found neither in the world nor even in the castle itself. These thoughts oppressed me more and more sorely; nor could my interpreter, Delusion (despite all his efforts) bring me relief.

Finally I cried out: “Oh, woe is me! Shall I ever find satisfaction in this miserable world? For all things are full of futility and misery!”

“Whose fault is it, you spoilsport, but your own?” my interpreter retorted, “for you detest everything which should please you! Look at others who gay and well content they are in their callings, having found sufficient sweetness in their own lot!”

“They are either insane altogether,” I expostulated with him, “or they lie; for it is not possible that they should enjoy true happiness.”

“Then become insane like them,” retorted Ubiquitous, “if it will ease your sorrow.”

“I am not able to manage even that, as you yourself well know,” I replied. “For how many times have I tried it, but perceiving the violent changes and the miserable end of it all, I gave it up.”

“What else causes it but your own fantasies?” rejoined my interpreter. “Were you not so fastidious about all human affairs and did you not toss them about like a swine does a straw-wisp, you would possess, like all the rest, a peaceful mind and enjoy pleasure, joy, and happiness.”

“That is to say,” I answered, “if I, like you, accepted the external appearance of things, and took some stale witticism for joy, the perusal of some literary hodgepodge for wisdom, and a bit of accidental fortune for the apex of satiety! But what of the sweat, the tears, aches, confusion, short-comings, accidents, and all the other misfortunes without number, extent, and limit among all classes? Alas! alas the sorrow of this miserable life! You have led me through everything, and to what avail? You have promised and exhibited to me wealth, knowledge, comfort, and security. But which of these do I possess? None. What have I learned? Nothing. Where am I? I myself know not. This only I know, that after so much danger, and after exhausting and wearying of my mind I find nothing in the end but an inward pain in myself and the hatred of others toward me.”

“It serves you right!” my interpreter retorted, “why have you disdained my advice which has been from the beginning that you distrust nothing but believe everything; that you test nothing but accept all; that you criticize nothing but be pleased with everything? Had you taken that path, you would have traveled tranquilly and would have found favor with men and pleasure for yourself.”

“Having been doubtless neatly deceived by you,” I answered, “I should have raved, like the rest; wandering to and fro, I should have rejoiced; groaning under a burden, I should have frolicked;

sick and dying, I should have shouted for joy. I saw, observed, and learned that neither I nor anyone else is anything, knows anything, or possesses anything, but that we all but imagine ourselves to know something. We grasp at a shadow while the truth escapes us. Woe to us!”

“I repeat what I said before,” my interpreter rejoined; “you yourself are to blame for your condition, because you demand something great and extraordinary, such as is granted to no one.”

“Consequently I grieve even more,” I replied, “that not only I myself, but the whole human race is so miserable; and so blind that it is not conscious of its own miseries.”

“I do not know how and by what means to satisfy your poor addled pate,” my interpreter retorted, “since there is not a single thing you like, neither the world nor the people in it, neither work nor idleness, neither learning nor ignorance, I know not what to do with you and what in the world to recommend to you.”

Mr. Ubiquitous then suggested: “Let us take him to the Queen’s castle over there in the center; he may come to his senses there.”

[...]

◀ CHAPTER 36 ▶

Being unable to look upon it any longer or to bear the pain in my heart, I fled, desiring to seek refuge in some desert, or rather, if it were possible, to escape from the world altogether. But my guides set out after me and catching up with me, demanded to know where I was fleeing. Wishing to repulse them by silence, I answered not a word. But when they obstinately importuned me, determined not to let me go, I exclaimed: “I already clearly perceive that it is useless to expect better things in the world. My hope is dead. Woe is me!”

“Are you never to recover your sense, even after witnessing such examples as you have seen?” they retorted.

“I choose rather to die a thousand times,” I answered, “than to remain here where such things occur and to look upon wrong, fraud, lie, guile, cruelty. Therefore, I prefer death to life; I go to see the lot of the dead whom I observe being borne out.”

Mr. Ubiquitous at once consented, saying that it was well to see and understand even that, but my other companion did not advise it, in fact, opposed it. I paid no attention to him and tearing myself away, went on. He remained behind and left me.

Thereupon, looking around, I observed the manner of the dying, of whom there were plenty about me. I saw a sorry spectacle, for every one gave up his spirit and terror, lamentations, fear and trembling, not knowing what would become of him afterwards nor where he would find himself after leaving the world. I likewise feared it, but nevertheless desiring to understand it a little better, I walked between the rows of biers until I reached the end of the world and of light; there the friends of the deceased closed their eyes and blindly hurled their dead into the abyss. Casting off the glasses of delusion and rubbing my eyes, I leaned out as far as I could. There I saw nothing but frightful darkness and gloom of which neither the bottom nor the end could be fathomed by the human mind, and in which nothing but worms, frogs, serpents, scorpions, pus and stench were found; besides, a smell of brimstone and pitch, overpowering the body and the soul, issued thence, in a word, horror unspeakable!

All my innermost parts were paralysed, and trembling all over and terror-stricken, I fell fainting to the ground. “Oh, thrice miserable, wretched, unhappy men!” I cried out in anguish, “Is this your ultimate glory? Is this the conclusion of so many of your splendid deeds? Is this the goal of your learning and the manifold wisdom with which you are so puffed up? Is this the desired peace and rest after your innumerable labors and struggles? Is this the immortality which you forever promise yourselves? Oh, that I had never been born! That I had never passed through the gate of life, if ather all the futilities of the world I am to become a prey to this darkness and horror! Oh, God, God, my God! If Thou exist, O God, have pity upon me, a wretched man!”

« CHAPTER 37 »

When I ceased speaking, but still continued to tremble all over with terror, I heard a still small voice behind me, whispering: "Return!" I lifted my head and looked around to see who was calling me and where he commanded me to return; but I saw no one, not even my guide, Mr. Ubiquitous. For even he had left me.

Then, lo! the voice again sounded: "Return!"

Not knowing whither to return, nor how to find my way out of the darkness, I felt dismayed, but the voice called a third time: "Return to the place whence you came, to the home of your heart and shut the door behind you!"

I obeyed the counsel as I understood it, and I did exceedingly well to have thus obeyed God who was counselling me, but even that was His gift. Collecting my thoughts as well as I could, and shutting my eyes, ears, mouth, and nostrils, and all other outward passages. I entered into the inner recesses of my heart, and lo! it was dark. But after peering into it, and looking about a little, I perceived after a while a very faint light streaming in through some cracks, by which I was able to distinguish above in the vault of this my chamber a large round glass window. But it was so dirty and so thickly smeared with filth that no light could penetrate it.

Looking about me by this dim light, I discerned various pictures on the walls which, as it appeared to me, possessed once upon a time considerable beauty; but now the colors were faded and some limbs of the figures were severed or broken off. I approached closer and noticed their names: Prudence, Humility, Justice, Purity, Temperance, and so forth. In the middle of the room were scattered some damaged and broken ladders; also broken pulleys and pieces of ropes. Besides, I saw large wings with plucked feathers, as well as clock-wheels or bent cylinders, teeth, and rods, all scattered pell-mell.

I wondered what the purpose of these various instruments was and how and by whom they had been damaged: and how they could be repaired. But looking and considering I could think

of nothing; nevertheless, I began to hope that he who had led me into this chamber by his call—whoever he might be—would make himself heard again and would direct me what else to do. For I began to be pleased with the beginnings of what I saw: the chamber did not have the offensive stench of those other places which I had visited in the world, neither did I hear the noise and clatter, the din and crash, the disquiet and whirl, the tugging and violence, (of which the world was full) for all was quiet here.

[...]

research blogging

overview

keeping a journal

building a commonplace book

preparing reports & documents



research blogging: overview

The pilgrimage allegory in the preceding pages provides a good background to the kind of research you'll be doing over the next several weeks. To be honest, I'm not quite sure what all the connections are (we can figure those out together), but I do think writing and research require the kind of impassioned curiosity exhibited by our protagonist in the labyrinth story. Research is all about starting out with questions (like *What should I be when I grow up?* or *Why is the world so messed up?*) and then venturing off, through real and virtual spaces, in search of answers.

'Research blogging' is the method we'll practice in this course in order to develop good reading, writing, and research skills. In other words, your vision quest will be recorded, or documented, on your research blog. In the end, your research blog might also resemble a kind of 'labyrinth' of information (ideas, questions, answers, even sounds and images) or a 'scrapbook' of stuff collected along the way. Your research blog may also prove useful to you in future courses.

What role will your blog—and what I call “research blogging”—play in this composition course? Below I will outline the three major components of your blog and offer up a general answer to that question. For now, though, a few words about blogging and its history.

what's a blog?

Some of you may know the answer to this question, may already be seasoned bloggers, or may at least have sampled blogging technology at some point in your lives. By the time you read this, you may have already set up your own blog for use in this course. You may have already posted your first entry. In any event, you'll want to know something about this particular writing technology before delving too deeply into the exciting world of blogging!

Let's begin with a Wikipedia definition: Derived from 'web log,' a blog is "a website where entries are made in journal style and displayed in a reverse chronological order." Blogs can serve several purposes. If you look around on the web, you'll find that some blogs "provide commentary or news on a particular subject, such as food, politics, or local news"; others function simply as "personal online diaries" (Wikipedia). Moreover, a typical blog "combines text, images, and links to other blogs, web pages, and other media related to its topic." In addition, some blogs allow visitors to "leave comments in an interactive format" (Wikipedia). You'll also find that most blogs are textual (writing only) but some collect images or videos (known as 'photoblogs' and 'vlogs' respectively) and others post audio (podcasting).

Blogs have a pretty interesting history that I urge you to check out (see <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blog>> for starters). For now, note that the kinds of journaling and data archiving that blogs are famous for today have their origin not in the dawn of the Internet, nor even in the computer revolution of the late 20th century. Rudimentary blogging goes back to a much earlier time. Today's blogs, in fact, can be traced to the 15th-century "commonplace book," which was basically a book or scrapbook filled with recipes, quotes, letters, poems, proverbs, prayers, and other miscellaneous bits that a writer or student (or student writer?) would gather up for study purposes. Medieval "chroniclers" also engaged in a kind of paper-based blogging when they recorded the lives of the local nobility or kept a record of public events (Wikipedia). Modern-day newspapers, journals, and newsletters are fashioned after these medieval chronicles, and some even retain the word in their titles (e.g. *The San Francisco Chronicle*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*).

putting it all together

The research blog that you will build in this composition course draws on this long tradition of *chronicling* and *collecting* in the literary arts. As discussed further below, you will do three things with your blog:

- (1) keep a *journal*,
- (2) build a *commonplace book*,
- (3) produce *reports & documents*.

These three activities will intersect in specific, and I think helpful, ways. What you gather in your commonplace book will provide material for you to write about in your journal. And vice versa: your journal entries will likely steer you toward a particular topic that will require some follow-up searching and gathering. Journaling and gathering will culminate in reports and/or documents that you will produce for others to read.

Blogs are both public and private. They are public insofar as they are ‘audience-filled,’ socially oriented, and accessible on the web. People will read your journal entries and peruse the bits you gather in your commonplace book. They might also read your reports and/or documents on the blog. Readers might also *write back* to you using the comments feature described above. Blogs are private, however, in the sense that you, the blogger, are the sole owner or occupant (in most cases) of the writing space. Also, most blogs today come with a function that allows you to limit your audience to only those readers you want to let in. In this course, you will decide just how public you want your blog to be; however, in all cases everyone enrolled in this course will have access to everyone else’s research blog.

When you set up your blog, you’ll create three *categories* as a way to organize your entries (we’ll go over this in class). The first category, *Journal*, will store your journal entries. The second category, *Commonplace Book*, will store the bits and pieces of text (perhaps sounds and images too) that you find on the Internet or elsewhere as you conduct your research. The third category, *Reports & Documents*, will collect the results, the ‘findings,’ that come out of your searching and journaling. These reports and documents might be more formal than your journal entries; this too (the difference between formal and informal writing) is something we’ll discuss often in class.

keeping a journal

A journal—also known as a ‘daybook’ or writer’s notebook—is reserved primarily for recording thoughts, observations, experiences, and ideas for later development. Here is where you’ll do most of your writing, and the journal component of your blog is most likely the part I will pay closest attention to, particularly in the first half of the course.

You can also keep a paper version of your journal (the dedicated spiral notebook). However, you may find it useful to transfer your paper-based journal entries to your blog so that I and others can read them more easily online. Even better, you may want to use your paper journal for jotting ‘scraps’ or ‘starters’ (things you see or overhear during the day, a thought, a funny image, reflection on the day’s news, an odd thing a friend says, etc.) which you can then develop into more extensive journal entries on your blog.

Think of your journal not just as an “assignment” to be completed for course credit. In fact, as you work to develop a good “research attitude” (see the “research” essay below), you may want to regard journaling as a *way of living* and not just a nagging course requirement. As you go about your day (and every day, not just the day you have writing class), look for potential topics in the things happening around you. Jot notes, scratch a few words, gather glimpses and snatches, all of which might lead to specific *ideas* to be traced out later in your journal.

Note that one way to liberate your laptop is to convert it into a portable writing machine. The wireless connections on campus and in the city make it easy to access your blog and write in your journal. Use it for that purpose. Dig in under a tree out there (after the weather warms up) and occupy your writing space.

building a commonplace book

As noted in the overview, the “commonplace book” is an old idea that goes back to the 15th-century practice of gathering notes, favorite passages, lines of poetry, and other bits of information for later reference. For this course, we transport that idea to the digital age.

In a way, the commonplace book will be the place where you store your reading. As Ivan Illich remarked in his book about medieval and Renaissance reading practices, “Careful reading always picks and chooses *bits that then must be bundled*, sifted, and arranged” (32, emphasis added). As you practice reading for research purposes, one of your aims will be to sift, arrange, and bundle the ‘bits’ that you pick up when you read.

Reading in this context is more than just letting your eyes wander over a page or a screen. Yes, reading begins with this kind of ‘contact’ between you and a given text (see the essay on “reading” below), but good research takes the reading process further: as you read (and reread), you’ll select and set aside some ‘bits’ for later reference, leaving other material where you found it. If you’ve ever gone camping, maybe you’ve gathered up sticks, leaves, pine cones, bits of bark, and other materials for building a campfire, selecting and sorting as you went. Some of your gatherings you may have put in your pocket and taken home. Reading for research purposes is much the same. In fact, the Latin word for reading—*legere*—means to ‘gather’ and ‘bundle.’

At heart, then, the commonplace book is designed to help you orchestrate your reading and research experience. It facilitates an essential research activity, namely the process of selecting, ordering, organizing, and composing the materials that you gather when you go in search of answers to your questions.

What kinds of materials (bits) will you gather in your commonplace book? Where will you go in search of bits to ‘bundle’? Why is this kind of reading-as-bundling important in the first place? These are the very questions we will address throughout this course.

preparing reports & documents

Three times this semester I'll ask you to prepare a "report" or "document" based on what you've learned in your reading, writing, and research. These reports and documents (which may appear as *essays*) will come out of your journal entries and your commonplace book. In fact, the reports and documents you prepare will *synthesize* your reading and writing materials in ways that combine them into an effective and readable whole.

Reports and documents may take several forms. In class, we'll look at different forms (different kinds of essays, for example) and you will decide how best to organize and present your report/document perhaps using one of those models as a guide. These reports and documents will give you an opportunity to 'pull it all together,' to play with your ideas and your bundled materials in order to create something worth presenting to the class and perhaps publishing for a wider audience.

I see these reports and documents as examples of more 'formal' writing, but they are by no means more important than the other writing, reading, and research you'll be doing in this class. On one level, the reports and/or documents that you prepare on your blog will function as the 'copy' that you will then transfer to print (see the "production and publication" project below) for distribution.

Journal and commonplace book entries may be rough and raw, playful and chaotic; in fact, these two other categories on your blog are meant to provide you with a space where you can write and gather freely and openly without concerning yourself (too much) with good writing etiquette. We may *narrow the audience* for your journal and commonplace book precisely because we may not want to 'go public' with everything that goes on our blogs. However, reports and documents will give you an opportunity to develop a *public face* for you and your writing.

short essays on

education

students

teachers

writing

reading

research



education

Think for a minute about the word *education*. What does it mean? Usually we talk about education in very broad terms—as something we obtain for ourselves (we go to school to *get* an education) as a means to a higher end, perhaps a steady job or, for some, more education. Education is usually understood as a good thing, a necessary thing; education is what separates ‘civilized’ from ‘primitive’ societies, adults from children, professionals from amateurs, experts from novices. Politicians, despite differences of opinion about how best to fund and organize education, at least agree on the point that education is essential to individuals and society at large.

Ivan Illich, a Catholic theologian who was also a critic of institutionalized schooling, took a slightly different view. He had a problem, for instance, with the way education fosters “the belief that people have to be helped to gain insights into reality, and have to be helped to prepare for existence or for living” (in Cayley 206). Illich proposed instead that people (families, communities, individuals) work harder to “help” themselves in preparing for, and then living, their lives. Moreover, he saw education—schooling in particular—as an impediment to real learning and ardently advocated throughout his life for the ‘deschooling’ of society and the eradication of “education” as a systematic method of social control.

Elizabeth Ferm, a radical education reformer and an instrumental figure in the “modern school” movement of the early 20th century, defined education as “one and the same as creative evolution” (9). A precursor to Illich, Ferm believed throughout her life that education should not be about learning obedience to authority (see the essay on “students” below) but rather the cultivation of “creative being” in all individuals (39). To make this possible, Ferm and others proposed, teachers must operate in a “hands off” mode when interacting with young learners,

allowing them to establish their own learning rituals and to take up, in their own manner and time, those subjects and topics that interest them. Only in this way, Ferm wrote, could the “inner life” of the individual be unfolded and revealed. Moreover, education as the cultivation of creativity and self-determination would teach important lessons in how to live in accordance with certain fundamental democratic principles, like community, solidarity, collaboration, and reciprocity. Thus, Ferm’s educationist project was also a social project that sought an alternative to the more authoritarian and hierarchical state-sponsored schooling.

John Dewey, who was a contemporary of Ferm’s, believed that education was all about cultivating “interests” in the world, in particular:

- (1) interest in conversation, or communication,
- (2) interest in “inquiry,” or searching for and finding things,
- (3) interest in “construction” or making things, and
- (4) interest in “artistic expression” (*School* 47).

Dewey’s educational project was also informed by his own interest in preserving democracy for future generations. Indeed, for Dewey and other education reformers, education “was practice *in* democratic living, not practice *for* it” (Gallagher 13). Thus, Dewey and Ferm, in contrast to Illich, might have argued that people do indeed “have to be helped to gain insights into reality.” However, both would likely add that it’s the kind of “help” offered through education that makes the difference.



What does education mean to you?

Why are you here, at this university, at this time?

What are some alternatives to the educational models described above?

If education is necessary to social and career advancement, then why, in most cases, do we have to pay for it?

students

Students in a college class may rightfully assume that their job is to be good students, to do what they're told, to follow instructions, and to finish the course with a good grade, meanwhile learning something along the way. In truth, this is often what is expected of students—"good" ones especially—and much of the training we get through elementary and high school reinforces this lesson.

John Gatto, former New York teacher of the year, put it this way: "Good students wait for a teacher to tell them what to do. This is the most important lesson of them all: we must wait for other people, better trained than ourselves, to make the meanings of our lives" (7). A passionate critic of institutionalized schooling, Gatto would likely agree with the point made by John Dewey: as students, Dewey wrote, we grow accustomed to the "chains we wear" and even "miss them when removed" (*Child* 28). In other words, "good students" are quite comfortable operating within the strictures of school and college and have no problem letting others—teachers or bosses perhaps—"make the meanings of our lives." Perhaps we've all learned that this is the best way (the only way?) to make it in today's highly competitive world. I can honestly say I was a good student, as defined here, throughout most of high school (though I did get into trouble once in French class).

Not all students would qualify as "good," however, and some educators in the past have characterized students (as a group, that is) as anything but. In the 1960s, W. L. Garner described college students as "self-centered, restless, striving, discontented, driven by glands, hedonistic, insecure, volatile, idealistic, scatter-brained, emotional, seething, imbalanced [and] unpredictable." Others more recently have dismissed them as passive and apathetic, with no ideas of their own because of their inherent "formlessness" as thinking beings. Jerry Farber went so far as to compare students to slaves who are "obliging and ingratiating on the surface, but hostile

and resistant underneath.” Culture critic Allan Bloom described students as “people with savage minds that need to be enlightened and elevated.” And finally, composition scholar Patricia Harkin has characterized today’s college students as “driven, scheming, and savvy consumers of knowledge commodities” (*Keywords*, 225–26).

Pause for a moment and consider:

Is any of this—“good” or “bad”—true of you or someone you know?

How would you describe yourself as a ‘student’?

What else are you—in addition to a ‘student’ in a college writing class?

Where do these characterizations come from?

In addressing the last question, you may want to revisit the words of John Amos Comenius, the 17th-century educator who saw in the “careful education of the young” the best, and really the only way to remedy “the corruption of the human race” (15). If the purpose of education is to remedy—or cure, fix, heal—human corruption, then obviously the first order of business is to deal with the hedonistic, seething, imbalanced, hostile, savage, and scheming behavior typical of today’s students. *Do you agree?*

Many educators (including the one who wrote this guidebook) have taken issue with the inherently combative and punitive nature of these portraits. Some have argued that students (young people, in other words) are not to blame, but rather schooling tends to produce the very problems it is meant to fix, particularly where educational institutions place an emphasis on “healing and remedy in the interest of maintaining social order” (Marsh 2). In other words, efforts to mold young, formless minds into entities that conform, by and large, to “good student” behavior lead to the kinds of social, cultural, economic, and personal *imbalances* that some teachers want to transfer to, and locate in, the students themselves. ‘Fidgeting’ in the classroom, for example, is often viewed as a behavior problem rather than a sign that classrooms are too confining or school days too long. Resistance

to assignment mandates might also be punished as inappropriate transgression rather than an attempt on the student's part to explore new intellectual terrain.

But what does it mean to remove “the chains we wear,” and why would we “miss them” if we did? If I insist that there are no chains worn in this class, will you be “obliging” and go along? If you do go along, will you be “hostile and resistant underneath”—not because you are enslaved to the system but, oddly enough, because you are being asked to operate outside of the system you've grown to expect and perhaps enjoy? Do you interpret my statement to mean that, freed from the “chains” of traditional schooling, you are free to do whatever you want? to follow your own rules? Are you already “scheming” your way to a better grade by imagining an easy road ahead?

To be sure, I agree with those teachers and education philosophers who have argued, in different ways, that one of the primary goals of higher education should be to help students “reach a certain level of intelligent self-direction” in their learning (Meiklejohn 120). However, I'm not sure what the best path is to “intelligent self-direction,” as much as I do believe that teachers and students alike should work hard to remove the chains, and unlearn old habits, in the interest of finding a better way. This guidebook, in part, is the result of my own impulse to remove chains in my own teaching and explore alternative paths.



*What are the “chains” you wear as a student, if any?
Have you ever been asked to “make the meanings” in your life, as
opposed, that is, to having someone else make them for you?
Are you a good student? What does “good” mean to you?
What does “intelligent self-direction” mean to you?*

teachers

Some students may “wait for a teacher to tell them what to do” because they have learned from experience (or pop culture?) that teachers and professors are authorities on a particular subject whose job it is to *deliver* knowledge, filling up students much like a waiter at a restaurant pours water into an empty drinking glass. Characterizations like these have inspired some educators to reject the “teacher-as-authority” paradigm in favor of placing the teacher in “collaboration” with “fellow learners” (a.k.a. students). In this model, teachers and students co-authorize the learning experience, and everyone benefits from this mutual collaboration.

I’m not entirely certain where I stand on this issue, but I do believe that all teachers, as human beings engaged in an occupation that deals with ideas, reflect and advocate for a “particular epistemology” or “ideology” when they teach (*Keywords* 234). This advocacy work may not be deliberate, or even conscious, but all teachers are to some extent “ideologues” who privilege (through words, actions, and approaches) “one rhetorical/economic version of reality over others” (234).

This is not necessarily a bad thing. Indeed, as propagandists, teachers today do pretty much what they have always done. Note that ‘pedagogy’ and ‘propaganda’ are linked historically and semantically in that they both deal with *propagating*—or earnestly disseminating—a given body of knowledge. The books some of us use to do this work of “propagating” knowledge (whether they be standardized textbooks or custom guidebooks like this one) are, in almost every case, meant to clarify precepts, rules, methods, and information in accordance with a given set of beliefs. The beliefs inherent to a given curriculum are what define it, roughly, as propaganda and (therefore) as pedagogy.

Teachers (like students) are called upon—sometimes forced—to play many different roles in doing their jobs, and these roles may vary depending on the nature of the institution, the level of instruction, the subject being taught, the cultural setting in which the learning takes place, and other factors. My particular bias is that the teacher’s job is not to deliver knowledge (as propaganda or anything else) but rather to create a good *medium* in which knowledge can be explored, tested, and created. This guidebook—based as it is on the idea that we will all be taking a ‘learning journey’ in this class—is meant to help describe and define that project.

On the other hand, as a writer and writing teacher I do know some things that I’d be happy to share with you, so why not *give it up* in a manner consistent with more traditional notions of teaching as knowledge-delivery. For now, then, I prefer to reside somewhere between teacher-as-authority and teacher-as-collaborator. One of your jobs as a student, perhaps, is to figure out (and help your classmates and me figure out) when and where each role is most appropriate and useful to your learning experience.

As a teacher, finally, I cannot help but privilege one “version of reality” when I teach. All I can do is try to be honest about what version I think I’m advocating for and make a clear case for why I support that version and not another. This guidebook, in part, is one marker, one imprint, of my ‘reality.’ In that sense, it’s the only *propaganda* you’ll be getting from me in this course. Your job is to write your own ‘reality’ and then propagate it in a manner that makes sense to you.

I guess that makes me the guide who goes along with this guidebook. Sometimes, though, I may ask you to lead the way.



What makes for a good teacher?

Who have been your favorite teachers and why?

Teachers are professional educators, but are there any educators in your life who are not professionals? In other words, have any people (besides teachers) been instrumental to your education?

Have you ever been a teacher, of any kind?

writing

Writing is a communication activity that makes use of available tools and techniques of inscription. Available tools nowadays include pen and paper, notebooks, IBM “ThinkPads” and other computers, cell phones, electronic PDAs (personal digital assistants), keyboards, word-processing and voice-recognition software, chalk, spray paint, etc. Inscription techniques include etching and graffiti, handwriting, typing, text-messaging and instant messaging, word-processing, and keyboarding, among others.

Can you think of any other *techniques* or *technologies* of written communication?

I also like to think of writing as the act of coordinating thoughts and experiences through the medium of the alphabet. All writing (in alphabetic language systems at least) begins and ends with your ABCs, though obviously there’s a lot going on in between. Clearly, this definition leaves writing open to a lot of possibilities—different genres (poetry, fiction, journalism, essays, articles, grocery lists, recipes, love letters, letters to the editor); different purposes (political, social, academic, professional, amorous, domestic); and different audiences (classmates, peers, colleagues, bosses, friends, family, community, country).

All writing is ideological, which means simply that all writers, in writing, create “a world and a world view in words” (Brodkey, *Social Practice* 105). But what does that mean, to create a “world view in words”? To me it means that we all operate, everyday, in accordance with our lived experience and our understanding of the world around us, so when we write, whether we know it or not, we codify or reflect, and sometimes challenge, that experience and that understanding in and through the words we use.

Another way to put it would be to say that *all writing is social*. The writing we do—leaving a sticky note on the fridge or keeping a diary or texting a friend—happens always within a relationship involving “a writer, a reader, a text, and a situation” (Brodkey *Social Practice* 96). There’s more involved, in other words, than just two people and a message passing between them. This last emphasis on the “situation” of writing, then, might be what makes writing social. When I send an email to my mother, I expect that she’s the only one who will read it, and when she does she will ‘receive’ the message I intended for her. So what’s the “situation” here, and how does that situation make this particular act of writing—sending an email to my mother—social and not, for example, merely *personal*?

While pondering that question, consider this as well: We learn to write by writing. The early modern educator Comenius made this point in 1637 (see quote above), and I think it still holds water today. It may sound obvious, but your *writing* in this course is key to your success in this writing course. In other (even more obvious) words, you will learn to write better in this course by writing. If you don’t write—and don’t write a lot—you will probably learn nothing.



What does writing mean to you?

Where do you write, under what conditions, and for what purposes?

Who’s your audience when you write?

Can you remember any early childhood experiences (either positive or negative, enjoyable or not) with writing?

If you like writing, why do you like it?

If you don’t, why not?

reading

Medieval monks in the 11th century had a different sense of reading than we do today, though there may be some similarities. One 11th-century French monk named Hugh of St. Victor (he was a teacher-monk and so put a lot of thought into this) regarded the book as “medicine for the eye” (Illich 21) and believed that when he and his fellow monks read through “the book” (in most cases, the Bible) they were healed of their sinful ways and thereby better prepared for a life of piety, charity, and other good things.

This transformative power of reading was total. For Hugh, reading did not just offer a way or a means to divine grace but was, in and of itself, a *divine remedy*. To read was to meditate on one’s life, one’s relationship with others, with God, with one’s mortality; and reading required that the reader perform a kind of virtual “exile” in order to concentrate on “wisdom, which thus [became] the hoped-for home” (Illich 17). This search for wisdom, through reading, was a “studious striving” that culminated in the reader’s growing “radiant” with divine knowledge (Illich 17). The reader’s “own ‘self’” was “kindled and brought to sparkle” through these heartfelt meditative reading practices (Illich 17). The book as physical object was essential to all this: the light of the “visible page,” glowing under candle or sunlight, mirrored the light of wisdom one sought through reading.

Sounds nice, doesn’t it? At the very least, I urge you to consider Hugh and his monastic reading techniques as you peer into the radiant glow of your laptop.

Meanwhile, it might be more practical to define reading, as Doug Brent does, as the process of “making contact with the mind of another human being” (13). I like this definition in part because it connects nicely with what I said above about writing as a “social” activity involving a writer, a reader, a text, and a situation. Here, with reading, that situation is understood as a form of

“making contact” with someone else. It’s an important point to keep in mind: Behind the words you read (in textbooks, novels, magazines, on subway trains, bathroom walls, bridges) there’s “another human being” (or group of human beings) responsible for putting those words there. Reading, as with writing, is a social act: it connects us to other people.

Doug Brent goes on to point out that reading is not just a matter of interpreting the text (i.e., trying to figure out what somebody else is trying to say in an essay, poem, guidebook, etc.). Reading also involves “the interpretation of another person’s *worldview* as presented by the text” (14, emphasis added). This, I think, is another way of saying that reading is not just a matter of ‘getting’ the words, the meaning on the surface, but also of *understanding* where those words (and the author) come from and what “worldview” informs the writing. When we write, we reflect and codify (sometimes challenge) our own worldviews. When we read, we gain access to other worldviews and make “contact” with people who hold them.

In fact, the degree to which what I read either reflects or doesn’t reflect my own worldview may determine how much of it (if any) I will *accommodate* as a thinking human being. If you have ever found yourself changing your mind—either over time or abruptly—because of something you’ve read, heard, or seen, then you have experienced what rhetoricians would call “accommodation,” or the process of “changing one’s mind for good reasons” (Brent 50-51). Reading can be difficult—even threatening, painful, disturbing—precisely because what we read often invites us or pulls us into different worldviews, and we might not always be ready or willing to take that on.



*What do you like to read, and why?
Have you ever read anything that changed your mind?*

What books or other print materials, if any, do you remember loving as a kid?

Do you use a computer to read?

How many books do you own?

research

Reading and research go hand in hand. In fact, reading is at heart a kind of research, and vice-versa: research usually requires a particular kind of reading.

This course is all about research—investigation, questioning, inquiry, analysis, study, experiment—and reading as one method of conducting research (along with conversation, dialog, interview). Above, I defined reading as “making contact with the mind of another human being.” Research, as an extension of reading, simply means making that contact and then “updating one’s own system of beliefs” in reference to what you’ve read (Brent xiv).

On one level, research involves a kind of ‘gathering’ of information. This makes sense if you consider that the Latin word for reading—*legere*—is rooted in the concepts of picking, bundling, harvesting, or collecting. So, when you read for research purposes, you collect and ‘bundle’ information in a way that makes sense to the particular question you’re trying to answer. One component of this course—the research blog—invites you to gather and harvest in explicit ways as a means of conducting effective research.

But research usually does not stop with gathering and bundling. As John Dewey wrote, to learn (and research is just a special kind of learning) is to “transform the material..., to take it and to develop it” within the bounds of your life experience and your “worldview” (*Child* 30). This focused form of mental “assimilation” is not something we do in a vacuum. The mere fact that you are “making contact” with others in your research makes this research activity (like reading and writing) a *social* activity. Or, as Doug Brent writes, “We develop knowledge not through an independent interaction with the facts of the universe, but in social interaction with other people” (Brent 64).

Research, as a literal and metaphorical *reading* of the world, is therefore “an art” central not just to academic life but to “the entire process of living” (Brent 102). If done in the spirit of the fourfold “interests” that Dewey described (see “education”), then research can and will change your life and your understanding of the world. Derek Owens, director of the Institute of Writing Studies here at St. John’s, remarks that the “challenge” of research “lies in getting students to equate research with something like enlightenment” (25).

Pause and consider:

What does Owens mean here by “enlightenment”?

What are some possible connections between his sense of “enlightenment” and the “light of wisdom” discussed above in the “reading” essay?

Also note that research is not solely about reading books, articles, and websites and assembling a research paper. As Owens goes on to say:

Conducting interviews with neighbors, sniffing around records in a local library, rummaging around in magazines, taking a walk and writing down observations, writing up a questionnaire and distributing it to members of one’s club or church, asking family members to comment on old photographs—all of these are forms of research (25).

The important thing to remember is that research is a form of inquiry (a virtual quest) that is also a state of mind, an attitude; the more energy you put into cultivating a ‘research attitude’ in yourself, the more fun you’ll have. As one writing teacher recently put it, research requires *curiosity*: “You have to want to know something before research makes any sense. Research without curiosity, or citations without a meaningful quest for information about something that matters, are like meals without hunger” (White).



If you've ever had a question and gone in search of an answer, then you've done research. So, given this definition, what kinds of research have you done before?

Have you ever had to write a traditional 'research paper'? If so, what was that like?

What are you curious about?

class projects



community handbook

101 assignments

production & publication

?

?

‘community handbook’ project

Most writers would agree that effective, energetic writing requires attention to both ‘lower order’ and ‘higher order’ concerns. ‘Higher order’ concerns include things like focusing your writing, organizing ideas, honing your argument, using examples and details, developing paragraphs, and making sure that the writing, as a whole, is moving in the right direction. ‘Lower order’ concerns include sentence structure, grammar, style, word choice, punctuation, spelling, typos, and formatting.

The division of these concerns into ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ may be misleading. All of them are important, and sometimes spelling or punctuation will be *high* on your list of concerns, whereas the organization of paragraphs may be less relevant to the writing task at hand.

In this class project, however, we put aside that distinction entirely and group all writing concerns (so-called ‘higher’ and ‘lower’) together for purposes of assembling a *community handbook*. Our goal for this project is simple: To assemble a concise writing, reading, and research handbook as a useable reference for you and other writing students at St. John’s University (and beyond). The goal is simple, but the task is huge. I don’t expect us to build a complete handbook in one semester (or whatever’s left of it when we start this project). We’ll focus our efforts and concentrate on what we agree is most important—and useful—to you as a class.

The rationale for this project is this: We often understand something better when we have to explain it to someone else. Most of what I’ve learned as a writing teacher I’ve learned by teaching writing to other people. So, rather than my bringing in and *explaining* a bunch of grammar and punctuation rules, you will do the work of finding, understanding, and then explaining a bunch of rules to each other. In doing so, you will likely learn a

lot more about grammar, punctuation, and other rules of the road than if I were to come in and “deliver” those rules to you.

You will not work alone. All work for this project will be group-based. Each group will take responsibility for at least one of the following handbook categories. Some of our class time will be devoted to this (and other) projects, but you will likely have to do some work on your own time. Periodically, groups will present their handbook findings to the class. Your group, in other words, will be ‘the teacher’ for that day and will present a set of concepts related to writing, grammar, punctuation, and/or mechanics. You may also be asked to provide a worksheet.

The Writing Center will be an excellent resource for this project.

Below are the proposed categories for the Community Handbook project. Groups will assign themselves a category or two (depending on time) throughout the course. Your teacher will help keep things organized.

Thinking about purpose, audience

Thinking about technology

Planning and shaping your writing

Drafting and revising

Writing paragraphs

Critical thinking

Critical reading

Critical writing

Writing arguments

Parts of speech

Sentence structure

Verbs

Pronouns

Agreement

Adjectives

Adverbs

Sentence fragments

Comma splices
Run-on sentences
Misplaced and dangling modifiers
Shifting and mixing sentences
Conciseness
Coordination
Subordination
Parallelism
Sentence variety
Emphasis
Word choice
Spelling
Periods
Question marks
Exclamation points
Commas
Semicolons
Colons
Apostrophes
Quotation marks
Capitals
Italics
Abbreviations

‘101 assignments’ project

I once told a creative writing class that their only assignment was to “be creative.” Reactions were mixed. A few people said they liked the idea because it freed them to explore. Others figured I was playing a joke or intentionally hiding something (the ‘real’ assignment, maybe) just to make their lives difficult. Some were utterly unenthused—even angry: Just tell me what to do, they said, and all I could do was sigh.

This is not a creative writing class (although all writing is ‘creative’), so I will not use that assignment here. On the contrary, in this class you will have not one or two but dozens—at least a hundred, I hope—assignments to choose from. The trick or catch (and it’s no joke) is that we will be developing these assignments together from day one and, maybe, all the way through to finals week.

Some students work best when working from concrete assignments. If that’s true for you, then you’ll like this project because it will give you plenty of concrete assignments to work from. Some students work best when granted a certain latitude with assignments. If that’s true for you, then you’ll like this project because it will give you plenty of assignments to choose from.

In the back of this guidebook you’ll find several blank pages reserved for “notes.” One thing I ask is that you use some of those pages to draft possible writing assignments. Some of these assignments will come directly from your journal writing. Class discussions, readings, and conversations with me may inspire other assignments. You may want to start by recording some writing assignments you’ve done in the past that you liked, or versions of assignments that you didn’t like (how can they be improved?).

Meanwhile, two words of advice for coming up with assignments:
Be creative.

‘production & publication’ project

Production and publication are two ongoing concerns for writers. In a way, all the writing you’ll do in college will be ‘produced’ and ‘published.’ To write a journal entry is to produce your writing, either in print or online; to post an entry on your blog is to publish it, making it available to a wider reading public.

We can take these ideas of production and publication further, however. For this project, we will decide, as a class, how best to coordinate, consolidate and *present* the work we’ve done in this class for wider distribution, either in print or online. Some possibilities include a centralized website that links to all of your research blogs and/or your reports and documents. We could also work in groups and produce mini-anthologies of some of the best writing done in each group. We could design a class ‘zine’ (print or online), and everyone would assume a small part in editing, proofreading, and designing it. An alternative would be to produce and publish one of the other class projects (Community Handbook, 101 Assignments, or something else) and make it available to other classes, perhaps future first-year writers.

Again, all writing involves layers or degrees of production and publication. To submit a 5-page essay on standard paper requires that you negotiate particular rules of formatting and design. That essay is itself a production and a publication—even if the design and formatting have been predetermined (pre-assigned) for you. Likewise, your reports and/or documents will need to be produced and published in certain ways. There’s no avoiding that phase in the writing process since, quite simply, there’s no way to *present* your writing without *producing* it in a way that I, as a reader, will recognize.

I’ve suggested elsewhere that your laptops can be used as ‘portable writing machines.’ By the same token, they can be mobilized as portable *production studios*. Microsoft Word and Publisher, not

to mention PowerPoint, can be put to use not only as word-processors but also as production technologies, as design tools. For this project, at least, we will LIBERATE our laptops in this way, turning them into production studios toward the publication of reports, documents, and, with luck, a collective class project.

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*What's missing in this guidebook?
Any suggestions for improvement?
Ideas for the course? for other writing courses?*

Please fill up the following pages
with notes, questions, assignments,
reflections, doodles, drawings,
concerns, wish lists, poems, etc.*

Share these pages if you want.
This guidebook belongs to you.

* Contributions to future editions will be much appreciated and duly acknowledged.

notes

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