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TWO NEW HEURISTICS IN RESPONSE TO FORMULAIC WRITING: WHAT LIES  
BEYOND OVERSIMPLIFIED COMPOSITION INSTRUCTION

by

JAMES TERRELL DAVIS II

Under the Direction of George L. Pullman

ABSTRACT

Many high school and college composition students have misused formulaic organizational structures, most conspicuously the five-paragraph theme, as invention tools. This misappropriation comes from teacher and student tendencies to oversimplify both the processes of writing instruction and its practice into countable and inflexible forms. In order to help students move towards improved invention models that respond to the overall rhetorical situation, this dissertation offers two new models of invention, the *x, y* thesis and the argument guide models. Beginning at the invention stage and extending recursively to all stages of the writing process, these two heuristics help guide students towards informed and analytical choices that respectively build relationships between parts and encourage asymmetrical, content-driven extensions of ideas. These models, individually and collectively, assist students in their efforts to restore a balance between content and form because the models set the students' invented

content at the core of a nonlinear rhetorical action – the composition of an essay that involves all phases of process writing.

INDEX WORDS: Composition, Rhetoric, Writing, Five-paragraph theme, Modes of discourse, Argument, Form, Content, Relationships, Heuristics, Process writing, Explorative writing, Organic writing, Linguistics, Math, Cartesian coordinate system, Sentence completions, Pedagogical models, Alexander Bain

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JAMES TERRELL DAVIS II

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2011

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by

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Georgia State University  
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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to Barbara, who was most supportive of me during this long degree-earning process.

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I would like to thank all three members of my committee, Drs. Pullman, Gaillet, and Schatteman, for their hard work on this dissertation. As well, I am indebted to Dr. Marti Singer, who met to discuss with me the potentials of my models early in this process, and to Dr. Calvin Thomas, Graduate Director. Without any of these gracious mentors, this project would have never come together.



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## CHAPTER 1.

### INTRODUCTION

#### Preface

College-level compositionists have long fought for process writing in a secondary world beholden to product-driven assessment. While some may argue that this debate has been mitigated via holistic grading or portfolio assessments, the current reality is an unresolved conflict between theory and practice and, therefore, between instruction and assessment.<sup>1</sup> Thus, with stronger pushes for standardized writing tests at the secondary level during the past ten years, and the simultaneous retraction from such formal assessments at the college level, this conflict has reached a heightened climax. Yet, as composition teachers and theorists, we do not have to be satisfied with the conclusion that “[o]f necessity, practice has far outrun theory in writing assessment” (Faigley, Cherry, Joliffe, and Skinner 205), especially if the distance between college and high school writing grows as a result.

English classrooms in the state of Georgia, where I currently teach high school and college English courses, offer good examples of this present academic tug-of-war. For instance, at the high school level, an academically competitive college bound student will most likely take the following litany of standardized writing assessments: the Georgia High School Writing Test in eleventh grade, the SAT and/or ACT essay(s) for college admission in eleventh and/or twelfth grade, and the AP English Language and/or AP English Literature exams (which each consists of

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<sup>1</sup> See Davida Charney’s “The Validity of Using Holistic Scoring to Evaluate Writing: A Critical Overview,” Brian Huot’s “The Literature of Direct Writing Assessment: Major Concerns and Prevailing Trends,” Pat Belanoff and Peter Elbow’s “Using Portfolios to Increase Collaboration and Community in a Writing Program,” and Lester Faigley, Roger D. Cherry, David A. Joliffe, and Anna M. Skinner’s *Assessing Writers’ Knowledge and Processes of Composing* for discussions about various struggles to evaluate student writing in ways that support composition theories.

three essays) during their tenth, eleventh, and/or twelfth grade years, depending on his or her matriculation sequence. Other states face similar situations; therefore, Georgia becomes for dissertation purposes an informal case study even though this current trend for standardized writing assessment and simultaneous need for better pedagogy is not limited to Georgia.

Across the nation, the vast majority of secondary and college English departments' learning goals encourage process writing; however, in many places, these theories that should favor all aspects of the writing process have been waylaid by practices where invention has been replaced with structure and where revision has slipped into mere editing. When these shortcuts limit the recursive adjustments that students need to make for their writing to become clear and thoughtful, they distort the writing process altogether.

Tendencies to truncate the writing process in such a way are unfortunately reinforced by pedagogies and practices surrounding standardized writing assessments. Students learn to write in response to standardized exams, but they usually do not understand the overall rhetoric of their own efforts in these situations or in others. With prescribed topics and audiences, students often write in the same manner – often through the same form – and ignore exigency, audience, purpose, rhetorical appeals, structure, tropes, and schemes.<sup>2</sup> In order for students to broaden their rhetorical understandings of academic compositions, better appreciations of form and content will most likely begin with an improved sense of purpose, potentially one that mirrors Kenneth Burke's definition of rhetoric from *A Rhetoric of Motives*: “the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents” (41). For students, purpose needs to become what they, as writers, want the audience to do. For many students, though, this

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<sup>2</sup> See Joliffe's “A Rhetorical Framework for Teaching Nonfiction, Fiction, Poetry, and Drama” for a compact visual that shows the interplay between these rhetorical constructs.

understanding of audience is one of their most difficult tasks; often, audience awareness does not even become much of a factor in their writing performance because they respond similarly when an audience is specified or when it is not (Huot 242). Contemporary students are the products of years of such psuedotransactional discourse.<sup>3</sup> In the modern age, they are convinced that the purpose for their writing is to convince the reader, the instructor or external evaluator, that the paper shows an understanding of the materials. However, instructors can fight against such patterns of pre-structured exposition if they teach students how to display their understandings within the context of an argument, ideally one driven by purposeful analysis rather than by a formulaic structure.<sup>4</sup>

For contemporary compositionists, such dilemmas about interplay between modal writing, assessment, and process writing – and others that concern the theory and practice of student writing – have been the basis for scholarship and debate for decades. Edited texts like Chris Anson's *Writing and Response: Theory, Practice, and Research*, Lad Tobin and Thomas Newkirk's *Taking Stock: The Writing Process Movement in the 90s*, and Sondra Perl's *Landmark Essays on Writing Process* show that discussions about process writing have occurred for decades by some of the most notable figures in composition and rhetoric, including Ann Berthoff, James Britton, Lisa Ede, Peter Elbow, Janet Emig, Lester Faigley, Linda Flower and John Hayes, Ken Macrorie, James Moffett, Donald Murray, Mike Rose, and Nancy Sommers. Other collections like Robert Connors and Cheryl Glenn's *The New St. Martin's Guide to Teaching Writing*, Erika Lindemann and Gary Tate's *An Introduction to Composition Studies*,

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<sup>3</sup> See Clay Spinuzzi (1996) for a definition of psuedotransactional writing: "writing that is patently designed by a student to meet teacher expectations rather than perform the 'real' function the teacher has suggested" (295).

<sup>4</sup> See Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca's *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* and Andrea Lunsford's textbook *Everything's An Argument* for discussions of argument(ation) as the driving mode of discourse in current academic writings.

James C. McDonald's *The Allyn and Bacon Sourcebook for College Writing Teachers*, and James Williams's *Visions and Revisions: Continuity and Change in Rhetoric and Composition* have all helped undergraduate and graduate students in composition and rhetoric, many of whom, like me, become instructors, join the discourse community, and engage in such discussions themselves.

Defining and refining process writing has been an ongoing topic within these readers and among the composition and rhetoric community at large. For example, Flower and Hayes, in their 1981 article "A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing," argue the following as the first two of four key points about cognitive process theory:

- 1) The process of writing is best understood as a set of distinctive thinking processes which writers orchestrate or organize during the act of composing.
- 2) These processes have a hierarchal, highly embedded organizational in which any given process can be embedded within any other. (252)

As well, in the "Reviewing" section of the same article Flower and Hayes add, "The sub-processes of revising and evaluating, along with generating, share the special distinction of being able to interrupt any other process and occur at any time in the act of writing" (261). I emphasize Flower and Hayes's ideas because their thoughts are often reproduced as representatives for process writing and because my theories about overlapped, connected writing processes, which are both hierarchal and recursive, mirror these ideas offered by Flower and Hayes. As well, Flower and Hayes notably highlight the importance of invention; in their conclusion to this same article they write: "By placing emphasis on the inventive power of the writer, who is able to explore ideas, to develop, act on, test, and regenerate his or her own goals, we are putting an important part of creativity where it belongs – in the hands of the working,

thinking writer” (274). It is this ongoing inventive process that has been and remains in danger, and it may be one of the most imperative aspects of the writing process because it begins the thinking process.

In terms of assessment, the CCCC’s “Writing Assessment: A Position Statement,” revised in March 2009, emphasizes some of the discord that comes from high school teacher’s pedagogies that truckle to standardized writing practices and assessments. For instance, the CCCC Committee on Assessment writes:

Assessments of written literacy should be designed and evaluated by well-informed current or future teachers of the students being assessed, for purposes clearly understood by all the participants; should elicit from student writers a variety of pieces, preferably over a substantial period of time; should encourage and reinforce good teaching practices; and should be solidly grounded in the latest research on language learning as well as accepted best assessment practices.

As these principles indicate, college writing programs spend much more attention tracking the development of individual student writing than high schools do: in part, this divide comes from the push for objective data to track trends of all students’ performance on standardized assessments at the high school level (i.e. district, school, or department-driven objective goals based on data from such assessments) versus the efforts to track trends among individual students in more subjective ways (i.e. portfolios and metacognitive reflections). Because these trends and divides are most likely going to continue, what needs to change are some of the writing pedagogies that occur at the high school level: at the very least, there needs to be more options implemented than teaching to the test. Preparing students to write better by responding

to the full writing process will produce similar efficacious results yet without the detriments.<sup>5</sup>

Like these discussions of assessment and process writing, specific discussions of invention also highlight the discord between collegiate composition theory and secondary writing instruction. Most notably, Sharon Crowley, whose work I discuss more in later chapters, explains in *The Methodical Memory* how current-traditionalists “transferred its [the current-traditional theory of invention] concern with minds to concern with the shapes of texts” (13). This shift, especially in practice, towards composition more concerned with form than content, rather than a balance between the two, presently fetters the majority of high school level writing.

Such restrictions to oversimplified forms usually begin with limited and formulaic theses. Writing theses often proves to be one of the hardest parts of the invention process, and instead of learning how to do and redo them, students and teachers often skip this step. The invention process at the thesis level is moreover hindered by both standardized writing prompts that offer theses for students to follow and allowances for writing that begin with organizational statements (i.e. FPT three-prong statements) instead of argument assertions.

These two pressures frequently collapse into themselves: in response to a standardized prompt a student creates a five-paragraph thesis which drives a five-paragraph arrangement of the response, an essay that is a one-time writing act rather than ongoing inventive and thinking process. In order to break free from such formulas, students need to look at the relationships between content and form more closely, and they need to understand the recursive theories of good writing emphasized by leading compositions like Flower and Hayes. Because revision

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<sup>5</sup> See also how process writing is encouraged by the “The Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy,” where the instruction of students in grades eleven and twelve includes efforts to “[d]evelop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.” (46)



occurs throughout the writing process, and because writing is paradoxically hierarchal (i.e. layered) and imbalanced (i.e. unequal in treatment of ideas), the models I introduce in this dissertation help students think and write better than prior invention models, especially those never intended to be heuristics.

Concerns about the quality of student thought have created some changes in potentially unexpected places: some of the standardized tests have attempted to balance evaluations of thought and structure, more specifically content and presentation. However, such efforts do mean that students know how to write differently. For example, the latest changes to the Georgia High School Writing Test try to evaluate better the substance of the essay itself. According to the 2001 *Assessment and Instructional Guide for the Georgia High School Writing Test*, the Georgia High School Writing Test became a graduation requirement in 1997, and the rubric was modified in 2005 to reflect changes in the state standards (i.e. from Quality Core Curriculum [QCCs] to Georgia Performance Standards [GPS]). As such, the rubric changed to evaluate Ideas, Organization, Style, and Conventions rather than Content/ Organization, Style, Conventions, and Sentence Formation. In other words, this recent shifts rightfully divorces content from organization, and it recognizes the overlap in Conventions and Sentence Formation by embedding the latter into the broader term.

Meanwhile, at a national level, standardized essay writing becomes a means to distinguish how well students can write and think about what they know. With more high school students taking the SAT than any other standardized test in this country, the addition of the SAT essay has made significant impact. The College Board has responded to a number of colleges that began to request students to take the SAT II writing test; in response, they announced in

2002 that they would add an essay component to all SAT tests.<sup>6</sup> By March 2005, this addition was a reality, and ACT matched this initiative with an essay component that actually rolled out a month ahead of its rival in February 2005, called the ACT Plus Writing.

Both of these standardized assessments mark writing holistically. For example, the SAT uses two readers that both issue a mark from zero to six. According to the “SAT Essay Scoring Guide,” each six point score assesses students’ abilities to try achieve the following five descriptors: “Effectively and insightfully develops a point of view on the issue and demonstrates outstanding critical thinking, using clearly appropriate examples, reasons and other evidence to support its position,” “Is well organized and clearly focused, demonstrating clear coherence and smooth progression of ideas,” “Exhibits skillful use of language, using a varied, accurate and apt vocabulary,” “Demonstrates meaningful variety in sentence structure,” and “Is free of most errors in grammar, usage and mechanics.” Likewise on a similar scale from one to six, according to the “Educator’s Guide to the ACT Writing Test,” the ACT Writing holistically measures students’ abilities to prove the following five skills: “make and articulate judgments,” “develop a position,” “sustain a position by focusing on the topic throughout the writing,” “organize and present ideas in a logical way,” and “communicate clearly.” With more students taking these assessments, the increased validity and reliability of these marks have become more important for selective college admissions procedures. Such pressures on both students and teachers for high scores on these standardized performance tasks have swayed many high school teachers – even those who have been trained in composition and rhetoric – to rely more on methods and internal assessments that duplicate such product-driven external assessments than

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<sup>6</sup> See “The New SAT 2005” for an overview of this assessment.”

many college instructors probably realize or, at least, want to admit.

Simultaneously, at the collegiate level in Georgia there has been a recent retraction from the Regents' assessments, including the essay. The Regents' Test began in 1983, and for years established a level of minimum literacy and writing competencies for college graduates, but the argument now seems to be that testing at this level is no longer necessary. For example, according to the University of Georgia webpage about the Regents' Test, from Student Academic Services:

On March 3, 2010, the University of Georgia was approved for an exemption of the Regents' Test by the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia.

The exemption became effective immediately, and the Regents' Test is no longer a graduation requirement for currently enrolled students.

Additionally, according to a news release from the Georgia Department of Education when Erroll B. Davis Jr. announced his retirement, "[t]he System's core curriculum was completely revised in 2009, which includes the gradual elimination of the Regents' Test." These changes have not yet fully trickled down into Georgia high schools, where some high school teachers fighting to teach students who struggle at these minimal literacy levels may feel abandoned by their college colleagues: such secondary teachers now have even more responsibilities to teach students to write well without another level of support and coinciding assessment at the collegiate level. Although I imagine that college writing instructors will see little change in the quality of student writing, including over reliance on formulaic structures (unless something changes in the high school classrooms themselves), the real hazard becomes that some students may feel that a degree of mastery lies with their passing of assessments like the GHSWT, and this test can still be passed via a formulaic model.

Thus, *the* problem with improving students' writings is the divide between composition theory and pedagogical practice. In part, this chasm is growing due to the ways in which secondary teachers prepare large numbers of students for high-stakes standardized writing tests and sidestep the entire rhetorical process. Duplicating such timed writing situations often means that students receive the exact topics (i.e. released exam prompts) on which they will write. In response, many students misuse writing structures – like the five-paragraph theme – as invention tools to complete the timed exam in mock and real settings. Because these student fail to make the overall rhetorical connections from the very onset of their limited composition processes, this project tries to revive the entire writing process by encouraging students to not only begin but to also follow invention as an integral component of the recursive writing process.

With such rhetorical goals in mind, this dissertation is unique in a few ways. While some dissertations begin as threads in graduate coursework or as extensions of extant studies, this project developed from my unique role as an instructor of both high school and college students and as a composition and rhetoric scholar. Moreover, as an IBO examiner and College Board reader, I evaluate thousands of college bound high school students' essays each year. Whether I am using my own rubrics in my face-to-face high school and college courses, the rubrics associated with a particular approved online course at the college level, or those assigned to external assessments, part of my job description is to evaluate products (and in many of these cases without an understanding of the processes behind them). For more than a decade, my varied experiences with two large high schools, four universities in South Carolina and Georgia, and pre-college (i.e. IB and College Board) essays have helped me further understand the following: what many freshman composition programs desire for college students to achieve in their writing presents a significant hurdle to many high school students who have not had many

writing experiences that ask them to think and to write about what they know, especially in non-formulaic ways.

In order to make this transition from high school to college writing classrooms much smoother, I have concluded that high school teachers and/or first-year composition instructors need to focus more on two key rhetorical processes: invention and revision. For this shift to occur, these respective teachers and instructors first need new means by which they can challenge the currently oversimplified and misused (non)invention models. And they need ways in which they can help teach students to think “through” – not just “around” – their writing as whole rhetoric; in other words, once students have learned how to invent better, then they can learn how to extend these thoughts into a cogent and complete argument.

To fully develop models that can join content and form via invention, I have researched the expectations and evaluations of standardized assessments locally and nationally. I have examined, for instance, the State of Georgia’s writing tests as representative models of middle, high, and college standardized writing assessment and ETS’s SAT, AP Language, and AP Literature exams as representative models of national standardized writing assessments for college-bound students. Additionally, I have researched the following Composition and Rhetoric threads as means to bolster this project: invention, thesis writing, arrangement, revision, standardized assessment, and the history of the five-paragraph essay. As evidence for the continuation of this model, despite theories against it, I have also examined a number of textbooks to see how they address these topics, in particular the five-paragraph theme. Such research is embedded directly into the corresponding chapters that evaluate the historical and current patterns to oversimplify writing instruction and its assessment and that offer two new heuristic models to can encourage students to think differently.

In the following pages, I discuss how two formulas, the five-paragraph theme and the Jane Schaeffer Method, offer valid starting points for composition instruction.<sup>7</sup> But they fail as invention models because they are organizational patterns and not heuristics; they, therefore, ultimately fail to teach students entering freshman composition courses to write rhetorically, at least in terms of the entire writing process. Thus, I have created alternative and connected invention models to try to create a better middle ground – one between composition and rhetoric theory and pedagogical writing practices in both high school and college classrooms – than these existing models provide. In this dissertation, I explain these two models, show how they work, and defend their use, both in theory and in practice.

My hope is that composition teachers will benefit from reading this dissertation because it is specifically designed to address an audience who recognizes that this oversimplification process writing has happened but may not know exactly how to begin re-complicating the composition process in a way that is manageable and teachable. Other teachers who have not yet had this epiphany may ask, “What is wrong with my current model?” This dissertation is also prepared to address this group as it explains what has happened when organizational structures have become invention strategies. Another group of expressionist instructors may ask, “Why use a model at all?” By establishing a middle ground between formulaic structures and expressionist responsive forms, this dissertation should also give this group something to reconsider, especially due to this pressing need for the return of invention to the academic essay.

Some resistance is expected because of the proliferation of teachers who support the

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<sup>7</sup> See, in addition to Chapter One of this project, Marc Wiley’s overview of the JSM in “The Popularity of Formulaic Writing.”

Five-Paragraph Theme and the Jane Shaffer Method.<sup>8</sup> It is this group of teachers, who will rise initially in defense of the formulaic structures, who should be the most resistant readers. As such, much of my focus, including Chapter Two, is designed to counter their potential rebuttals. In simple terms, the new invention models that I explain in this dissertation will help instructors and students who still want to hold onto formulaic writing keep up with the changes in academic expectations; if necessary, scaffolding the FPT, the JSM, and my invention models could help many students learn how to think and to write rhetorically without stepping too heavily on the toes of these entrenched models.

With such goals of introducing two related alternatives of invention into the field of writing instruction, the pages that follow offer alternative pedagogical theories and unexplored academic methodologies for composition teachers. These models help improve classroom-related writing in distinctive ways described as tangible, accessible, functional, justifiable, interrelated, contextual, and, perhaps most importantly, flexible. Because these options offer such benefits to a vast number of high school and college writing classrooms across the country, they deserve some prolonged inquiry and discussion.

In Chapter One of this dissertation, I fully introduce this project by discussing the trends towards oversimplification of the writing process, in particular of invention; as well, I identify the counter trends against these agendas. This chapter opens with an examination of the current discrepancies between composition theories and practices (i.e. instruction and assessment) that looks more closely at standardized writing tests, in particular at the Georgia Regents' Essay and

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<sup>8</sup> Presently Louis Educational Concepts owns the rights to what is commonly referenced as the Jane Shaffer Method. According to owner, Deborah Louis, Jane Shaffer first began introducing her model during AP English workshops in 1984. With over ten consultants presently engaged in implementing sixteen types of current workshops nationally and internationally, the Jane Shaffer Writing Program has become its own industry, one that continues to thrive even after Jane Shaffer's death in 2010.

the SAT Essay. In order to explain the need for the heuristics that I have developed, this chapter additionally evaluates the impact of formulaic structures that pose as invention strategies in relation to such assessments.

In Chapter Two, I examine the five-paragraph theme more closely than any of the other formulaic models I have yet mentioned. I carefully explain why this model has become the epitome of formulaic writing because it begs for students to oversimplify the rhetorical act of composition. This chapter first explores the history of the FPT in order to examine that its practice has bent away from its theoretical underpinnings. After I trace the history of the FPT and its oversimplification, I will also show the present counter shifts in thought from formulaic to non-formulaic writing at both the high school and college levels. Based on these analyses, this chapter proves that the FPT – and other formulaic writing pedagogies – have taken root more because of an absence of alternative models than because of overwhelming support for the methodologies they encourage.

Chapters Three and Four fully present and detail the *x, y* thesis and Argument Guide models, which help fill this existing void, in particular with the absence of other new rhetorically-based invention models. Specifically, the *x, y* thesis model teaches students how to turn their attentions towards relation models that stress the invention of ideas in the context of an overall argument. This model helps students see how a thesis differs from a formulaic organizational statement: a good thesis establishes relationships that prompt arrangement because they prompt discussion. In other words, the argument becomes a product of logic that is determined by the writer's ideas about the content – not by a predetermined structure. Likewise, a good thesis is part of a nonlinear writing process that will help make an essay more thoughtful and more connected than one that offers a non-thesis organizational statement. Moreover, an



understanding of responsive form will help students revisit their thesis as part of their overall rhetoric when they expand their reasoning beyond formulaic constraints.

As an extension of the *x, y* model, the Argument Guide turns students' attentions away from responding to organizational statements common to the FPT. Chapter Four on the Argument Guide will show how paragraph writing is not a one-size-fits-all activity. In addition, it will show how such paragraphs relate to one another in a larger unified composition. In contrast to the JSM and formal outlines in particular, the Argument Guide shows teachers and students the problems that occur when writers allow formulaic structures to limit or to prescribe the content in academic compositions. By showing these students how their compositions should create their own order and by showing them how the content determines the organization of the discourse, students can better understand how good writing takes shape with extended analyses of interconnected ideas (i.e. not disparate and oversimplified arguments where  $A+B+C$  often remain unrelated or overlapping in the organizational statement posing as a thesis). This portion of the project also parallels some teachers' current efforts to expand their students' reasons and to extend their analyses; a complete argument will "Specify" and it will "Prove," as teachers often encourage students to do in order to move beyond formulaic explanations into responsive and often asymmetrical forms.

In both of these chapters where I explain the models, after I detail these alternative invention strategies, I also offer examples of their use in both literature and composition English courses. Using these explanations and examples, I defend the theories behind the models through discussions of their strengths and weaknesses. I want students to learn how to write better in the context of the course, not in direct preparation for standardized writing assessments. My overall goal, therefore, would be to teach students how to write in these new ways on their

own. Then in any writing situation, including timed ones that they see as high stakes, these students will have more and improved writing strategies from which they can begin and complete the writing task.

Because Chapters Three and Four are the heart of this dissertation, they are written for a professional audience that is invested in improving high school and college writing. To reiterate slightly, my foremost goal with these models is to help instructors teach students how to write better without thought-restricting forms; it is these teachers who have direct and prolonged contact with students. With the explanations of these models, I wish to provide teachers with alternative approaches to invention that will enable them to forego formulaic methods in favor of alternative responsive ones. The goal is to help students learn how to think independently about their writings in analytic and rhetorical ways. Thus, portions of this dissertation, in particular the diagrams and sample responses, could be transferred into direct instruction. The students, after all, need some additional alternatives in order to help them further understand writing, and, in particular, to help begin writing, more fully than they do presently. Students can learn how to use these alternative invention models to begin and to shape their own discourse.

In the concluding chapter, I discuss how these two options differ from the current invention and structure models. With such options in place, especially at the onset of the writing process, the invention level, students and teachers can use various means to explain their understandings of what good writing is and what better writing does. In this concluding material I additionally look at potential implications to extend discussions of these models.

### **Formulaic Writing Structures Hinder Invention Strategies**

Writing instructors across the board have witnessed students' struggles to understand the

limitations of the five-paragraph theme (FPT). For many students this substitute invention method is the only way they have been taught to begin and to complete essays, and it is the only way, as well, they have received acceptable marks. Therefore, such students who write their compositions by following this formulaic model often see this organizational model as the only means by which they can invent, compose, and complete an essay. In many cases, these students have never been challenged to view composition through any other lens that is without such restrictive filters.

While this model of arrangement, the FPT, is not inherently faulty, when such students limit their own thinking by analyzing every writing situation as something which can be broken into three parts, this organizational structure overrides their invention and overall intellectual efforts because it invites discord and limits development. Thus, students who are overly reliant on the FPT do not fully examine the connections between their ideas or examine the areas where they could extend their examples, analysis, or discussion. In other words, when students' invention processes collapse due to a model that oversimplifies the writing process, these students have forestalled their abilities to write fully on a particular topic.

The most progressive changes need to occur in the classrooms themselves because these changes come closest to the students and because some changes in (inter)national testing are already underway.<sup>9</sup> Secondary and post-secondary classes need to push strongly and consistently against formulaic writing in order to turn the present acceptance of limited thinking and writing on its head. For example, in the following five-paragraph theme-based Regents' essay, the writer could have explained further how the risks of entrepreneurship outweighed the

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<sup>9</sup> See "The FPT's Current State in both High School and College Composition Courses" in the next chapter for a discussion of the changes already in place by some testing organizations, in particular the College Board.

rewards in order to create a more sophisticated and a less contrived complete response.

However, most students are not trained to write about such relationships.

Because many composition teachers in Georgia would wish to mark this ensuing composition as a failing effort, especially after considering that most students taking this exam have earned three semesters of college credit, and because most of these instructors want students to perform at a higher level, the real complication remains how to implement instructional improvements on a broad enough scale that the students will actually forego formulaic structures like the FPT, especially when they are asked to write in such standardized scenarios. Unfortunately, the associations between assessment and academic writing are forever tied; consequently, it becomes the responsibility for teachers to improve the quality of student writing that these organizations wish to measure. In order for this quality of writing to improve, I feel the changes must occur at the invention level with alternative models that directly challenge the formulaic organizational structures (which epitomize standardized writing assessment).

The following student writing sample that uses the FPT as the only framework for the response can serve as an example:

*Going out of Business Sale! Signs of this nature can be seen everywhere.*

*Today opening up a business can be scary, because of the extensive risk, high cost, and extreme stress.*

*The chief reason I would not want to start my own business is the great risk of failure. Today statistics show that four out of every six businesses fail within the first year. Those are not very good odds for one just starting his or her own business.*

*The second reason not to start my own business is the high cost of starting a business. Businesses take a great deal of money to get started, and for that matter to keep running. The first thing one has to do is find a place to put the business. Lots are very expensive. Then a building has to be built, and merchandise to fill the building has to be purchased.*

*Finally owning a business can be stressful. Being ones own boss can be stressful to her or him by the way of having to make all of the important decisions, or can cause stress at home. The stress at home can be very detrimental to the marriage, or even the family as a whole.*

*Concluding this owning a business is just one big headache. On the other hand some people are very successful, and they got that way by taking the risk of owning their own business. I personally don't think that owning a business is worth the risk, when working for someone else is a lot safer.*

The Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia posted this sample five-paragraph essay in 2006 as part of the “Instructions for Scoring Regents’ Testing Program Essays,” now online as part of the current Regents’ Testing website. This document, directed to train instructors who rate the exams, discusses how this sample essay in particular represents a borderline case that could be marked as a one, which is a failing mark, or as a two, which is a low passing mark. The entire section on the site that answers, “What specifically does the 2/1 model represent?” reads:

The essay chosen as a 2/1 model represents the balance point between the “1” and the “2” essay. The committee which selected the essay would hope that, if the 2/1 model essay were rated by fifty raters, it would receive twenty-five “1’s” and

twenty-five “2’s.” A tiny nudge could swing the balance either way. It would be a clear “2,” if, for example: a few more supporting details were supplied, the diction were more appropriate, the mechanical and grammatical errors were fewer, or the coherence were improved. On the other hand, it would be a clear “1” if it were a trifle weaker in any one of these aspects.

Although the Regents’ assessment desires to measure only a “certain minimum skills,” the above product and discussion tells today’s college and high school writing instructors that this “minimum” expectation for an hour of writing is worth their attention (Overview). In this example, the student’s adherence to the five-paragraph theme (FTP), a prevalent formulaic structure and model of arrangement, is most prominent. Maybe because he or she has never been taught in any other manner, the student feels the need to make three points but feels no need to explain any of them well. The student is not solely to blame, and such exams often encourage this kind of student genre. As well, many teachers still teach students how to write in this formulaic and limiting manner; among many academic communities a general passive acceptance remains for such structured writing, in particular as a means of measuring minimum abilities to write academic essays. Such equivocation has never settled well with academics entrenched in first-year writing programs, and the aforementioned recent exceptions and eventual eradication of Regents’ assessments may be regarded as a victory for freshman composition programs and instructors alike.

For dissertation, the controversy between standardized assessment and rhetorical theory becomes quite evident with a further investigation of the explanations for the marks. For example, the site does not clearly explain how the five-paragraph structure that this sample student follows so rigidly has hindered the development of his or her essay. Instead, within the

discussion of the 3/2 model, the rater's information explains that in this better borderline sample, "The organization is clear but not formulaic." And, later, in the document, the response to this question, "Must an essay have a thesis sentence to pass?" reads:

Not necessarily. Although an explicit thesis sentence is perfectly acceptable, and many – perhaps most – of our students need one, many a good writer can make the implied thesis clear and can organize the essay well enough so that the reader can follow the line of thought without the writer's having revealed the organizational plan in the introductory paragraph.

In other words, students or instructors who turn to these models and explanations for raters wonder from where the "nudge" towards a passing or failing mark for the 2/1 essay will originate. Reading this last sentence about the 3/2 essay would encourage me to treat the 2/1 essay as a failing effort. Because the writer of the 2/1 essay has so little to say, the structure and content of the 2/1 essay are essentially the same.

In its defense, however, this sample paper most likely was a 2/1 essay because all of the ideas consistently proved a negative position on the topic. The essay does move sequentially towards a unified idea, but it fails to move forward successfully with connected or well supported ideas. This consistency is not always the case with these five-paragraph theme models. When the first thread (i.e. A) mentioned in the organizational statement becomes the topic for the first paragraph, B for the second, and C for the third, students like this one often never recognize that the three short essays (A+B+C) merely pose as one longer essay. Many of these five-paragraph themes even offer subsets that no longer fit under the same affirmative or negative position that the writer offers as his or her claim. Therefore, composition instructors' strongest criticisms of essays with these A+B+C parts often come from reading documents that

offer unrelated mini-discourses. When writing such five-paragraph themes that suffer from this formulaic fragmentation, many students limit their critical thinking by dividing rather than by unifying their thoughts.

Such students would be better off if they learned how to respond to such prompts in ways that were less formulaic and less contrived. Of course, this idea is somewhat radical because it asks students to work differently: it fights against the general tendencies and long-term trends since the nineteenth-century for writers and for writing teachers to oversimplify the writing process and the writing products. In this Regents' example, for instance, the sample essay suffers because it follows the FPT formula too rigidly, especially at the thesis level, "Today opening up a business can be scary, because of the extensive risk [A], high cost [B], and extreme stress [C]." Like many other cases, when students write under pressure, the FPT formula encourages such ineffective responses because the student follows the FPT formula as a one-time determination of what they will write; thus the organization structure replaces the rhetorical act of invention. What this student, for example, could have realized is that two of these conditions that they describe [A and C] are essentially the same because they both could revolve around excessive stress for the potential business owner. As well, high costs [B], help to create this stress. With focus on stress in mind, he or she could have reset their essay to discuss how the internal stress related to opening a business outweighs the potential external rewards. In other words, if the student had focused his or her essay on what they wanted to discuss – that risk is stressful – rather than fragmenting his or her thoughts into three body paragraphs to match the organizational statement, then he or she could have further developed his or her concerns about stress (i.e. how the potentials for stress are more detrimental than the potentials for fiscal profits) in a way that did not include rather repetitive and, in this case, interrupted parts.



With its weak unity and lack of depth of analysis, borderline and formulaic essays like this one should raise a number of questions within the writing community. Moreover, using this Georgia test in particular as a representative of disparate nationwide education initiatives the following questions: Does this writer use the formulaic five-paragraph theme as an effective organizational structure to support his or her position successfully? If not successfully, then how will this community of teachers instruct a student to write proficiently? If a statewide goal includes testing such writing in a standardized manner, then to what degree does this organizational structure limit the thinking and the writing that occurs in such assessments, in particular at the invention level? If national standards are adopted, as trends indicate, then to what degree will these assessments change? And to what degree do teachers harm students by accepting papers with such limited development as passing, especially at the college level? I confidently assert that these questions still haunt many writing teachers who face students reliant on such formulaic structures and limited in understandings of the rhetorical writing process.

Compositionists who have pondered these questions may first think that the answers reside with assessment. I have heard many teachers assert that the changes need to occur first with testing. They argue that until formulaic college essays like this one receive failing marks, students will continue to write in this way. They claim that the changes need to occur from the top down – from bureaucracies that lie outside of the classroom – because high school tests like the Georgia High School Writing Test prepare students for the Regents' Tests, even if educational pundits recognize flaws in such assessments. Arguing about the assessments will most likely not make them disappear, especially at the secondary level. Even when they become better assessments, critics will always find faults. Therefore, I feel the changes need to occur at the other end of the conflict: alternative and rhetorically-based writing instruction strategies will

gain much more long-term and student-centered traction than philippics concerning standardized assessments.

In order to discuss instruction more clearly, I prove in this dissertation that there is current problem with such organizational structures being misused as invention models, and I explain to both high school and college composition instructors how formulaic writing models usually limit student thinking and writing. When students replace invention strategies with formulaic organizational systems, they immediately risk confining their ideas to a set form. In other words, students who rely on such formulaic models allow this structure to shape the form as intended, but they also unintentionally and unconsciously limit their thinking about the content of the essay itself. I argue instead for thoughtful and responsive invention models that help develop compositions which build from rhetorically-conscious and recursive decisions.

This dissertation will show composition teachers how to introduce and to implement two new models of invention, the *x, y* thesis and argument guide models, that challenge the non-invention models presently preferred by many of their students, like the FPT. These new invention models can help students write essays that literally react to the ideas of their arguments because the student learns how to think better about the interconnectivity of their essays' parts. This movement will push students to think harder and to write better at the same time because they are not merely looking to show knowledge but to engage critically with their understandings of this knowledge.

In most simple terms, the FPT fails repeatedly as an invention model. Such limited methods of thinking injure not only the product but also the thought processes behind it. Consequently, teachers need better invention models than oversimplified organizational structures to help students begin, write, revise, and publish essays. The *x, y* thesis and argument

guide models that follow will help such teachers instruct students how to pull away from these formulaic structures and how to move towards responsive writing. Therefore, the two models I offer in this dissertation help teach students to think about their writing analytically because they have to look at how parts build towards wholes and how the whole relates to the parts. This linear and nonlinear examination of purpose helps students evaluate their own subjects and the real connections between their ideas throughout the recursive composition process.

Like this Regents' sample shows, a student writes what he or she thinks is a successful essay, but most college instructors would feel otherwise. However, rather than working with students on process (i.e. invention strategies), such instructors often respond to the product (i.e. grammatical errors). Thus, teachers frequently offer students feedback that focuses mostly on what they do wrong mechanically and only somewhat on what they need to improve intellectually, much like the prior comments about the Regents' essay that move in order from "diction" to "mechanical and grammatical errors" to "coherence." Students turn to this first layer of comments for initial directions for editing, and they often start and stop with these local changes to the mechanics. They want to make corrections and edits rather than to undergo the difficulty of actual revision: consequently, students often change only what the instructor has marked, even if the same patterns persist later in the essay.

This communication gap between students and teachers reveals an important disconnect between the expectations of many process-oriented teachers, who prefer that their students first engage in the "thinking" portion of the writing task, and their product-driven students, who would rather repair mechanics. In other words, rather than only looking at their papers as something to fix locally, students need to turn to this global feedback to learn how to improve the

overall quality and unity of their ideas.<sup>10</sup> Even after decades of process writing theories, many classrooms still fail to help students see the importance of making this shift to focus on revision first. Alternative ways of understanding how invention strategies, like the *x, y* thesis and argument guide models, can help students see how the parts represent the whole *and* how the whole impacts the parts; as well, as these invention models place value on student ideas, they can help reassert rhetoric in composition classrooms.

Because the tendencies to oversimplify writing persist despite the efforts to teach composition rhetorically, the FPT and its kinfolk of formulaic structures that also pose as invention strategies remain. Teachers, therefore, need better means to help students write more rhetorically and less formulaically. Yet, at present those teachers who wish to teach students how to address form and content as interconnected components, as well as ideas and mechanics, do not have a clearly defined pedagogical framework. Certainly, they have very few, if any, alternative strategies that can encourage the flexibility of responsive forms as the focus of the invention instruction. The models in this dissertation, the *x, y* thesis and argument guide models, help to fill this void.

These new invention pedagogies work well because they help students simultaneously learn how to think and to write better *on their own*. This last prepositional phrase is critical because I feel it identifies the underpinnings of effective instruction. Educational theorists have recently spent much of their energies trying to define “best practices” for teaching. Yet, what makes good teaching better in composition classes is rather simple: the instructor find means to foster able-minded and self-sufficient students who will succeed at the tasks assigned and who can

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<sup>10</sup> See Nancy Sommers’s “Responding to Student Writing” and Brooke Horvath’s “The Components of Written Response: A Practical Synthesis of Current Views” for early discussions that advised formative comments to encourage student revision.

readily transfer these skills from one class to another. Eventually the skills become ingrained where a student could write a three page or a ten page essay in any discipline or vocation. Yet, models like the FPT are not transferable forms beyond academia. Instead, fostering such forms hinder students to become active thinkers and writers once they leave the university.

### **Trends Against Oversimplification: The Influence of Bureaucratic Battles Occurring Outside and Around the Writing Instruction Classroom**

Sharon Crowley's *Composition in the University: Historical and Polemical Essays* argues against the academic essay and the institution of the first-year composition course. At the core of her argument is the artificiality and vastness of first year writing programs that connect a "bureaucracy" to a "perceived need for composition" (260). In some ways I agree with Crowley about the ineffectiveness of such programs, but I am more hopeful than she, especially about the idea that invention can still occur in an academic argument. Therefore, I argue that until most recently the actions of this evolving bureaucracy have oversimplified writing instruction for the sake of writing assessment. In order to reclaim rhetoric in these classrooms, teachers will need to make writing complicated again: the invention models I propose will facilitate this process.

Compositionists have fought against the movements that debase rhetorical writing, and these battles parallel the waxes and wanes of the overall bureaucratic cycle. For instance, in response to spread of this bureaucratic energy, in particular in the 1920s with the growth of "large composition programs, complete with administrators and elaborate testing apparatus" (Crowley 260), the CCCCs, since its inception 1949, has asked Writing Program Administrators to move composition programs towards instruction that is more rhetorical than grammatical in approach. I feel that such efforts highlight the complications caused by efforts to oversimplify

writing altogether; the composition theorists and educational bureaucrats, who often sit outside the classrooms, want changes to occur within them. And they change policies and programs to try to match these desires and fill the gaps in their data.

Not all of these bureaucratic efforts are for naught. Attempting to work within this bureaucratic system to impact classroom instruction, some larger universities programs, like the University of South Carolina, have included mandatory graduate coursework to help all teaching assistants assigned freshman composition courses further understand the demands of these classes. These graduate teaching assistants, usually with literature or linguistic backgrounds, learn how to teach writing rhetorically.

However, not all schools have this luxury to work within the system. Other schools and programs without a large number of graduate students must rely more heavily on adjuncts than trained TAs, and these diverse instructors consequently teach rhetoric courses from a variety of perspectives. For example, a study of 267 students in the University of Wisconsin at Platteville's first year writing program indicates that what "students take with them" from the classroom differs from what instructors have attempted to instruct.<sup>11</sup>

Most likely these discrepancies are not unique to this campus. Instead, among other findings, the University of Wisconsin at Platteville study indicates that students do not consciously frame their writing rhetorically. For instance, what students think is revision is not even editing but "proofreading." In addition, only 40% identified an understanding of "writing as process," only 16% showed an understanding of rhetoric, and, even more dismally, only 12%

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<sup>11</sup> Ciesielski's study explains, "The national association of Writing Program Administrators (WPA) indicates in their national outcomes statement (see Appendix D) the basic content of first-year composition ought to address rhetorical studies primarily and skill and drill exercises secondarily." See <http://www.uwplatt.edu/~ciesield/aafgrant.html> for the results of this study conducted by Dennis Ciesielski.

understood what was meant by a “rhetorical situation.” This study explains that much of these differences come from discrepancies within the faculty’s theories and practices of composition instruction; locating part of the problem as “the sort of education and preparation these students received from a diverse set of writing teachers that cover the gamut from full Ph.D.s in rhetoric and composition to generally under-prepared adjuncts,” this study places the onus back on the institutions themselves to make changes.

Indeed, instructors who teach at one given institution come from varied backgrounds and with various histories of writing instruction (as students themselves and as teachers of writing), and these differences often riddle the rhetorical focus within English departments, no matter what the department’s missions or what the WPA may state.<sup>12</sup> In other words, bureaucracy – and its tendencies to prescribe the content and “predetermined grading scale” (Crowley 260) – often overpowers the efforts of compositionists to keep the courses aligned with rhetorical principles.

Other changes outside of the composition classroom indicate that the most logical place for effective change to occur is within the classrooms themselves. For example, many colleges and universities have acted upon their concerns about the overall quality of their writing instruction programs. Some programs like the University of Michigan have pulled their composition programs into subprograms and programs like Harvard have created a separate

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<sup>12</sup> See the “Program Creation” section on “Evaluating the Intellectual Work of Writing” webpage within the WPA website; the goal of WPA programs includes a strong rhetorical basis and recognition of process writing:

Our point here is that program creation is a strong indication of intellectual work, since successful programs are grounded in significant disciplinary knowledge, a national perspective that takes into account the successes and failures of other composition programs, and a combined practical and theoretical understanding of learning theory, the composing process, the philosophy of composition, rhetorical theory, etc. An obvious corollary is that writing programs that fail, other than when attacked on the basis of budget and ideology, often do so because they lack this scholarly foundation.

See <http://wpacouncil.org/positions/intellectualwork.html>.

entities from the English Departments altogether<sup>13</sup>; others like Kennesaw State University have established first-year writing programs as part of the General Education Program but have kept these courses embedded in English departments; others like Georgia State University have tried to improve their writing centers to create an environment in which students feel comfortable speaking to graduate students or professors about their writing; others like Colorado State University, which notably houses the WAC Clearinghouse, have attempted Writing Across the Curriculum models to encourage writing instruction in all areas of the academic community. Such universities have made these structural (bureaucratic) efforts in order to improve student writing by creating sub-groups that are concerned with the quality of this instruction. However, despite these most genuine efforts to impact student writing for the better, students still come into writing classrooms, writing centers, and other courses with their formulaic FPT-essays in tow.

Fortunately, some high school level bureaucratic systems are also taking steps towards ending this formulaic oversimplification. What has not well documented in recent composition discourse is the push against formulaic writing by such educational organizations. These organizations, like the College Board, the International Baccalaureate Organization, and the Cambridge Advanced International Certificate of Education (AICE) Program, influence the ways that curriculum is both currently developed and implemented at the high school level. And they all desire higher-order analysis that rarely extends from student writing that uses formulaic models because these models limit the development of such analysis.

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<sup>13</sup> See Maxine Hairston's "Some Speculations about the Future of Writing Programs" where she notes that in larger research based universities that she is "not optimistic about the future of writing programs as part of English departments in institutions such as these. They have already split off in Harvard, Michigan, and UCLA, but in a way I do not think is healthy. In these institutions, there are no graduate programs connected with the writing programs; consequently, the universities regard them largely as service programs and they cannot command the respect and support a good writing program needs." (12).



The College Board in particular, which has its fingers closely on the pulse of thousands of college-bound North American high school students, has altered the SAT writing prompts to encourage performance writing that encourages students to expand rather than divide their thoughts, thus eschewing formulaic structures in favor of developed and thoughtful argumentation.<sup>14</sup> From the current SAT essay website, here is a complete prompt with the directions and writing situation (and my attempt to replicate the format):

You have twenty-five minutes to write an essay on the topic assigned below.

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below.

Many persons believe that to move up the ladder of success and achievement, they must forget the past, repress it, and relinquish it. But others have just the opposite view. They see old memories as a chance to reckon with the past and integrate past and present.

*Adapted from Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, I've Known Rivers: Lives of Loss and Liberation*

**Assignment:** Do memories hinder or help people in their effort to learn from the past and succeed in the present? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

Twenty-five minutes is not much time to present ideas on this topic that will show the College Board readers the writer's abilities to both think and to write well. Thus, the College Board recommends responses that are developed (i.e. not fragmented). This shift means that students

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<sup>14</sup> See <http://sat.collegeboard.com/practice/writing-sat-essay>

must learn how to invent ideas in a traditional way (i.e. instead of an organizational structure substituting for invention) and discuss these ideas more fully than the FPT would allow.

On the same SAT site, the College Board provides a sample essay that scores a 6, their highest mark. The explanation of this mark, although it does not state it overtly, could not have been easily achieved with a formulaic structure:

This essay effectively and insightfully develops its point of view ("In order to move up the ladder of success and achievement we must come to terms with our past and integrate it into our future") through a clearly appropriate extended example drawing on the writer's experience as an actor. The essay exhibits outstanding critical thinking by presenting a well-organized and clearly focused narrative that aptly illustrates the value of memory.<sup>15</sup>

It is this type of shift in writing responses with an “extended example” that challenges the five-paragraph trends of three limited examples. In fact, none of the examples included on this site follow a five-paragraph theme, even those with lower scores, which alleges that such formulaic responses are discouraged at all levels.

In contrast, the scaffolded instruction preparing students for these exams usually follows such formulas. A quick look at the “Georgia Grade 8 Writing Assessment – 2010 Sample Papers” website, for example Paper 4, shows an essay that earns a passing mark of a 3 of 5 on organization, even though it follows an FPT form (with a narrative hook). The prompt for this assignment reads (and looks):

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<sup>15</sup> For the sample essay see <http://sat.collegeboard.com/practice/writing-sat-essay?pageId=practiceWritingEssay&tabValue=scoring>. The rubric does explain that an essay that would score a 2 could contain this weakness: “Is poorly organized and/or focused, or demonstrates serious problems with coherence or progression of ideas.” See in full <http://sat.collegeboard.com/scores/sat-essay-scoring-guide>.

### Writing Situation

In some countries, students are responsible for the basic cleaning of their school buildings. Fifteen minutes is set aside each day for all students to sweep, dust, and clean their classrooms and hallways. Think about what your class could do to clean the school.

### Directions for Writing

Write a letter to your teacher explaining your solution for cleaning the school.

Provide specific details so that your teacher will understand what your class will do.

Even though eighth graders are allowed one hundred minutes to draft and write this essay, the writer of Paper 4 on this site uses “The first thing,” “The second thing,” and “The third” as their sentence openers in their topic sentences for each of the three respective body paragraphs. As well, Paper 4 concludes with the typical “These are the three reasons” opener in their conclusion. The site responds to this organizational strategy in the following manner: “The overall organizational strategy (introduction-supporting ideas-conclusion) is appropriate to the writer’s ideas and the expository genre. [...] Transitions between body paragraphs, however, are not especially effective (‘The first thing,’ ‘The second thing,’ and ‘The third’). The conclusion is clear.”<sup>16</sup> Even though this sample is from eighth grade, it highlights the attitudes that many students retain towards formulaic writing structures: their essays may not earn the highest marks, but they will often pass.

Heavily influenced by educational organizations like the College Board that want to

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<sup>16</sup> See “Grade 8 Released Writing Topics and Sample Papers 2010” link at [http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/ci\\_testing.aspx?PageReq=CITestingWA8](http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/ci_testing.aspx?PageReq=CITestingWA8)

break these middle-school patterns, high school teachers now face the same dilemma that college instructors have for years: they need to free students from formulaic structures and from formulaic thinking, but many do not know how to implement such changes in their pedagogies. Many still want to teach to the test, but they do not recognize how the test has changed and is changing. Thus, like some of their college counterparts, many teachers need better instructional models, and I feel that the best places to begin resetting student mindsets are through better models of invention. Teachers need pedagogies to help students create focused and, at times, extended written compositions and to help engage students in the all aspects of process writing (i.e. they are not artificially restricted to focus their thoughts on formulaic structures). These secondary instructors need to see how a high school student can write an academic thesis-driven essay that will work well yet does not adhere to a pre-stated non-thesis or to a restrictive organizational statement. Most importantly, they desire pedagogies that will help them teach transferable and flexible skill sets that apply to all lengths of academic essays.

Such high school teachers face more responsibility than ever to adjust their instructional methods to confront this comfort zone of formulaic writing and erroneous invention. The shifts in assessment by organizations like the College Board highlight a growing overlap of high school and college writing philosophies which push against formulaic compositions. Ironically, because standardized writing assessment data still matters in these secondary settings, changes need to occur not only from the outside but also from within the classrooms. Thus, this top-down pressure has created more urgency for high school teachers to improve their instructional strategies than ever; consequently, teachers need better means to teach large numbers of students to write and to think better. The *x, y* thesis and argument guide models give them two such means to begin.

## **Trends In Favor of Oversimplification: The Influence of Bureaucratic Battles Occurring Inside the Writing Instruction Classrooms**

In addition to these bureaucracies that reside outside of the classroom doors, the composition teachers and their students inside these classrooms desire change as well. This dissertation responds to these needs by focusing on the overarching consistencies that nationwide a diverse group of composition instructors and institutions wish for students to carry from their writing courses through the remainder of their academic writings: argument, analysis, synthesis, and voice.

With such foci, the pedagogical alternatives I explain in later chapters, the *x, y* thesis and argument guide models, focus on one of earliest – and ongoing parts – of the writing process: invention strategies. For high school and, if necessary, college English courses, the development of these alternative instructional means to invention will help show students how to pull away from formulaic models towards models that help them engage critically with the demands of the writing situation itself. At present, because students replace invention strategies with formulaic structures like the FPT, formulaic models have led to limitations that can best be described as formulaic responses and formulaic revisions. These formulaic models already in place include the most prevalent five-paragraph theme, the Jane Schaffer Writing Program – known as the Jane Schaffer Method (JSM) and relatively common to secondary classrooms, formal outlines, and other argument structures, like the Classical and Toulmin models of argument, which students often assimilate incorrectly as formulas. Thus, non-formulaic alternatives to these models, alternatives that turn the focus from product to process, will help students learn to examine their own overall compositions more successfully than these formulas, especially in terms of overall

critical thinking.

Many students never analyze why they adhere so tightly to such formulaic structures like the FPT, JSM, formal outlines, or misapplied argument models like Toulmin's. These formulaic structures can be effective instructional tools for achieving learning goals at a particular stage in students' development, but long after other instructors expect them to move on to rhetorically responsive writings, many students hold too firmly to these models as limiting forms.

An analogy may help explain these limitations. These formulaic writing structures restrict mobility very much like the training wheels on a child's bike. They provide security, yet they also limit the risks in the types of analyses that the students take. When my oldest son was four he often lost momentum while he tried to ride his bike with training wheels across someone's lawn rather than remaining on the sidewalk. His rear wheel would lose contact with the ground. Once he learned to ride on his own without these training wheels, though, he no longer faced this dilemma. As he began to ride more freely and more quickly on his own, I thought about how his training wheels were a fair metaphor to describe the conformity and limitations that parallel both formulaically-structured essays. With these organizational models, some students do not realize that they have been confined because they have never left the path; meanwhile, others do have a sense of my son's frustrations because they feel that there is whole world they are not free to explore. Yet without alternative models of invention, many of these students will continue to ride bikes with training wheels (i.e. write using formulaic models), which means they have elected a series of limitations.

Many of these students find a comfort zone with a formulaic structure of arrangement rather than learning how to balance form and content. Prepared to count and check for completion, students wish to satisfy their goals with the least amount of risk and work. Rather

than stopping to ponder the possibilities of the essay as a whole or exploring a whole route that may take them nowhere, these students focus on task completion. With alternative heuristics, though, an instructor can encourage a new step in these students' evolutions as writers.

The five-paragraph theme most overtly exemplifies the tendency of writing instruction and writing efforts to oversimplify writing into a non-rhetorical act. In particular, the thesis in the FPT becomes a non-thesis (like the bike discussed above with training wheels is in reality a non-bike). Because students – and sometimes teachers – seek something countable and complete, the five-paragraph theme is the most commonly used formulaic writing structure that extends from this non-thesis.

With the FPT, students usually mistake an arrangement pattern, a non-thesis three-prong organizational statement, for an inventional strategy, and this early decision in the writing process usually creates a pattern of bad writing that five-paragraph essays often exhibit. The models that I offer, the *x, y* model in contrast to the FPT in particular, reinforce process-based invention practices to keep students from mistaking theses as patterns of limited arrangement.

However, because it is not the only formulaic structure taught at the secondary level, most secondary and post-secondary composition instructors also need to understand the Jane Schaffer Writing Program, often called the Jane Schaffer Method (JSM). Like the FPT, the Jane Schaffer Method creates a measurable and countable form. But unlike the FPT that seems to stop invention at the thesis level, the JSM focuses on the form of the body paragraphs; it is at this level of the composition where students might lose their invention strategies and, consequently, their abilities to extend their ideas.

Students who begin to follow the JSM model face a new set of restrictions as Marc Wiley's apt discussions in "The Popularity of Formulaic Writing" note. He writes how this

commercially-derived writing method focuses on a strict arrangement pattern and how the JSM influenced numerous teachers and schools, especially by the mid-1990s when her materials were published on a large scale. I still see evidence of it today in my college and high school classes; therefore, I think it important to share some an explanation of and my thoughts about the JSM.

The JSM follows a mathematical formula to shape each body paragraph similarly. Thus even more prescriptive than the FPT at the paragraph level, the Jane Schaffer Method does offer teachers an alternative writing structure to the FPT. The Jane Schaffer Method does ask teachers to move their students away from the three-prong thesis (A+B+C). Yet, the discussions about paragraph development are too restrictive because the focus in her pedagogy turns towards unwavering mathematical relationships between what she calls “Concrete Details” (CDs) and “Commentary” (CM). In fact, she prescribes a four-paragraph essay in which “[e]ach body paragraph must have eight sentences” that follow a duplicate pattern of “[a] concrete detail and two commentary sentences [to] form a single chunk” (Wiley 62).<sup>17</sup> Despite these rigid patterns, the Jane Schaffer Method emphasizes including evidence and building towards analysis of this evidence. Moreover, as Wiley points out, these terms present, a “common lexicon [which] helps limit the concepts students must learn, and [from which] teachers and students can easily talk about an essay’s structure” (62-3). Yet, despite these strengths, the strict pattern and the commitment to ratio – the 1 CD to 2 CM ratio and word minimums – limits the extent of the commentary that follows, making an academic argument stilted and artificial. The CMs are also too prescriptive to encourage a rhetorical response because students most often summarize the

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<sup>17</sup> See also Mark Pennington’s take on Jane Schaffer where he sells a variant method that replaces these terms with “numerical values that reflect the hierarchy of effective essay structure: 3 (topic sentence) -4 (concrete detail) -5 (commentary)-5-4-5-5 in “Why Johnny Can’t Write” at <http://www.articlesbase.com/education-articles/why-johnny-cant-write-205968.html>.



evidence rather than move forward with thoughtful analysis. For example, the 2002 program, which many secondary schools still follow, offers sentence openers that should follow citations, all of which begin with grammatical expletives such as “This [also] shows that,” “This is because,” “This is important because,” and “As a result.” Students who feel that they must stick to this model word by word find themselves stuck with these rather empty sentence openers: with these expletives as guides they often begin to explain very little, falling into paraphrase of the passage itself and never extending the analysis beyond this guided sentence completion. In other words, they follow the formula so tightly that they do not have much else to say beyond these two sentences, the CMs, which follow their CD.

Not all is wrong with the JSM, but it has limitations. As Wiley writes, “Her writing pedagogy requires some, but not extensive training; it is accessible and tightly structured; it is applicable to any number of students, regardless of ability; and it promises positive results in a short time” (61). Compared to the FPT that encourages students to think “around” a topic, the JSM helps students think “within” it. Thus in many ways the JSM helps students understand the limitations of the five-paragraph theme because it shows them how little they had to say about their disparate parts. Because the JSM attempts to encourage more analysis of evidence (i.e. CMs) than the five-paragraph theme, which focuses on finding reasons (i.e. CDs), despite its aforementioned limitations, it offers a nice segue from the FPT to the heuristics I explain in later chapters. For example, in its favor, the method should allow for teacher responses that discuss more rhetoric than grammar because the students attempt to say something about their ideas. The model falters, however, through its rigid mathematical formulas. The JSM designates how students will compose their analyses – rather than allow the content to drive this form the form drives the content. Thus, like the FPT, students who adhere too closely to the JSM lose their

inventive voice when they fall victim to another countable pattern. Students recognize these limitations on their own; for example, the author of the following “everything 2” post states at the end:

This Writing method is good for starters, yet can be a damper on more advanced writers. You will hit a barrier on your writing real fast, and will probably move on to something else. This method should, on average, guaranty you a "B" on an essay. I had a teacher that made me use this, and I absolutely hated it, but, I did do well on essays.<sup>18</sup>

Many students, like this one who volunteered his or her thoughts online, make their writing decisions based on grades; therefore, I am reluctant to share Schaffer’s confidence that “[t]he formulaic nature of this unit [JSM] does not bother us because students may leave it once they understand it” (7; quoted in Wiley 63). Too many students insert their initial thoughts into formulas like the JSM, as they do with the FPT, and stick to these thoughts.

Neither of these models, the FPT and the JSM, strongly encourages students to write multiple drafts of papers; instead, students usually see writing as a linear activity. For many students who adhere to these restrictive forms, the activity of writing becomes countable and complete; they prefer a set system that generates products rather than promotes thinking. Wiley, for example, observes “there is no *next* in the Shaffer approach” (63). I agree, and I also feel that there is no next in the FPT either due to the ways in which secondary instruction focuses more on completion and assessment than it does invention and revision. Into this gap my alternative models of invention find a location, a place where teachers can help students find better means to stimulate rhetorical compositions which break free from restrictive formulaic responses.

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<sup>18</sup> See April 10, 2004 post on <http://everything2.com/title/The+Jane+Schaffer+Writing+Program>.

Students too caught up in the oversimplification of the writing process replace inventive and revision strategies with these organizational structures, and they rarely step back from their compositions to examine their thoughts in a prolonged way. In contrast, because new invention models like the *x, y* thesis and argument guide models push students to extend their ideas in ways to match the needs of the discourse, these models challenge the tendencies of writing instruction to sell themselves short. A response more aware of the rhetorical writing process, one not fettered by such limiting formulas like the FPT or JSM which ask students to look towards mathematical completion, will allow students to reflect continually upon the ways in which their writing best represents their extensive understandings of the topic because they learn to examine how their extended analyses complete their overall arguments.

Because the FPT and JSM methods are not entirely faulty, it would be helpful to have discussions with students about the potential limitations that these formulaic structures impose on their thoughts, especially upon invention. To help this discussion, the models that I offer in this dissertation draw a distinction between teaching writing that encourages what I call *responsive form* instruction and practice – composition theories that encourage the rhetorical situation (i.e. content in response to the audience and purpose of the discourse) to shape the form. This instruction focused on responsive form composition vastly differs from *formulaic writing* models – composition structures that encourage non-responsive forms to restrict the content and analysis of this content. These new responsive form models, therefore, challenge the bureaucracy of writing instruction – inside and outside of the classrooms – that press for an oversimplification of the writing processes.

When teachers assume the role as bureaucrats, they oversimplify the rhetorical process as well. For example, in their efforts to model standardized tests and assessments, many high

school instructors teach to the test using released prompts. Others deviate some from these practices but still assign common topics on which all of their students write. While assigning topics and themes has been something fairly common to composition instruction since Aristotle's *topoi*, I have witnessed as well a trend over the past two decades where teachers assign specific topics and limit potential sources.<sup>19</sup> The AP Language Synthesis essay is a model for such practices; thus, many teachers create their own "synthesis" packets for their students. This process works rather well to teach analytical behaviors and to control concerns about plagiarism, but there are hazards to this methodology.

Unfortunately, the trend here is similar to that of the FPT and JSM: teachers, formulas, and packets oversimplify aspects of the writing process, especially invention and structure. The hazards of such restrictions in form, topic, and sources are that some teachers and students will focus little on the rhetorical situation because they never have to how their thoughts can achieve their purpose. Therefore, it becomes possible for a college student to reach a composition classroom without ever having written a thoughtful response to a relatively open-ended prompt that evolved from all phases of process writing; unfortunately, many of these inexperienced first year writing students practically collapse when their college instructors ask them to invent, research, think, and shape the form of their essays to produce initial drafts, even if this assignment is limited by a rhetorical mode (of discourse) or by specific genre.

Rather than tell students they have learned faulty models, students need to understand the value in such oversimplified rhetorical acts, the FPT and JSM, as scaffolded models. The FPT helps students learned how to think "around" an essay because they understand better the theory

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<sup>19</sup> See Horner's *Nineteenth-Century Scottish Rhetoric: The American Connection* for a discussion of how theme-writing shifted from the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Scottish academy to the American one.

of unity and progression (even though these acts are forced in this model). Likewise, the JSM helps students think “within” the essay because they have to learn how to say something analytical about the evidence they offer (even those these acts are also forced in this model). These past models, despite their rhetorical faults, help students harness skills necessary to write effective process essays. Teachers can take what these students have learned along the way in order to teach them how to repackage and to rethink how these parts can become a better whole within a full rhetoric. In effect, with new heuristics students can learn how to think “through” an essay.

### **Fighting the Oversimplified Academic Essay with New Invention Models: An Introduction to the *x, y* Thesis and Argument Guide Heuristics**

With these patterns and dilemmas as part of our history and of our present, many college instructors find their students falling into formulaic writing structures, even though they do not relate to the rhetorical situations or assignments in the course. One natural response to these observations is for post-secondary teachers to condemn the ways in which writing instruction is handled at the secondary level, but few solutions ever emerge from such criticisms of such secondary composition instruction.

Examining this stereotypical divide between high school and college communities will help better explain this non-productive clash between high school language arts teachers and college English instructors. A large number of students enter college as poor writers, and, among other concerns, many of these students rely heavily on formulaic writing strategies. What college instructors do not see is the batch of poorly written students’ papers, some of which are products of students who did not make it into the college environment where they teach. In

general, in response to these error-ridden and hardly comprehensible essays, many high school teachers spend lots of time marking student papers for grammatical errors. Continuing a pattern that has been in place for decades, these high school teachers oversimplify aspects of the composition process (i.e. assigning specific themes or encouraging formulaic structures) in order to expend their efforts editing their students' documents for grammatical errors. These teachers mark the errors and add ways to correct these issues.<sup>20</sup> In these stereotypical scenarios, students just correct these surface faults that the teacher identifies, rather than thinking deeply about the topic in a way that could be called revision; these students, therefore, respond to their teacher's feedback mechanically, without fully recognizing the reasons behind their revisions and edits.

The hazard with this pattern becomes quite conspicuous at the post-secondary level. When these students reach college campuses, many still try to force the majority of their compositions into the same structures, usually in the appearance of the five-paragraph theme, or they ask for specific topics and positions to begin writing. In other words, they are more prepared to await their red marks on the surface of their writings than to engage with the rhetorical situation that will help them actually nonlinearly invent, compose, and revise these essays. It is at this level of specification where students and secondary instructors feel most comfortable discussing writing and grades – in terms of what is right and what is wrong rather than terms of what could be. In contrast, many college instructors pull away from such patterns. For instance, Robert J. Connors and Andrea A. Lunsford's "Frequency of Formal Errors in Current College Writing, or Ma and Pa Kettle Do Research," has helped composition instructors understand the patterns common to marking frequent student errors; likewise, Nancy Sommers's

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<sup>20</sup> It may be that the continuation of this trend in web-based courses may relate to the comment function in programs like Word. In this format, teachers look electronically at one screen shot at a time. The hypothesis that this electronic forum may push instructors to respond more locally is a topic worth exploring more in another project.

work has been influential in discussions about the (in)effectiveness of the marginalia and endnote conversations between teacher and student.<sup>21</sup> Discussions about the futility of mere error marking, like those about “surface errors” by Richard Haswell in his article “Minimal Marking,” establish a need for balanced assessment alternatives, in particular at the secondary level, because this damaging pedagogical pattern of red ink that focuses solely on surface errors continues (i.e. even in today’s age of electronic opportunities for asynchronous discourse between student and teacher).<sup>22</sup> In other words, even though it overtly caters almost solely to the mechanical areas of writing and covertly decimates the invention process, some instructors feel that conventions are easier to discuss than ideas. Such discussions are more clearly cut because they discuss what is right and wrong versus what is and what could be.

Focusing on instructors and students, this dissertation offers my two models, the *x, y* thesis and argument guide models, that will help improve students’ academic writing by finding invention alternatives to the current formulaic models that often ignore process and that usually supplement organization as invention. These new models provoke an improved student-teacher conversation because the models focus primarily on using the students’ thoughts to generate forms in response to their ideas. In other words, these models further establish innovative and flexible pedagogies that bridge the skills most students have learned from narrow formulaic pedagogies and the ideas that some students have gathered from obtuse free-writing

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<sup>21</sup> See Nancy Sommers, Carol Rutz, and Howard Tinberg’s “Re-Visions: Rethinking Nancy Sommers’s ‘Responding to Student Writing,’ 1982” for a brief update to her original discourse. See also “Teacher’s Rhetorical Comments on Student Papers” by Connors and Lunsford for a discussion of the trends of teacher’s written comments on student drafts. A smaller study by Carol Rutz manages to detail four unique patterns of feedback within the first-year writing program at the University of Minnesota: an instructor who matched surface errors to a writing handbook, an instructor who “ignored surface error and provided a full page of single-spaced typed commentary,” an instructor who “line-edited every draft,” and an instructor who wrote very little but “required each student to meet with her individually on each draft” (260).

<sup>22</sup> See also Elaine Lees’s “Evaluating Student Writing” – where she writes “[o]ur covering student papers with suggestions and corrections is not the same thing as leading students to revise for themselves” (373) – for a discussion of teacher input and student output.

philosophies.

With a common lexicon and a better understanding of how academic writing works, these alternatives broaden the means available for complete academic writing to be discussed. The movements to this middle ground for instructional dialogues differ most significantly from current models concerned with formulaic responses, like the five-paragraph theme (FPT) and Jane Schaffer Method (JSM), because they encourage students to let the content shape the form (i.e. not letting a formula determine content). As well, these alternative models provide teachers and students with visual guides that will help them see the integrated layers of an academic composition – the thesis, major claims, evidence, and analysis – that make arguments most complete and convincing.<sup>23</sup> For many teachers, these models will additionally present stable and clearer terms in order to discuss ideas, structure, unity, transitions, revisions, and assessment tangibly. Ideally, through these alternatives, students learn to negotiate better the relations of both content and form, they learn to improve their writing on their own, and they learn to present this information in new ways.

These invention models that I offer in the following chapters offer such learning opportunities by helping students learn how to write better college-level essays. Without strict formulas restricting their abilities to develop aspects of their arguments, these students can learn to understand and to demonstrate the thinking skills define both rhetorical and academic writing, even though Crowley would disagree with this pairing. These alternative invention models further display the non-linearity and asymmetry often indicative of better thinking and better writing. Student writing can become effective and, eventually, efficient when students

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<sup>23</sup> See Linda K. Silverman's *Upside-Down Brilliance: The Visual-Spatial Learner* for more discussions of visual spatial learning. As well, see Howard Gardner's theories of multiple intelligences, offered first in his 1983 *Frames of Mind*, for discussions of spatial learners.



understand how nonlinear the process truly is. Meanwhile, their teachers, prepared with new invention strategies that facilitate such shifts in critical thinking and in rhetorical writing, can help encourage such gains in thought and, ultimately, in product. In order to help students' writing practices match their instructors' process theories, students and teachers need new instructional models, in particular invention strategies, like the ones I present in this dissertation to further facilitate these shifts from formulaic forms towards rhetorical arguments.

Such invention alternatives offer options that many high school or college instructors have not yet considered. For over twenty years, the excuse has been that many high school teachers are either unaware of or resistant to the theories practiced by their collegiate counterparts. Rather than place blame on standardized tests or on needs for multiple formative and summative assessments to appease parents and administrators, high school teachers, in particular, need to find means to (re)introduce invention and revision into their often-crowded classrooms. With these new models, teachers and students alike can learn to experiment with form and content (and the interplay between the two) because they will better understand how an extended composition builds from relationships and moves past formulaic models like the FPT that merely provide coordinating ideas (A+B+C). With shared terms and with practice using the terms in connection with both writing and reading, they will learn how to discuss better student writing with one another.

When students no longer follow static formulas that limit their thinking, then they will see how to invent and to extend flexible discussions within an academic composition naturally; they will learn how to maintain a focus on their argument without following illogically balanced

outlines or set formulaic constraints.<sup>24</sup> Without these formulas, students can conceptually understand the interconnectivity of the parts of a composition. Therefore, experimenting with new pedagogies and the options they can provide for student writing could help student learn to see how all of the pieces in their compositions can work effectively, independently and globally, in a composition when they relate overtly to one another.

In defense of this dissertation, I provide alternative invention strategies for instructors to consider that would expose students to rhetorical ways of examining their writing and others'. If students or teachers see these models merely as step-by-step instructional techniques rather than frameworks to encourage student thought, then they will not work much better than the current and restrictive FPT or JSM models.

In contrast to (or as extensions of, depending on the point of view) such formulas, my invention models help students better understand that they have options – in both form and content – when they invent, compose, and revise (and how this order is not always sequential). These connected models help students write compositions that match their purpose with the shape of their argument, and, as a result, these models focus more on overall thinking than on organizing parts. I desire for instructors to realize that they can teach the thought processes that make academic writing successful when they explain to students how the interconnectivity and flexibility of a composition's parts bend to the students' ideas.

With the plethora of writing situations that a typical college preparatory student faces in

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<sup>24</sup> See Purdue's OWL website and accompanying PDF for an explanation of the different types of outlines. This site does a nice job showing some asymmetry based on the needs of the essay [<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/544/1/>]. Also see older sites like "Preparing and Using Outlines" at Capital Community College for the more common expectations about seeking balance with "descending" outlines; here they write "Logic requires that if you have an 'A' in your paper, you need to have a 'B'; a '1' requires a '2,' and so forth." [<http://www.ccc.commnet.edu/mla/outlines.shtml>].

secondary classrooms and testing centers, and with decades of process writing theory by the likes of leaders like James Moffett, those vested in improving students' compositions now arrive at a identifiable crossroads. It may help for readers to consider the five-paragraph formula and other oversimplified organizational structures as the first of three scaffolded levels of writing instruction, which include as the middle level a new set of models that reside comfortably between the FPT and naturalist models. It is to this middle ground – this empty island – which this dissertation portages.

The average American student already knows the FPT model; such students are better prepared to learn alternative models that utilize this prior knowledge than most skeptics may think. Eliciting prior knowledge is not a new educational trend. Yet, the idea of scaffolded – sometimes called tiered – instruction has had lots of coverage in recent educational discussions. To offer a quick summary, according to cognitive psychologist Lev Vygotsky, there is a “zone of proximal development” between what the student knows and what they can learn (32)<sup>25</sup>; therefore, what scaffolded instruction does, as explained by Judy Olson and Jennifer Pratt, is provide instruction that helps move the student through this zone of proximal development. This dissertation will explain how these new invention models help to transition composition instruction from restrictive structures like the FPT and JSM to alternatives that offer a more thorough and ongoing examination of the entire rhetoric. Once students understand the heuristics explained in this dissertation, they, by becoming cognizant of rhetorical connections and relationships, can see how their writing needs a recursive invention process to create a complete and connected product.

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<sup>25</sup> In Vygotsky's terms, it is “distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (33).

While I am not attempting to rid the world of the five-paragraph theme, the Jane Shaeffer Method, or standardized writing assessment, I am trying to open readers' eyes to understand the present dilemma better by first examining the FPT closely, especially as a model of formulaic writing that oversimplifies the writing process. Simply put, students resist creating a form on their own that does not follow a formula because they have flawed invention strategies. Thus, the relative ease of the formulaic FPT has helped it become the most common model to which past generations of the educated populace come to expect as an acceptable form. Despite its weaknesses, the FPT serves as a common ground to discuss the interactions between student and teacher and between writer and product. Regardless of the institution and the types of students matriculating in these systems, as a whole, there remains a common expectation for first-year composition programs to teach effective and efficient communicative skills that will transfer to the workplace. And none of these real world communications asks for a formulaic response (or always three solutions or reasons). Thus, by consistently considering content and form during a linear or nonlinear composition process, the models that I offer, in contrast, are accessible means to move beyond the constraints of formulaic writing via heuristics that emphasize students' ideas and the rhetoric to support them.

I acknowledge that some critics may argue that all models, especially models that replace faulty formulaic and misappropriated ones like the FPT, can replicate the extant problems. This concern is valid if my invention models also replaced invention with structure. Yet, they attempt to right this wrong of oversimplification, and, if implemented as flexible invention pedagogies to encourage better thinking, such vast criticisms about the shortcomings of all models should become moot.

In other words, I offer two better invention models in this dissertation than the FPT and

the JSM, which are not even invention models. Moreover, other invention strategies like clustering, brainstorming, free writing, listing, outlining, writing proposals, Burke's pentad, and cubing can all fall back into same structural traps of these formulaic structures that often cloud the ways in which students invent because students hesitate to divorce the topic from these regimented forms.<sup>26</sup> Although my composition models encourage the form and ideas to work together, they should not be abused as formulas. I envision that teachers could spend, for example, one lesson that discusses why students learn to write in various ways by showing the continuum from formulaic writing to explorative pedagogies. From here, these instructors could introduce the tendencies to oversimplify writing instruction to help students better understand the present trends that are taking place both outside and inside classrooms. Presenting the alternative rhetorical models of invention in dissertation, in particular as a means to fight against these trends, will help students understand why they need to experiment with these models if they desire to improve their academic writing. Furthermore, by improving students' awareness of the potential for subject matter without oversimplified, restrictive forms, teachers can help dispel some of the students' anxieties that have led them to accept organizational models as invention strategies and can help encourage students to free their writing from these extant formulaic restraints.

With an understanding of these two new models, students will further examine their writing conceptually. These alternative invention tools will also help students identify the overarching elements in their own entire compositions and help students learn broader understandings of the ways rhetoric actually works in a whole academic essay. These models

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<sup>26</sup> For a student-friendly summary of these common invention methods see Bradley Bleck's blog from Spokane Fall Community College [<http://bleckblog.org/comp/node/112>].

foster such opportunities to discuss how effective academic writing responds to the needs of the writer, the rhetorical situation from which the discourse originates, and the communication that results from these efforts.

I envision a broad audience for this dissertation. The thinking patterns easily extend to other subject areas where instructors expect students to write argument-based essays rather than to write mere reports. For instructors in English education classrooms and in professional learning seminars, these models could introduce these new alternatives to teaching composition. These writing alternatives will help teachers expand the ways in which both high school and college writing instruction is taught and discussed.

## **CHAPTER 2.**

### **AN EXAMINATION OF THE FPT'S POTENTIAL AND REAL HISTORIES**

#### **Introduction**

The five-paragraph theme (FPT) remains the most prevalent prescribed writing structure that American students have adopted.<sup>27</sup> Whether the FPT appears in middle schools, high schools, or college classrooms, it impacts the shapes of students' essays, and it does so physically and intellectually.

Examining the origins and history of the FPT, especially in an age of instruction still heavily influenced by current-traditional rhetoric, this chapter will help readers recognize how students misuse this organizational model as a faulty invention strategy, despite its origins otherwise. Knowing how teachers and their students have fallen into this historical writing pattern, as a representative of other formulaic non-invention structures, will help teachers learn how to move beyond such oversimplified composition methods (as they prepare their students for the future with methods that encourage a complete rhetoric). This historical background will also help distinguish how my invention models explained in the next two chapters differ in theory and in application.

#### **A Brief Explanation of the Five-Paragraph Theme**

As most high school and even first year college teachers witness through their students' work, many teachers often teach thesis writing to students through the five-paragraph theme

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<sup>27</sup> As a reader, who has marked thousands of external, standardized writing assessments for both domestic and international organizations, I can attest to this claim. Additionally, as an instructor at both the high school and college level in the US for over a decade, I can confirm the frequent tendencies of students to turn to the FPT.

structure. The products of such instruction are usually formulaic compositions – with their narrowing introductions, preview thesis statements with three parts, corresponding body paragraphs, and conclusions that restate what has just been argued – that have become the touchstones to which many high school and college students return when asked to write a composition.

The predictable shapes of and self-referencing language in these common formulaic essays make the FPT easy to identify and to describe. For example, Thomas Nunnally in the January 1991 *The English Journal* identifies the most common expectations for this modern five-paragraph essay or “five-paragraph theme”:

As it is usually taught, the FPT requires (1) an introductory paragraph moving from a generality to an explicit thesis statement and announcement of three points in support of that paragraph, (2) three middle paragraphs, each of which begins with a topic sentence restating one of the major ideas supporting the thesis and then develops the topic sentence (with a minimum of three sentences in most models), and (3) a concluding paragraph restating the thesis and points. (67)

This FPT model has maintained itself in very much the same pattern in many of America’s classrooms for the last century. Yet, to understand its current vitality and its misuse as a heuristic, the history of the modern FPT must be investigated. Its past, which is certainly an issue open to debate and which is potentially more surprising than many compositionists have previously considered, has enabled this national pedagogy to take root.

### **The FPT’s Potential Histories, Influences, and Intentions**

In terms of its historic origins, some compositionists have attempted to show how the



FPT developed gradually through Classical, Renaissance, Current-traditionalist, and Contemporary rhetorics and their related pedagogies. While there is a historical break where little discussion occurs (between the Renaissance and more contemporary rhetorics), a number of historians identify the institutionalization of writing in America as a result of the Harvard Committee's late nineteenth-century influence. To explore and to unite these respective histories and influences, I will examine in this section of the dissertation how the FPT, in particular as a rhetorical strategy, has been connected to previous eras and various rhetoricians, specifically late nineteenth-century innovator, Scotsman Alexander Bain and his mid twentieth-century predecessor, American Duane Nichols. In this discussion I will explain how the FPT most likely developed and how its roots, especially when linked to Bain, were closer to the rhetorical practices that it has ironically stymied.

When historians look for the source of the FPT, Aristotle is not it. Aristotle's five stages of preparing a speech, for instance, do not parlay to a set formulaic structure.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, Aristotle divides many of his thoughts in *Rhetoric* Books I, II, and III into threes – kinds of persuasion, divisions, distinct ends, things which inspire confidence in the orator's own character, and three points one must study to make a speech (i.e. the means of producing persuasion, the style or language, and the proper arrangement of the various parts of the speech). Aristotle's writings on arrangement, however, show that he encouraged only two parts to discourse: statement and proof. He writes specifically, in the beginning of Chapter 13 in *Rhetoric*, "A speech has two parts. You must state your case and you must prove it" (144). He offers rigid arrangement on the grounds that most audience members cannot follow close

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<sup>28</sup> See Bizzell and Berzberg as an example of discussions of Aristotle, Thomas Wilson and Cicero in *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*.

reasoning and need this preparation. Thus, his expanded model is the one typically cited, where he states: “the only necessary parts of a speech are the Statement and the Argument. These are the essential features of a speech; and it cannot in any case have more than Introduction, Statement, Argument, and Epilogue.” (144). In other words, some of Aristotle’s models present ideas in three main parts beyond the introduction like the FPT, but this division is not the driving force behind his organizational theories; instead, he sees arrangement as something that responds to the needs of the audience and the purpose of the speaker. Without much surprise, the FPT, consequently, does not belong to Aristotle.

If Aristotle’s theories of division are not the sources for the FPT then neither are later rhetoricians’ theories that added similar organizational sections. For example, subsequent rhetoricians, like writers of the *Ad Herenium* and *De Inventione*, offer six parts to an oration.<sup>29</sup> Thomas Wilson in an even later text, the sixteenth-century book *The Arte of Rhetorique*, discusses classical rhetoric and separates an oration into seven parts rather than four or five; in the opening of this text he finds that there are seven parts in “every Oration”: “the *Enterance*,” “the *Narration*,” “the *Division or several parting of things*,” “the *Proposition*,” the “*Confirmation*,” the “*Confutation*,” and the “*Conclusion*.” Not only does the FPT not match the structure of these organizational models, but it also does not match in rhetorical theory either. By comparison to these models, the five-paragraph approach often ignores the rhetorical context, the rhetorical situation, and the rhetorical appeals that these historical rhetoricians discuss at length. In contrast, these historical efforts stress that effective discourse must recognize and respond to the audience; the differences in this audience awareness between the FPT and these

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<sup>29</sup> Rhetoricians, like Donald C. Stewart, have also looked to Peter Ramus’s *Arguments in Rhetoric Against Quintillian* that link arrangement and invention together under logic, thus separating both from style, memory, and delivery.

historic models become especially heightened when most modern composition typically faces only a reading audience, a group which differs greatly from a classical listening audience.

This next wave of real influence upon classroom writing practices came during the nineteenth century, and this period of current-traditional rhetoric has received much attention. For example, Sharon Crowley has already recognized the ways in which the FPT belongs to the nineteenth-century current-traditionalists because they were teaching students to write in instructional situations for academic reading audiences. She feels this group strongly influenced the writing instruction and writing practice in the present-day academy, and I agree. In *The Methodical Memory*, for example, she criticizes the current-traditionalists by writing that they “transferred its [the current-traditional theory of invention] concern with minds to concern with the shapes of texts” (13). Her findings also assert that these pedagogies were more concerned with finding ways for students to identify what they knew for the instructor rather than to explore what they thought about a subject. Any contemporary writing instructor who has struggled to teach a student to think freely about the ideas presented before them understands that these influences of current-traditional rhetoric have been hard to break.

The invention stage of the writing process proves especially difficult for students, whose overall thinking is stifled from patterns of oversimplification like the FPT. For Crowley, current-traditional rhetoric is culpable; she directly addresses the impact of the FPT on invention in her discussion of the five-paragraph theme as a “manifestation” of current-traditional rhetoric (134):

[B]y the middle years of the twentieth century, the synthetic process [the five-paragraph theme] was more often treated as a graphic structure than a means of invention [...] The five-paragraph theme was prescribed to students in the absence of a historical context; it was simply touted as the way things are done.”

(135).

In other words, the current-traditionalists ran against both invention and the naturalist theories of the Classical rhetoricians like Plato who argued discourse as something natural, unique, individual, and responsive to the context in which it occurs.<sup>30</sup> Yet these oversimplified pedagogies still took hold as common practice because teachers wanted a means to control a diverse classroom and to measure student performance.

The nineteenth-century classroom faced a causal chain of outside influences that promoted such change: changes in the American populace, government, and economics; overall structural changes within the American academy in reply to these needs; the widespread adoption of written college entrance examinations to prepare students for this altered college experience; and rhetorical textbooks that supported current-traditional pedagogies to keep up with standardization trends. For example, John C. Brereton explains in his book, *The Origins of Composition Studies in the American College. 1875-1925: A Documentary History*, how the American college went through many transformations in the late nineteenth century that would have supported the current-traditional theories with which Crowley is concerned. The shift from the college to the university meant that schools became more organized, more formal, more varied, and more purposeful; in Brereton's terms, "the American college moved from a unified small, elite school to a diverse, large, fragmented, university organized by academic disciplines" (4). When the university model became the norm, the changes that it spawned "were to shatter traditional rhetoric and to aid in the emergence of modern composition" (Brereton 5). This composition instruction began with preparations for the entrance examinations and continued

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<sup>30</sup> See also Crowley's "Composition Is Not Rhetoric" (2003) where she argues: "current-traditional rhetoric, where invention was reduced to selection of a subject to write about and where arrangement was reified into the five-paragraph theme."

with the first-year composition course, practices theoretically focused on ability more so than knowledge. Unfortunately, this focus easily inverted as time passed and as colleges unprepared to teach rhetoric found easier means to teach and to measure student writing.

When many of these other colleges became modern universities that followed in the footsteps of Harvard's current-traditional rhetoric, the irony has it that the writing in these programs became less rhetorically-centered. Potentially due to the celerity in which schools made preparations for these Harvard-like programs, the influences of textbooks like Adam Sherman Hill's, the pressures of the entrance exams, or combinations therefore, in a quick wave the rhetorical models became formulaic models designed primarily for assessment to enter college and to show what was learned once admitted.

Because of its vast influence, the efforts and impacts of the Harvard Committee of Ten are often charged with this institutionalization of writing in American classrooms. In response to open admissions policies at the growing colleges and universities in the late nineteenth century and the growing of number of specialized programs in these institutions that followed the German model, Charles W. Eliot, as President of Harvard for forty years (1869-1909), spearheaded a monumental task with far-reaching influence. With the help of educational leaders like Adams Sherman Hill and Francis James Child, "[w]hat Eliot did was to ally the modern university with a new emphasis on English and to raise writing and English literature to the level of more hallowed studies like mathematics and classics" (Brereton 9). And he did so by modifying the entrance examination and creating a first-year writing course.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> See Brereton for a full history. In sum, by 1885, the freshman composition course had become English A, "a two-semester course in rhetoric and writing almost totally based on Adams Sherman Hill's *Principles of Rhetoric*" (11). As well, see Brereton for a discussion of Yale's Thomas Lounsbury, who he claims had much influence on using literature as the substance for discourse in the *fin de siècle* and twentieth-century first-year writing courses (16).

According to Arthur Applebee, the content and pedagogy of high school preparatory programs corresponded directly to the announced college entrance requirements and assessments. Specifically, the 1873-1874 Harvard assessment is considered to have the most long-lasting and widest-spread impact: here they proclaimed that “literature was to be studied, not for itself or even for philology, but as a subject for composition [assessment and instruction]” (Applebee 30). Meanwhile, by 1892 the National Conference on Uniform Entrance Requirements and the Committee of Ten had formed to discuss entrance exams. This latter group, which consisted of a chairman and representatives from nine academic fields, made the following conclusion about English instruction:

The main objects of the teaching of English in schools seem to be two: (1) to enable the pupil to understand the expressed thoughts of others and to give expression to thoughts of his own; and (2) to cultivate a taste for reading, to give the pupil some acquaintance with good literature, and to furnish him with the means of extending that acquaintance. (qtd. in Applebee 33)

Here were the tenets of the early American composition programs, and Harvard worked hard to become the nucleus around which these changes occurred. As the only major school dedicated to teaching writing to its students over the whole four year period, Harvard also attracted leaders and innovators who were willing to implement changes at the university, department, class, teacher, and student levels.

Because other schools did not have or could not attract departments similar to Harvard’s, they consequently changed what they could: instruction and assessment. Brereton and Applebee, for instance, discuss how at the secondary level most preparatory schools responded by trying to prepare students for the entrance exam and at the collegiate level many schools responded by

attempting to emulate Harvard's first-year composition course. Although the contemporary standardized writing assessments may have new names and the composition theories new loci of leadership, in reality many of these current-traditional patterns have remained relatively unchanged over one hundred years later.

To explain further, during the late nineteenth century first-year composition students at Harvard read Hill's book, *The Principles of Rhetoric*, and it eventually became the most one of the common rhetoric textbooks of the era (Berlin 11).<sup>32</sup> In 1990, Albert Kitzhaber, in his book *Rhetoric in American Colleges*, linked formulaic writing in the overall American educational system to Harvard with his discussions of Hill. He asserts, "The Harvard entrance examination in English, which was the first such requirement imposed by an American college, did much to encourage the ideal of correctness" (200); he also adds this focus on 'correctness' prospered because of the large number of English teachers that Harvard trained who then "went forth to spread the Harvard gospel" (204).<sup>33</sup> Kitzhaber spends time looking at Hill's role at Harvard, and he concludes that through Hill's influence on the Harvard entrance examination and his textbook *Principles of Rhetoric* that "[g]ood writing meant [...] not effective writing but writing that violated none of the rules" (204).

Rule following, however, was not the only trend towards conformity. Scholars like Applebee have clearly explained that the preparation for the standardized entrance assessments used literature, initially in the form of a prescribed list, as the subject for the composition.

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<sup>32</sup> See also J. Genung's *The Practical Elements of Rhetoric*, which was another popular textbook of the era.

<sup>33</sup> See also Arthur Applebee discussions in *Tradition and Reform in the Teaching of English: A History*; he tracks how this movement towards evaluating students' writings also perpetuated "the study of standard authors and set in motion a process which eventually forced English to consolidate its positions within the schools" (30). Applebee focuses mostly on the history of teaching English literature, including important discussions of the roles of Francis James Child and William James Rolfe on pushing English studies more towards literature than rhetoric, rather than composition in this 1974 textbook, but his afterword could be the basis of evaluation for any modern educational pedagogy course.

Preparatory programs, therefore, had fewer decisions concerning what literature to study and what composition skills to instruct: students needed to learn how to write about this literature in a manner that would help them pass these entrance examinations. The first dilemma worked itself out in way that was less formulaic: eventually the list of works to be studied in preparation for the Uniform exam faded. For example, by 1916 there was an entrance examination question about the prescribed list and an open question, and by 1931 the “restrictive lists were finally abandoned” (Applebee 54). The second dilemma about writing pedagogy disappeared even more quickly, but the result was most likely the first of many oversimplified trends: the conversations about methodology seem to have dried up as the pedagogical tendencies became more formulaic, methodic, and restrictive. As James A. Berlin explains in his section of *A Short History of Writing Instruction*:

Harvard was one of the founding centers of current-traditional rhetoric during the last century. [...] Its epistemological base is positivistic and rational, offering writing as an extension of the scientific method. [...] In this scheme, knowledge is always prior to the act of writing, to be discovered through the appropriate inductive method of one’s scientific area of expertise. As a result, invention as the discovery of the available means of persuaded is excluded from rhetoric and attention is shifted to arrangement – the modes of discourse – and style, now conceived as superficial correctness. (188-189)<sup>34</sup>

The trickle-down effect was rapid and potent: secondary schools that wished to prepare their

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<sup>34</sup> See also Berlin’s “Richard Whately and Current-Traditional Rhetoric” where he asserts: “The thrust of all this [current-traditional rhetoric], of course, is a rhetoric which offers principles of style and arrangement that are to be applied to the written product, not learned as a process. Significantly, invention is excluded from the rhetorical act.” (11).



students to enter universities prepared these pupils to compete against other students prepared in similar methods. Due to these pressures, form won over content, and invention lost to arrangement. As these influences of the Harvard Committee and its legacy highlight, Crowley's concerns about the proliferation of current-traditional thought – and products of its influence, like the FPT – are just.

Institutionalized writing has flourished during the last century and a half because it provides schools a means by which secondary and post-secondary compositions can be both written and marked efficiently. The FPT, for example, could be used to measure how well students met set expectations, especially in knowledge and in mechanics, because all of the essays looked and behaved the same. Thus, the FPT became the epitome of a “school essay” with a focus primarily of set form “suitable for production by students in the classroom,” as Jean Sanborn describes in “The Essay Dies in the Academy circa 1900” (121) – and it still is a formulaic structure that appears to exist only in academic settings. As an increase in students with varied backgrounds entered the nineteenth, twentieth, and now the twenty-first century classrooms, the push towards teaching students to work mostly with strict formulas helped many teachers rate student writing, specifically the essay test that usually evaluates knowledge of materials or that measures abilities to use grammar well. This connection to assessment led W. Ross Winterowd and Jack Blum in *A Teacher's Introduction to Composition in the Rhetorical Tradition* to label the “five-paragraph essay” a “[r]ubric” that “makes composition easier to teach” (31). Their summary of the “legacies of current-traditional rhetoric” offers some raw honesty about how many writing instructors have become primarily focused on grades via “correcting themes” (31), especially the FPT. In practice, the FPT has often become what Winterowd and Blum describe: a formula that reveals only rote knowledge and that stymies

extended thoughts. Although the FPT arose many generations after the Classical and Renaissance contributions to rhetoric, this gap does not mean that rhetorical writing, in particular invention, has to be left in the past.

This potential to revitalize invention, in spite of the FPT and current-traditional influence, becomes clearer with studies of Alexander Bain. Bain's ideas were misappropriated by the group at Harvard, in particular Hill, who was well-versed in Hugh Blair's Scottish rhetoric.<sup>35</sup> In part, when the nineteenth-century American rhetoricians, including those at Harvard and the schools they influenced, picked up the Scottish theories, including Bain's, they could not help but recognize how their situation mirrored their postcolonial cousin across the Atlantic. However, they did not create an American rhetoric in the fullest sense, even though the Scottish rhetoricians, in particular Bain, encouraged such well-rounded rhetoric. As Kitzhaber and others rightly identify, Bain's influence became Hill's legacy.

Since current-traditional rhetoric worked itself into practice, concerns have fallen on student products, not processes; therefore, looking at the criticisms of Bain help to highlight the short sidedness of these current-traditional efforts. The quick formulaic fixes, like the FPT, became so entrenched and generally accepted that they created (and continue to create) long term injuries to process writing.

Some current scholars' discussions, in particular critiques of Bain's ideas, now justly apply due to the inherent connections to the modern FPT. In other words, it is not mere coincidence that many of the academic sources that discuss the origins of the FPT identify the

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<sup>35</sup> See James A. Berlin's "Richard Whately and Current Traditional Rhetoric" for a convincing link between both Hill's and Genung's ideas to Blair, Campbell, and Bain (11). In this article, Berlin, as the title indicates, adds to this list Whately, also influenced by Scottish rhetoric, and examines the mid nineteenth-century influence of Richard Whately – and his *Elements of Rhetoric* textbook – on current-traditional practices.

Scotsman Alexander Bain as the man who pushed for this nineteenth-century school-related model and that American schools became the locus of such student writing. Yet, as important as it to locate Bain as the most likely (misappropriated) source for the FPT, it is equally important to recognize that he may be a scapegoat because his theories are much more rhetorical than the skill-based foci of current-traditional rhetoric. By limiting discussions of Alexander Bain to criticisms of restrictive current-traditional rhetoric, including formulaic writings, scholars fail to examine his own philosophies, teaching practices, and writings. Consequently, looking at Bain as one source of the FPT reveals that his intentions were much more rhetorical than most modern critics give credit.

I am not alone in my defense of Bain's rhetorical theories. There have already been some significant scholarly efforts set in motion to defend Bain. Notably, in the 1982 article "Alexander Bain's Contributions to Discourse Theory," Andrea Lunsford asserts, "Bain has become a popular whipping boy, identified with a rigidly prescriptive, product-centered system" (290). She is most correct, and in a recent e-mail Lunsford added:

The criticism of Bain has been misguided, I think, at best. We should always remember that he was teaching at a time when the "boys" of Scotland needed to make their way in a world dominated by England--what many see as "mere correctness" was for the young people who came up in the free mechanics' schools of Scotland a means of moving up in education--and that was very important. Moreover, Bain carried out extensive empirical analyses of paragraphs: he didn't just make up the principles!

Some other scholars like Rebecca Casey in her 1997 dissertation have tried to link Bain's intention to improve basic writing to his concerns about students' democratic opportunities,

particularly during this age of conflict between Scottish and British educations.<sup>36</sup> Like Horner's work, which recognizes that Bain's "influence is most strongly felt in the teaching of basic writers in modern composition" (147-8), Casey's effort commendably focuses on Bain's intentions and examines his texts as much as the responses to them. To explain these intentions, Casey compares Bain's work in Scotland to Mina Shaughnessy's in America. While the critiques of Bain have been long standing, his defenses, despite Lunsford, Aley, and Casey's efforts, have been short lived by comparison.

Some of these criticisms of Bain look at the didactic structures and classifications that Bain supposedly advocated in his efforts to improve the writings of the Scottish academy. For example, Edwin Herbert Lewis's *The History of the English Paragraph* (1894) praises Bain's "six rules" of composition. What Bain calls "indication of the theme" (Bain 108), Lewis calls "rule III" (Lewis 29), and it is this third rule that reemerges as one of the clearest arguments for a topic sentence: "The opening sentence, unless so constructed as to be obviously preparatory, is expected to indicate with prominence the subject of the paragraph" (Bain 108). Lewis further adds that it is "evident that the third rule is one of the historical causes of the widely diffused impression that the loose paragraph is the only right kind" (Lewis 29-30). Others look at the impact of the modal separations of compositions. For instance, Jon Harned's 1985 article "The Intellectual Background of Alexander Bain's 'Modes of Discourse'" goes so as far to criticize Bain's varied background failing him in rhetoric, claiming Bain "is steeped in a psychology whose main thesis is that all minds are alike" (49).

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<sup>36</sup> See also Shelley Aley who Casey acknowledges helped with her project. Aley published in the 1998 collection *Scottish Rhetoric and its Influences*, her attempts to explain the shifts in Bain's reputation and impact in "The Impact of Science on Rhetoric Through the Contributions of the University of Aberdeen's Alexander Bain": she writes, that "rhetoric becomes interpreted as mere rules of method and form" despite "Bain's educational goal" to "guide the students in developing their critical thinking skills before they were asked to write" (215).

Likewise in 1985, Robert Connors's often-cited "Mechanical Correctness as a Focus in Composition Instruction" describes how American colleges during the 1870s moved towards "immediate instructional goals" that were similar to the Scottish efforts. Connors writes, "The immediate goals, in this case, came to involve, not more effective communication, but rather, simple mechanical correctness" (64). While he does not attribute this movement to Bain's *English Composition and Rhetoric* handbook in this article, Connors writes four years earlier in "Current-Traditional Rhetoric: Thirty Years of Writing with a Purpose," "since the 1870's the paragraph has been the subject of rigid traditional theory based on Alexander Bain's seminal paragraph definition of 1866" (218).

Another often-referenced source that condemns Bain is Winifred Horner's *Nineteenth-Century Scottish Rhetoric: The American Connection*. In her 1992 text she offers sound evidences for these accusations, identifying, for example in a broader time period than those that focus on Harvard's influences, that "during the second half of the nineteenth century, Bain's *English Composition and Rhetoric* was the most widely used textbook in American college English" (173). Although she asserts that "Bain has been vilified by the composition theorists" and "deserves more study to exonerate him," she nonetheless writes that his textbook "initiated the idea of the paragraph as an important division of discourse marked by unity, coherence, and emphasis, as well as the topic sentence, the thesis, and other concepts still familiar to millions of American students." She adds that he "takes much blame for the didactic rules established by the later text writers who adapted his work" (178).

These reputations for didacticism and for formulaic writing show Bain's misrepresentations most. What Bain actually wrote and intended proves crucial to impartial discussions of the five-paragraph theme and its twenty-first century persistence. Despite Bain's

intentions, students, teachers, and institutions have nevertheless created the FPT as it exists today, a restrictive formula that ignores much of the rhetoric of the writing situation.

Critiques of Bain's ideas distort both his memory and rhetorical reputation. Dissatisfied with the books available to teach grammar and rhetoric, Bain wrote his own texts. Although he encouraged individual analysis, Bain is often credited for a formulaic system that contrasts his own theories. In her 1982 defense of Bain, Andrea Lunsford states: "[H]is procedure typifies the classical philosophical dyad – analysis / synthesis – much as it was practiced, for example by Descartes. This process should not be confused with mere deduction" (295). She adds that in Bain's analyses that follow in this section on the "Paragraph," he shows models that extend discourse on one topic sentence from one paragraph to another; he "looked on the paragraph principles not as hard and fast, immutable rules of composition, but as practical analytical tools for his pupils" (297). Lunsford's assertion here is one that is easy to miss because of the ways in which Bain's ideas were later (mis)implemented. Other critics, including Lynée Gaillet, have also discussed how Bain's ideas have been misconstrued. For example, in her chapter on George Jardine in *Scottish Rhetoric and its Influence*, Gaillet writes the following about Bain: "Because of its format, the work was easily translated into a writing text, although Bain designed the work as a critical reading text" (206).<sup>37</sup> This "format" of Bain's *English Composition and Rhetoric* allowed for a manipulation of his intent and an alteration of his history.

Although he has the reputation for fostering formulaic writing, he used his textbooks as a guide to examine other writers' works. In *On Teaching English with Detailed Examples and an Enquiry into the Definition of Poetry*, Bain writes, "I have always maintained that you can hardly

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<sup>37</sup> See Shelley Aley, who asserts that "Bain quotes extensively from Jardine's *Outlines* in his inaugural address to his first class in logic at the University of Aberdeen in 1860" (214), for an additional discussion to Gaillet's about the connections between Bain and Jardine.

ever make the same text-book a convenient basis for both language and thought” (25). Bain held fast to this separation, expecting students to use his composition textbook as an examination of language, not as a tool for writing (despite interpretations otherwise). He adds a few pages later, “Form and Method can be taught by a direct operation; ideas and language are the indirect and gradual outcome of all the collective influences at work on the individual” (30). Yet these flexible methods or responsive thoughts are not the products of Bain that people remember, if they recall his name at all.

Close examinations of Bain’s writings like these reveal that he worked to engage his students’ active thinking and analyses, not formulaic responses. Bain’s overall interests in critical thinking are vital to current discussions like this one that examines formulaic writing, including the five-paragraph theme. Students who only face contemporary practices of formulaic writing never learn to write rhetorically because they fall victim to a number of traps that limit their thinking: they mistake structure for invention, they allow this structure to determine content, they do not consider the connections between their purpose and their ideas, and they forego recursive process writing for mere editing. Such students see writing through a series of inflexible rules and checklists and categories that were never intended to be so didactic or binary (i.e. right or wrong) in nature.

Bain is usually criticized for providing many of these hard rules at the paragraph level and for establishing what have become four distinctive modes of discourse.<sup>38</sup> But his intent with his discussions of paragraphs was to show students how “the most effective paragraphs are structured in such a way that they are easy to read or process, that they are memorable, and that

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<sup>38</sup> The fifth mode, poetry, has fallen out of this memory of Bain, who discusses in *On Teaching English* only “Descriptive, Narrative, Expository, Persuasive” as his “separat[i]ons of] Essay Themes” (29).

they fulfill the psychological expectations of the reader” (Lunsford 297). Likewise, although scholars identify Bain for pushing the modes of discourse as instructional categories, Bain’s later textbooks forego these modes as an organizational tool.<sup>39</sup> What Bain sees instead, in Lunsford’s words, are “the interrelationships among the forms, noting, for example [in the first edition in 1866], that ‘description is involved in all of the other kinds of discourse,’ or that narration occurs in history, biography, science, exposition, or poetry” (298). His inclusion of exposition and the overlap of this mode with scientific inquiry and explanation is a testament to his broad readings and philosophies.<sup>40</sup> Bain offered more open-ended and overlapping explanations of rhetoric and composition than he is credited. These models of thinking and of writing, of analysis and of organization, occurred in a time heavily influenced by Hugh Blair, George Campbell, and Richard Whately. As Horner and Gaillet discuss, this age was a time when Bain distinguished his ideas from others like Blair, Campbell, and Whatley, and other less known figures of the time, including most notably George Jardine, from whom Bain developed a number of his writing theories, and Edward Aytoun, who looked to English literature, not rhetoric, as sources for instruction. Few, if any, of Bain’s peers were asking students, in their efforts to write their own compositions with such deep self-introspection, to look at other writers – especially writers from diverse histories writing in varied genres and modes of discourse – through a rhetorical lens.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Bain falls in with others like Newman and Campbell and, in particular in America, Adams Sherman Hill, John Gunung, Barrett Wendell, and Fred Newton Scott into discussions of modal writing. See, in particular, Donald C. Stewart’s chapter “Fred Newton Scott” in *Traditions of Inquiry* for a discussion of how Scott played an important role in the “mechanically-structured” writing, the “five-paragraph essay” (41).

<sup>40</sup> See Jon Harned’s “The Intellectual Background of Alexander Bain’s ‘Mode of Discourse’ (1985) for a more thorough discussion of exposition, including a link of Bain and Adam Smith.

<sup>41</sup> See Winifred Bryan Horner’s overview of Aytoun, Bain, and Jardine in the chapter “Writing Instruction in Great Britain: Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries” from Murphy’s *A Short History of Writing Instruction*. See also Lynée Gaillet’s “George Jardine: Champion of the Scottish Philosophy of Democratic Intellect” (1998) for a further



Despite these efforts, the modern view of Bain oversimplifies his efforts. With this reductive pressure in place, despite his concerns for an overall rhetoric, portions of Bain's *English Composition and Rhetoric* do help to reveal how he has become a common source for the FPT and its hazards. Indeed, the following portions of Bain's textbooks will sound hauntingly familiar to all of us who were once taught this logical sequence of the FPT.<sup>42</sup> In *English Composition and Rhetoric*, under the "Indication of the Theme" section, he writes, "The opening sentence, unless obviously preparatory, is expected to indicate the scope of the paragraph if the paragraph. [...] This rule is most directly applicable to expository style, where, indeed, it is almost essential" (90). Bain continues to discuss how the opening sentence gives the theme and then moves forward to discuss the positioning of the thesis in a most recognizable manner:

In Descriptive style, there is a near approach to the characteristic of exposition. Each new paragraph introduces and finishes a definite topic. [...] Frequently the opening sentence is so constructed as to throw the subject of the paragraph to the end. [...] This method of reserving the subject is sometimes applied on a larger scale. When the opening paragraph announces the theme of a whole composition, the announcement may be reserved to the last sentence. The preceding portions of the paragraph will then be occupied with general statements and illustrations

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discussion of the connections between Bain and Jardine. Also of note is Lucille M. Schultz's "Elaborating Our History: A Look at Mid-19th Century First Books of Composition" in *College Composition and Communication* (1994) where she discusses how the popular composition textbooks were more interested in moral instruction and how other textbooks like John Walker's *The Teacher's Assistant* (1801) had three main characteristics common to many of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century textbooks: "students learn to write by learning rules; young writers are not capable of inventing their own subject matter; and students write about general, abstract topics, not about their personal experiences" (13).

<sup>42</sup> See Fahnestock and Secor's "Teaching Argument: A Theory of Types" for a discussion on how these logical descriptors of inductive and deductive "can be used to describe the organization of arguments, the deductive setting out the thesis at the beginning, and the inductive disclosing it at the end" (30).

intended to excite curiosity and lead up gradually to the point. (91)

One has to look harder at Bain's handbook to find what has become the premise for the five-paragraph essay. In "The Intellectual Qualities of Style" section, Bain writes that "[i]n all communication of knowledge we must proceed on a basis of the known" (191) and that "[a]ll statements bearing upon the same topic should be kept together" (192). These thoughts still seem like good advice. However, his own proximate analysis of an examination of an expository essay becomes the substance for coordinate division in later modal writings:

Now, in this short Essay, three main subjects are treated of, -- viz., the meaning of classification, the nature of the classifying process, and the distinct characteristics of natural history classifying; and these three follow in the just and proper order, and are kept, throughout, in isolation. Nothing would be easier than to jumble the three together, or to over-emphasize subordinate points that each of them suggests. Hence it may be well to take paragraph by paragraph, and indicate distinctly how each handles the topic assigned to it, and where the pitfalls lie for the unwary. (193-4)

We should set aside what others have seen in these series of passages as didacticism by focusing on the qualifiers he intersperses in this handbook that examine these examples; with this relative open-mindedness, it becomes clearer how Bain tries to establish a standard for his students, as critical readers, who had none in any definitive published source. When I reread these sections, I find Bain trying to encourage his readers to locate ways to begin examining discourse analytically and rhetorically: he asks the writer to consider the reader's needs. In particular, I note how Bain asks the writer to expand the analysis on each idea as much as he encourages a separation into parts that move progressively in a logical order.

Like Lunsford, despite these portions, I do not blame Bain for formulaic compositions because he pushed for more efforts to examine the overall rhetoric rather than to specify a closed form. Lunsford, for example, writes in ““Alexander Bain’s Contributions to Discourse Theory,” “What Bain constructed were patterns his students could use in analyzing writing and hence in exercising their intellectual judgments” (299). Some readers saw aspects of other scientists and philosophers in this logic, while others, especially later rhetoricians, latched onto his division of modes and his rules for composition as something solidified rather than as flexible philosophies or efforts of explanation. Yet, when Harvard embraced his product and the ideas of other Scottish rhetoricians who deviated from Bain, they ignored his ideas, and divorced themselves from Bain’s rhetorical theories that favored invention and organic growth. Therefore, it is quite ironic that his efforts to encourage students to respond to their writing tasks as informed readers and as rhetorical writers have been misguided by the (mis)pairings of his rhetoric to the FPT.

Bain meant his work as a starting place for Scottish students who spoke a variety of dialects. He attempted to formalize an education system in northern Scotland where different clans came together into a large university system, much like others did in mid and late nineteenth-century America. Even more drastically in the 1960s and 1970s with the implementation of open admissions policies, American universities faced a new cycle of similar problems: universities had to learn to accommodate increasingly specialized (and less traditional liberal arts) instruction, and they had to provide such opportunities to a group of sons and daughters of disparate immigrants with varied literacies and poor writing mechanics.<sup>43</sup>

Although over a century has passed since the first wave and over a half century since the

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<sup>43</sup> See S. Michael Halloran, for example, who discusses in his chapter of Murphy’s *A Short History of Writing Instruction* how the “competitive middle-class society of the nineteenth-century” came to be the complex and varied American student (167).

second wave of changes to the college population have occurred, today's high school and college writing classrooms consist of diverse learners and thinkers who deserve better writing strategies than misappropriated conformist invention strategies. Understanding these similar histories of Scotland and American universities, in the mid and late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, proves helpful to understand further how many American scholars looking for a twentieth-century follower of Bain usually locate the resurgence of the formulaic model in the same time frame as the aforementioned open admissions policies.

Thus, Duane Nichols and his 1966 article "The Five-Paragraph Essay: An Attempt to Articulate" becomes the first source to articulate and to encourage openly the FPT. Under many of the same pressures as Bain and the Scottish school system, Nichols examined the struggles of the American essay, in particular its composition. Looking at the expectations of college writing, the instruction offered in high schools, and student products, Nichols wanted students to understand the "concept of *essay* sooner and better" (903). He encouraged students to offer a "stated purpose" in the introduction (904), and he offered a six step introduction that moves from the "purpose" to "background" to "scope and limitation" to "definitions of terms" to "acknowledgements" to "plan of procedure" to "statement of thesis" (904). Nichols expected that "by the time a reader finishes the first paragraph he should have some idea of the subject to be covered and what is supposed to get out of reading it" (904). In other words, Nichols discussed how either directly or through "implication" a writer should provide the reader with an organizational statement (904).

Nichols's plans to work on efficiency and effectiveness actually backfired: students and teachers replaced invention with a formulaic structure, the FPT. In turn, what developed as the FPT-thesis became a place at the end of the introductory paragraph for students to overtly limit

the scope of their essays with three reasons to drive three respective body paragraphs. As inductive evidence for this pattern's accessibility, Nichols acknowledged that many of the 3,000 successful student essays he examined consisted of "[o]ne paragraph each for the introduction and conclusion and three paragraphs in the body explaining the ideas" (904). For many, during the 1960s and for the last fifty years thereafter, this organizational structure seems just fine as guide for students to complete academic essays and for teachers to mark them.

Nichols differs vastly from Bain because he propagated a model from which students write non-rhetorically. Nichols offered a formulaic structure as a replacement for invention, and for a number of teachers these shifts away from invention helped make writing compositions a "teachable" act. Like formulaic models have a tendency to do, Nichols's theories oversimplified rhetoric, and the academy embraced this movement more than it did listen to arguments by those like Crowley who wanted to restore rhetoric in composition courses. Even though Nichols even writes, "The number five is not sacred or magical" (904), advocates for the FPT, much like the earlier selective readers of Bain, have not had shared in his attitudes about flexibility of form.

Thus, to some degree Bain's classifications and to a major degree Nichols's organizational statements have impacted and defined the modern FPT. As a source of instruction, the modern FPT's linear sequence restricts both the form and the content of students' essays. In other words, the major problem with the FPT is that instead of asking students to focus on the writing situation, their purpose, their thoughts to extend and to prove this purpose, and the impact on their audience, the FPT encourages students to focus primarily on rule following and on task completion.

Students and teachers have felt the pressures from standardized measurements and grading policies; as a result, they have remained more concerned about measurable writing

products like the FPT than the thinking processes behind them. Like others, Kitzhaber points towards Bain's influence, his prescribed "order of thought," as the origin of such rigidity in both mechanical product and expected form (158). Such rule following and penalties for rule breaking (i.e. mechanics) have become ingrained in the American system, even though they restrict the rhetorical risks that writers take. As Robert J. Connors explains in his 1985 article "Mechanical Correctness as a Focus in Composition Instruction," "[t]he rhetorical theory developed between 1865 and 1895 about structures above the sentence level – most importantly the modes, the concepts of paragraph structure, unity-coherence-emphasis and the methods of development – was all an attempt to govern the written product by rules" (65). With an increase in students from diverse backgrounds graduating high school and taking college courses, this pedagogical shift towards correctness most likely would have occurred with or without Bain because of overall discrepancies in the quality of writing seen at the secondary and post-secondary levels.

Meanwhile, this stigma of teaching English as a means of determining correctness rather than analyzing thought, especially of those who teach composition, remains with us today. And the same adults who remember their comma splices and split infinitives from their college writing courses remember they survived the course with closer examinations of their grammar and their punctuation more than analytical examinations of their arguments. As such, the FPT is the epitome of a formulaic composition structure that allows for a focus on grammatical rules – from both the students' and teachers' perspectives. As teachers looked less at the "what" and more at the "how," this practice continued, and the activities in a composition classroom and the expectations of writing outside the academy grew further apart.

In particular, this pattern of looking at compositions as spaces for locating student errors

has become almost impossible to break. The oversimplified composition instruction of the last century has often become synonymous with formulaic writing and with its associated lists of errors and deductions in related instructional feedback.<sup>44</sup> This focus on countable errors shows up not only in a plethora of handbooks – and the folklore of college composition – through the ages that offer a list of shorthand marks to indicate errors, but also notably on the Internet. For example, a website from a professor at Texas State includes standardized values for deductions and imposing categories to relegate types of offences: “Capitol Felonies (punishable by an automatic F on the assignment and perhaps in the course),” “First Degree Felonies (deduction of approximately ten points or more from the grade),” “First Degree Misdemeanors (deduction of approximately 6-8 pts. from grade,” and “Second Degree Misdemeanors (appx. 3 pts. Deducted)”.<sup>45</sup> What happens in these cases – and frequently as well with peer reviews – is that instructors find it easier, more efficient, and more measurable, to look for errors of conventions and mechanics than to comment on ideas.

These discussions of Bain and Nichols help to highlight how shifts in composition theory and practice have been difficult to implement during the last one hundred and fifty years due to the academy’s tendencies to oversimplify writing instruction, especially during an age of standardized writing assessment (most likely in response to the growing American academy). Even though many modern rhetoricians and composition instructors would like to see a balance of form and content, the FPT continues as the most common formulaic structure for introductory

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<sup>44</sup> See J. Stephen Sherwin for an early examination of the failures of formal grammar instruction in *Four Problems in Teaching English: A Critique of Research* (1969).

<sup>45</sup> For the full document see <http://www.english.txstate.edu/jones/gel.html>.

essay instruction in North America.<sup>46</sup>

Bain specifically serves as a vital and controversial figure to highlight the ongoing divisions between composition theories and practices. Examining his ideas shows how very little gains composition theories have made to change imbedded practices, even since Bain's time, including discussions of form and modal discourse.<sup>47</sup> Better understandings of the differences between mere organization (i.e. formulaic responses to FPT organizational statements) and responsive structure (i.e. analytical responses to thought) should help modern teachers and students respond differently than these histories by pushing rhetorical theories into effective practices.

### **The FPT in Practice: High School and College Composition Courses**

Despite its rigidity, evidence shows that many teachers still use the FPT in controlled settings for students to show their understandings of concepts or for timed essays. One notable article from the 2003 *Los Angeles Times* includes an admission by the English Department co-Chair at Chino High School that says, "Most teachers concentrate on making sure students can 'coherently write a five-paragraph essay,' because that is the type of writing that students must complete on timed standardized tests" (Hayasaki ). One article in particular from *Research in the Teaching of English*, shows how an eighth grade language arts teacher opts to use the FPT in response to the demands of such formal testing: "Teachers [...] have ample reason to take any

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<sup>46</sup> See Bruce Pirie's 1997 chapter from *Reshaping High School English*, entitled "'Mind-Forged Manacles': The Academic Essay" where he discusses how prevalent this "phenomenon" has become, in what he identifies as a "North American species" (75).

<sup>47</sup> See *The Methodical Memory: Invention in Current-Traditional Rhetoric*, Sharon Crowley in which she explains that Bain's separations of description, narration, and exposition work towards what he associates as the understanding, Crowley also argues how these modes of discourse fail as a means of categorizing and classifying texts – from both the readers' and writer's perspectives – because they do not account for audience as much as they do structure (90).



assessment occasion seriously. In order for students to perform well, regardless of how dubious some might find the means of assessment (i.e. Hillcocks 2002), the five-paragraph theme might be viewed as a way to socialize student writers into the discourse of large-scale assessment” (Johnson, Thomson, Smagorinsky, and Fry 142). This socialization impacts new teachers as well. Novice language arts teachers receive as much pressure to normalize their teaching to the ways that other veteran teachers teach as students receive from these regurgitated models still stained with purple mimeograph ink. Instruction remains in this “discourse tradition” because its confines at this middle school (i.e. junior high) level have shifted very little. The NCTE’s 2008 College Summer Forum Meeting report of its survey findings confirms the persistence of this tradition. This publication states: “A clear majority [of responses] thought that students should learn to write in a variety of forms to be prepared for college writing, but there was an identifiable minority that named the five-paragraph essay as an important form for students to know.”<sup>48</sup> As well, ES[O]L teachers, like Erlyn Baack, still teach this structure as an origin, well aware that “those most opposed to the five-paragraph essay in reality presuppose that students already know its structure and merely reject the continuation of its use.” In these settings, the FPT survives as a tangible formulaic model because many teachers see its value along these lines with developing writers, who struggle with language or with writing.<sup>49</sup> In its defense, the five-paragraph structure remains steadfast because it helps such students understand the need for a

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<sup>48</sup> For the full discussion see “2008 College Forum Summer Meeting” at <http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Involved/Volunteer/Appointed%20Groups/ForumsAR08.pdf>.

<sup>49</sup> Meanwhile, non-English and sometimes non-Humanities teachers, who attempt to further the Writing Across the Curriculum movements also tend to perpetuate the cycle. One notable example was a conference publication that I found where Ladimer S. Nagurney and Hisham Alnajjar, who teach electrical engineering courses at the University of Hartford, explain that in their efforts to “strengthen the writing of Junior and Senior Electrical and Computer Engineering students” they added “several writing assignments based upon the Five Paragraph Essay.” Efforts like these are in good faith and with decades of FPT instruction as evidence. See in full Nagurney and Alnajjar’s “Work in Progress – The Five Paragraph Essay in Junior/Senior Electrical Engineering Courses” from the 2008 Frontiers in Education Conference publications at <http://fie-conference.org/fie2008/papers/1186.pdf>.

thesis-like statement and for explanations of this claim in complete paragraphs.

Many advocates will turn to published examples that offer praise to further defend the FPT. One often referenced article is “In Defense of the Five-Paragraph Essay,” written by Kerri Smith in 2006. She writes:

[M]any professors would like nothing more than to help students *build* on this foundational form. As a professor of first-year composition, I would be thrilled if, every September, more students could put their ideas together in the coherent fashion demanded by this underappreciated form because, almost without exception, students who know the five-paragraph essay intimately are more prepared to take on the challenge of college-level writing. (16)

Smith supports such claims with thoughts like, “It’s no coincidence that the scientific method demands a similar process: hypothesize, test, conclude” (16), and she praises “the five-paragraph essay as the flexible, functional form that it is” encouraging teachers to see “it as a building block to other, more sophisticated forms” (17). Other teachers, like Tracy A. Novick in 2001, argue that the model is a “useful tool” because it helps students who “have a difficult time making or supporting a point” and adds that it is productive “if the teaching is done with imagination and skill” (12). Even those bent on arguing against it rise momentarily in its defense. Thomas Nunnally’s “Breaking the Five-Paragraph-Theme Barrier” (1991) is one of these examples. He admits that the format “provides for effective inculcation of concepts such as unity, coherence, and development” (67), and he further acknowledges its strengths as a starting point, admitting that it is “a helpful but contrived exercise useful in developing solid principles of composition” (71). In sum, those who surface in its defense, even temporarily, continually stress such language to argue rather reasonably that the FPT is a “tool” or a “form,”

one of many that teachers use to teach writing. Unfortunately, too many students believe that it is the only tool and the only form(ula). These students follow its rules so closely that they never let their own thoughts stretch beyond its limitations; having never written an essay that was not five paragraphs, they feel the need to move on to the next reason stated in their organizational statement even when they have not fully explained their thoughts.

Opponents to the FPT hence criticize it as an overly formulaic restrictive structure, one that is rehearsed rather than invented in response to the writing situation itself. This group feels that the general problem with the FPT is that students ignore invention methods because they already have an organizational structure that will allow for selection (i.e. not invention). For example, if an economics professor assigns a paper to learn whether or not his or her students understand the overall concepts in a textbook chapter, there is a good chance a student will use three of these concepts as a frame to an FPT essay. However, when composed this paper will most likely fail to discuss the ways in which these three concepts relate or the ways in which these concepts are more important than others he or she has opted to exclude. Therefore, when instructors ask such students to write, then the students usually oversimplify the situation by using a formulaic response to all writing situations. Some teachers may be happy that their students have engaged with these concepts at all, but many writing teachers feel that this organizational model limits developments of thought. And when teachers tell students to write using the FPT, then they are stating that they do not welcome different models of form. What they are also telling their students – overtly and covertly – is that do not welcome different models of ideas. As a counter movement to this oversimplification in instruction, expectation, and product, teachers and organizations made up of such instructors have increasingly opposed formulaic writing.

As an informal study, let me offer a brief summary of a dialogue that I witnessed of the conflicts and concerns that still surround the five-paragraph theme. I sat in a meeting at a Georgia high school where middle school teachers asked whether or not they should continue to teach the five-paragraph theme (FPT) and related strategies to their students. What followed was an extended and emotional conversation that included the pros and cons of this instruction. Certainly a group of traditionalists at one extreme wondered why teachers would stop using this well-entrenched model that allowed for students to organize their thoughts and that allowed for readers to have a sense of the intended organization of the essay. They argued that FPT gives students a means to write balanced compositions that are organized under divided and parallel restrictions. A group who fell more towards the middle meanwhile explained how the five-paragraph theme worked well as an organizational model; they also subtly argued that it functioned as a mock-invention strategy, one from which students offered something written, even if it was in an anticipated form. This group argued that teachers could often help students move towards better theses from the FPT organizational statements; one teacher, for example, argued that with a FPT thesis the writer could remove the weakest branch of the three prong thesis and then attempt to embed or subordinate the weaker of the two remaining ideas into the one thread with the most potential. This idea has much merit, and it very similar to the suggestions I made earlier about the Regents' sample. As well, there was a third group, tired of trying to re-teach writing to students without this crutch, who wanted the FPT lost forever.

For further information about this debate that piqued my interests, I sent an e-mail to the high school English department where I work. In response, to this simple inquiry that asked for teachers to describe what they saw as the strengths and weaknesses of the FPT, I received a number of messages. One of these anonymous high school teachers replied in an e-mail

correspondence, “the FPT works well for beginning writers, ones who need to have the framework as a guide for how they should organize their thoughts. The challenge is getting the students to make the transition from the formula to a logical organization of their own thoughts/analysis.” Another teacher wrote in a similar electronic discussion about “[w] hat doesn’t work” in response to identifying the weaknesses of the FPT; she feels like others that it is “difficult to get students to give up the crutch, [to] move beyond the formula.” These sentiments prevailed in the e-mail responses I received from other teachers about their sentiments towards the FPT. There are mixed feelings about the pragmatism for developing writers and the limitations for developing thinkers. As one of the most colorful responses explains, “Like a pop-tart for breakfast...it'll do in a pinch, but - EW!”

In particular in communities like this high school where I work that seems to fight more against the FPT than it does to support it, the connotation of the term (and its anti-rhetorical strategies) has become pejorative, especially with its links to standardized summative assessment. These overt critiques come from students and teachers who complain that FPT has shifted from one possible form to *the* formula. Some writers have done a good job capturing students’ negative attitudes about the FPT. Nunnally, for example, argues at length to show how the model robs students’ writing of “potential” (69). He publishes as an example one of his students’ reflections:

Throughout high school I was taught to adhere to the form of a five-paragraph essay. My high school English teachers told me this was the correct way, the only way, to write an essay; however, in English 106 I have progressed and expanded my writing to include ideas which are formed by a train of thoughts or perhaps ideas. (70)

This student's message outlines the most often repeated concerns by composition students: students fall into a restrictive patterns, like the opening Regents' essay, where they only view ideas in chunks of threes rather than in the nature of the subject itself. Yet, high school teachers who teach mostly upperclassmen and college instructors alike face students every year who state "that their high school teachers controlled the form of their pieces of writing by requiring papers 'always in the same style and always five paragraphs'" (McAndrew 109). Other research, like Randsell and Glau's 1996 study, also shows that "students feel the need to practice essay forms that stretch beyond the five-paragraph theme" (17), and they provide numerous anecdotes of students' complaints about the patterns of high schools teaching the five-paragraph essay. Randsell and Glau also conclude that high schools students "would benefit from more complex assignments that require multiple drafts and multiple paragraphs of analysis that cannot be written by following a predesigned pattern" (21). If such research shows that students feel trapped in this pattern, then their writing also reveals how they feel restricted. Many students, especially when under pressure, move into this FPT model, viewing it as a temporary panacea rather than spending the time to examine the nuances of the rhetorical situation they face. Therefore, strict adherence to the FPT model limits topic selections and topic extension, and too often these limitations often became analytical limitations when students only write linearly – first defining A, then B, then C – rather than conceptually and recursively.

As readers and ultimately evaluators of such student essays, many teachers assert that the shortcomings of prescriptive structures like the FPT outweigh their strengths. These teachers' thoughts encourage a current movement at the high school level to find alternatives to the FPT. The common complaint with the FPT and other formulaic writings is that breadth becomes more common than depth, fragmentation becomes more important than focus, rule-following becomes

more important than exploration, and pragmatism more important than style.

With such concerns, this group of critics welcomes the movement against the FPT by the standardized testing giants, in particular at the high school level by the College Board with their SAT and AP testing. At present, the arguments surrounding the FPT have reached a point of even greater concern because of this growing divide that exists between the test makers and many of the test takers. With the world of education – and the politics that surround it – focused on performance writing and on standardized test scores as means of measuring the success of students, teachers, departments, systems, and states, undeniably much of the current exigency to find alternative models to the FPT comes from influential sources like the College Board who make such assessments. Using the SAT, PSAT, AP, and CLEP exams as assessment tools, the College Board – a subsidiary of Educational Testing Services (ETS) – exerts considerable influence on both high school and college writing (although the ACT exam, the International Baccalaureate Organization’s [IBO] curriculum, and the Cambridge Advanced International Certificate of Education [AICE] Program have gained some notable influence over the past two decades).

A new wave of twenty-first century standardized tests and well-designed writing assignments, like the College Board’s AP Language synthesis essay and SAT writing prompts, favor student writing at the junior and senior year of high school that shows an ability to respectively understand the voice of others they read and develop voice on their own. As outspoken opponents for improvement, the College Board has, for example, identified that the highest scores on their AP Language test reflect “sophistication in their argument,” “thorough [...] development,” “control of language,” and “evidence and explanations that are appropriate and convincing,” feel that the five-paragraph structure often fails to show deep analysis or

higher-order thought. The shorter SAT Writing prompts, as another example, privilege in part narrative anecdotes rather than formulaic expositions. With these high stakes tests in mind, a rubber-stamped formulaic response no longer scores the highest marks. If students *and* teachers examine this vast variety of rhetorical situations that high school students face, let alone college students, the writing responses require a refined student-initiated discourse analysis that expands beyond merely inventing three sub-topics. These assessments evaluate how students think and write by asking for an extension of their ideas in a manner that the FPT does not encourage.

As a starting point for this discussion to examine the growing overlap between college and high school writing instruction, I will examine Advanced Placement English Language, the College Board course that high school students take that most closely models freshman composition courses.<sup>50</sup> Advocates of National English standards will admit too that this course has heavily influenced such proposed curriculums. Consider the influence on writing structures, most specifically the five-paragraph theme, in this current published on-line course description for AP Language:

An AP English Language and Composition course should help students move beyond such programmatic responses as the five-paragraph essay that provides an introduction with a thesis and three reasons, body paragraphs on each reason, and a conclusion that restates the thesis. Although such formulaic approaches may provide minimal organization, they often encourage unnecessary repetition and fail to engage the reader. Students should be encouraged to place their emphasis on content, purpose, and audience and to allow this focus to guide the

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<sup>50</sup> According to the 2011 AP Language Chief Reader's introduction, by David Jolliffe, to the AP Language readers in Louisville, Kentucky, as of 2011, the AP Language exam is now the largest AP exam.



organization of their writing.<sup>51</sup>

As an AP reader for the students' written assessments that accompany this course, I verify that the College Board holds to these philosophies. A community of readers, table leaders, and question leaders work together to reward essays that not only show sustained thought and analysis but also respond to what the student has been asked to read.

While some schools still only offer AP Literature, others promote the preferred sequence from AP English Language to AP English Literature. Thus for these high school students, the next AP English course – AP English Literature – supports this sequenced writing instruction. The students in this sequence may have an easier time meeting the following writing expectations of AP English Literature, as described on the College Board website:

Writing instruction should include attention to developing and organizing ideas in clear, coherent, and persuasive language; a study of the elements of style; and attention to precision and correctness as necessary. Throughout the course, emphasis should be placed on helping students develop stylistic maturity, which, for AP English, is characterized by the following [...] A logical organization, enhanced by specific techniques of coherence such as repetition, transitions, and emphasis.<sup>52</sup>

Whether or not this result comes from a scaffolded progression or a senior year course that is as shocking to the students as freshman composition will be to some of their future peers, it is perhaps apparent that the most influential group on high school instruction in America, the College Board, has set forth expectations for the top achieving students to move away from the

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<sup>51</sup> For the full document see [http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/ap/sub\\_englang.html](http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/ap/sub_englang.html).

<sup>52</sup> For the full document see [http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/ap/sub\\_englit.html](http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/ap/sub_englit.html).

FPT and into writing models that show natural development from less restricted models.

Teachers at the secondary level need to recognize the College Board's recent moves as influential test-makers because these initiatives will eventually trickle-down from test centers into classrooms. What some onlookers and naysayers may miss is the vastness of the College Board's influence. Many high school students who do not enroll in AP classes still matriculate in schools and systems where they read textbooks or follow curriculums designed to coincide with AP philosophies. As well, higher order thinking and analysis, what have been deemed pre-AP strategies, influence all levels of instruction, especially those in college preparatory programs.

College Board's influence, among its other impacts, currently pushes students and teachers away from FPT thinking and formulaic products. What schools need are ways to respond to such changes. For another example of this anti-formula trend, College Board also influences writing instruction through its SAT college entrance examination. The advice portion of their website detailing the writing component of the SAT reads, "The essay gives you an opportunity to show how effectively you can develop and express ideas. You should, therefore, take care to develop your point of view, present your ideas logically and clearly, and use language precisely."<sup>53</sup> These expectations to "develop" ideas rarely occurs when students follow a FPT structure because once they make a decision about their points (i.e. once they decide how the body paragraphs can be broken down into three subpoints), they work against this checklist without reevaluating how to extend and how to connect their expressions of thought. Here is a new situation where teaching to the test(s) may actually improve the quality of instruction. This current period of transition will also reveal how the terms loosely thrown around to label high

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<sup>53</sup> For the full document see [http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/sat/prep\\_one/essay/pracStart.html](http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/sat/prep_one/essay/pracStart.html).

school classrooms, such as AP, IB, Cambridge, PreAP, PreIB, Honors, Gifted, Advanced, or College Preparatory, all mean very little unless there is an underlying substance in these courses that push for students to think and to write critically.

Further research finds evidence that this movement towards critical thinking and writing that asks for sustained and developed ideas with extended examples has trickled down into standards-based graduation exams, like, in the state where I teach, the Georgia High School Graduation Writing Test (GHSWT). The transitions in the language that relates to organizational patterns in the Georgia High School Graduation Writing Test are quite notable between 2001 and 2007, and despite moves by the state to pull away from the graduation tests in the four core areas due to End of Course Tests (EOCTs), the state plans to keep the GHSWT. Here is a response from 2001 to the question, “Is instruction in the five paragraph essay sufficient preparation for the GHSWT?”:

In general, no. Writers should always organize their ideas. For the lowest level writers, a formulaic approach provides a beginning structure for their writing.

However, a formulaic structure alone is insufficient and often leads weak writers into repetition rather than development. For a formulaic approach to “work,” the writer must make the paper complete by adding details and examples to the structure, instead of simply repeating the same ideas. Skilled writers can produce creative, complete papers without the traditional thesis/three reasons structure.

For these writers, imposing a formula on them will inhibit their natural creativity and lower their Style score. Formulaic writing can be a starting point, but it

should not be the goal for all students or for all writing situations.<sup>54</sup>

Yet, with the movement in Georgia from a curriculum designed around QCC (Quality Core Curriculum) to GPS (Georgia Performance Standards) even stronger language against the FPT emerged, language that mirrors the ideas of the College Board. Georgia offers the following contrasts in a chart for educators to help students and instructors understand the changes made in 2007: “An effective persuasive composition [...] clearly establishes a position on the issue and fully develops an argument with specific details and examples” and “An effective persuasive composition is NOT: Formulaic writing or a repetitive, standard five-paragraph formula that repeats the writer’s position and supporting reasons.”<sup>55</sup> Note the critical language in this statement: to the Georgia Department of Education, the FPT is “formulaic,” “repetitive,” “standard,” and essentially not “effective.” In addition, as discussed in the introduction, there has been a “trickle up” effect of sorts on the Georgia Regents Exam, the college version of this minimalist assessment, which now has similar requirements.<sup>56</sup> These organizations want rhetorical thesis statements that usually present arguments, and they encourage nonlinear thoughts about these arguments. In contrast, FPT-style organizational statements usually merely outline, often rudimentarily, a one-time plan for the essay that will follow.

Despite these GDOE and College Board rubrics pushing against rewards for formulaic responses, students who become uncomfortable in a writing situation often turn to the FPT as a sort of defense mechanism in this time of duress, hoping that something which looks organized can carry their scores into a low pass range. Therefore, despite the controversy and

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<sup>54</sup> For the full document see [http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/\\_documents/curriculum/testing/ghswt.pdf](http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/_documents/curriculum/testing/ghswt.pdf).

<sup>55</sup> For the full document see <http://www.gadoe.org/DMGetDocument.aspx/Georgia%20High%20School%20Writing%20Test%20with%20notes.pdf?p=6CC6799F8C1371F6E92750DC77EF0551C6C6E5AE5C04F3F9A8A75E163C804599&Type=D>.

<sup>56</sup> For the full document see [http://www2.gsu.edu/~wwwrtp/Instructions\\_for\\_Scoring\\_RTP\\_Essays\\_January\\_2006.doc](http://www2.gsu.edu/~wwwrtp/Instructions_for_Scoring_RTP_Essays_January_2006.doc).

conversations in English academia, the FPT resurfaces in these real settings, even with the changes in the assessment tools themselves, as a comfort zone where students resituate themselves to write adequate but certainly not excellent essays. For example, as an AP Language reader, I have witnessed many students responding to the rhetorical analysis prompt along similar lines, analyzing the passage(s) based by offering a FPT based upon individual paragraphs addressing the rhetorical appeals (*ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*) or by evaluating a text based on its diction, syntax, and tone. In some examples I have read, the model is noticeably rehearsed. In their rhetorical analysis, students find it acceptable to use hyperbole, irony, and *logos* in order to inform his satire, as if appeals are interchangeable with strategies. In other words, students chunk and divide such terms without considering how the pieces fit back together with any sense of continuity. They jeopardize the rhetorical effectiveness by failing to unify the pieces of their discourse or by pointing to devices in check-list form rather than offering a discussion their impact.

Although potential penalties for this formulaic structure exist, readers of high-stakes tests still see many student essays in which the writer divides almost any topic into three parts and feels that all three parts are equal and interchangeable. In these cases, what often develops is an inconsistent essay, one in which thoughtful and naturally developing ideas are truncated so that they do not take up more space than other ideas and where weaker ideas are elongated to achieve a façade of balance. Most readers would agree that as a whole these formulaic products are not well written because in most cases they are not thoughtful or convincing.

Students have trouble extending a five-paragraph argument because they treat this organizational pattern as an invention strategy. Looking back at the opening Regents' sample, this student never analyzed how his or her ideas interconnected, moved, or flowed. He or she

never revisited what he or she wanted, that the risks of running a business are stressful, because this student had already figured out how he or she was going to write it. Thus, writing like this model that relies on the FPT as an invention tool usually becomes overly repetitive or grossly disconnected or under-analyzed. I would argue that the Regents' sample suffers most from this third error: a rereading of the piece could have highlighted how the student feared the stress which comes with running a business. Thus, teaching students like this one and others alternative responsive forms that will improve their content and their thinking around that content will only help them think about what they are attempting to argue and how they can best make this argument.

Another major problem with the FPT relates to scope. Students think they can use the FPT structure for any size essay in any writing scenario (i.e. essays that are too short to warrant the breadth of three sub-topics or too long to justify the lack of depth that often coincides). In particular, many underclassmen college students and high school students typically are not writing long enough essays to warrant such FPT-style organizational statements that ironically typify the less developed five-paragraph essay. In these organizational statements, students reliant of the FPT want to show their readers, their instructors, a map to their essay as a most basic outline; these students are convinced that when the reader sees that they have followed this train of thought as set forth, then the product will be rewarded with high marks. However, many current first year writing programs wish for students to learn to think on their own by responding to writing tasks less formulaically. Recently, for example, Dr. Beth Daniell, the Director of Composition at Kennesaw State University, discussed the students' desires for what she calls the "draw map," on which many have been reliant as their means for not only invention but also

organization.<sup>57</sup> In an e-mail that Daniell sent to the staff teaching first year composition at Kennesaw State University, she explains how students often write on evaluations that they need “clearer directions.” Here she wants the instructors to help students break these bad habits of wanting didactic instructions that they follow line by line:

I think that what students are complaining about is that you [first year composition instructors] are not drawing them a map of the assignment: [Students think] You must have 5 paragraphs. In the first sentence of the first paragraph, you must begin with a historical fact....In each body paragraph you must have 6 sentences, the first being...

With my experiences sitting in the gap between college and high school English classes, employed as a high school teacher and as a college adjunct, I wholeheartedly agree with Daniell. Many of my fellow college instructors complain about what they see as underprepared students; however, in many situations the problem lies in the oversimplified and formulaic preparation the students did receive to help them earn access to that college.

Students are too comfortable with assigned theme writing and oversimplified discourse. Too many students want instructors to decide what topic they will write, what approach they will take or use, what constitutes a paragraph, and what suffices as an adequate analytical discussion. Yet writing and thinking are not this simple. Most people would agree that college should help

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<sup>57</sup> As an example of first year writing programs, Kennesaw State University clearly states in its online “Guidelines for ENGL 1101: Composition I” the following push against FPT organizational statements:

English 1101 students should learn the basic elements of rhetoric: claim, reason, evidence. They should learn that the main claim, or thesis (or central idea, or proposition), does not merely name the topic, but rather states a position on an issue. They should learn that a thesis is not a fact, but rather a judgment that can be defended. They should learn that the organization of the rest of the paper is derived from the thesis. They should learn that while a blueprint (or forecasting, or mini-outline), sentence may be helpful in a long paper, such a sentence is not generally necessary in the relatively short essays written in English 1101.

See <https://web.kennesaw.edu/firstyearcomp/1101-guidelines>.

students think better and should help prepare them with both the knowledge and skill sets to think about this knowledge in order. There is much hazard in teaching students that there will be recipes to follow because the work place does not have these same recipes. Unfortunately, many students *have* received instruction along these lines, including models or sample papers that they do (and are sometimes instructed to) follow almost line by line. Based on my discussions with high school teachers who defend and who sometimes continue to foster the FPT, some teachers have succumbed to such student demands because, despite their good efforts otherwise, they do not know how to move students beyond the five-paragraph theme. New invention models like the *x, y* thesis and argument guide models will help these teachers reconsider the importance of invention to generate a content around which an essay can be structured (i.e. the form of the essay responds to the content rather than the content responding to the form).

Compositionists express similar concerns about the quality and effectiveness of student writing. Students need to write essays that extend the depth of the analysis, an aspect that often falters when students use a formulaic five-paragraph response. Thomas E. Nunnally, for instance, wrote this response to one of his students in “Breaking the Five-Paragraph-Theme Barrier”: “What I want to find out is whether you can *allow* a subject and line of thoughts to develop into an appropriately organized and developed paper” (69-70). Similarly, Kimberly Wesley, in 2000, follows such concerns and begins by sharing how one of her students “touches on a more interesting train of thought at one point in the paper” but “does not expand on this idea, however, because it does fit within the neat, prescribed formula of her thesis” (58). Wesley, an advocate of the “view of writing as a rhetorical process” (60), offers choices to her students. She expresses that her “primary objection to the five-paragraph theme is its tendency to stunt students’ critical thinking abilities” (59). Because many students mistake the five-



paragraph theme as an invention strategy, they see invention as one of the most difficult tasks because they do not understand rhetorical invention strategies. Thus, they limit their thinking about the topic by trying to place their thoughts into patterns of threes. When I read student paragraphs that become repetitive or when I read a third body paragraph that does not extend the writer's position, I further understand the problems with any instruction, like the FPT, that binds a student to a model too closely. By making decisions based on form rather than on content, students never explore what they want to say without externally imposed restrictions. Linda O'Donnell, a participant in lengthy 1998 online NCTE-Talk on the five-paragraph essay (i.e. 5PE below), reminds this engaged electronic audience of the dangers of continuing to teach this formulaic structure:

Another reason I think teachers cling to the 5PE is because they perceive it as easier to teach. Please don't take this as a flame, \_I don't mean to be mean at all\_, but you yourself said: I find it much easier to teach my students how to structure their writing if I give them these guidelines. Then they know what I expect for supporting details and point development.

Yes, if you only give them one set of guidelines it is easier for everyone, but easiest isn't always best. Give them guidelines that are more fluid.<sup>58</sup>

O'Donnell observes how some teachers – although it is most reductive to the rhetorical integrity of the composition – still stress that a paragraph must have five sentences and an essay must contain five paragraphs. Such models give students something to count and teachers something to deduct if such rules are not followed. Therefore, models like the FPT mislead students to

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<sup>58</sup> For the full discussion see “The Five-Paragraph Essay: A Thread from NCTE-Talk” at <http://home.pct.edu/~evavra/TEACH/TT.htm>.

focus on quantity rather than quality and on the importance of a rigid form (following a set organizational pattern) rather than to respond to their own holistic content (supporting a progression of related ideas). Specifically, the FPT model misleads students to solidify a paradigm in which they accept three reasons as a means to complete an essay for an acceptable grade. Yet, reemphasizing the invention process challenges this paradigm by asking the student to think on their own during the drafting, writing, and revising processes.

Those resistant to the FPT feel that when this behavior continues and when the rewards are still granted for writing that follows this formulaic model, students never explore different organizational patterns, which would most likely lead to extensive or focused essays reflective of the goals of the discourse itself. For example, Richard Haswell notes that Pearl G. Aldrich's 1982 study concluded that "[s]tudents are aware of only one organizational pattern – the five-paragraph theme," and he continues to argue how "[f]ive paragraphs, of course, are not necessarily a pattern of organization at all, but rather a stylistic uniform" (Haswell 402). Students have learned to respond to writing tasks in this methodic manner; others like Mary Garrett and Xiaosui Xiao in 1993 accurately refer to the FPT as a "discourse tradition" that is "both a source and a limiting horizon for the rhetor and for the audience of the rhetorical situation" (38). As Crowley concluded about current-traditional pedagogy and its continued influences on product-driven discourse, students are still most concerned with completion; they typically write to fill the holes in an essay with what they know rather than to find out what they think. In turn, task completion becomes more important than task quality.

When students reduce models like the FPT to a series of minimized component tasks, they fail to realize that the FPT essay is most likely three short essays in one rather than a single coherent essay. They never step back to see examine how well the essay works to expose the

relationships between the ideas for the reader. It is the value in these relationships that makes a composition flow, and it is the absence of such connections – other than the organizational statement itself – that makes a poor FPT an example of non-rhetorical writing.

Serious problems arise when students use the FPT formula as a default invention technique in which they move towards an end without ever slowing to examine the path. These students follow an organizational statement under the false premise that a thesis and an outline are synonymous. As Marie Foley confirms,

The prefabricated structure invites students to fill the five slots with what they already know, thus often depriving them of the pleasure of discovering new ideas [...] The problem is not that the five-paragraph formula produces *incoherence* but rather that it limits students to a superficial, predictable level of coherence. For the body of their essays, students tend to tack any three loosely related ideas onto the prefabricated scaffolding. These three ideas cohere only in the sense that they are three aspects of the chosen topic (232).

In this 1989 article, “Unteaching the Five-Paragraph Essay,” Foley encourages teachers to “unteach” this structure by focusing on process writing, specifically “offering the metaphor of the essay as journey” (233). She feels that process writing destabilizes the FPT foundation to which students cling, yet she does not offer a solidified direction for the student or teacher to head next on the “journey” to step outside of this comfort zone. Likewise, in “How Students Handle Writing Assignments,” Joy Marsella, Thomas L. Hilgers, and Clemence McLaren explain in 1992 that some students say that they want more rigidity and others less; meanwhile, they assess that students’ “discovery experiences proved incompatible with the prescribed essay structure” (180). Here lies the problem with the naturalist process writing theories. Students

continue to use the FPT despite their needs for a writing model that sits between Plato's philosophical ideals to locate truth and Nichols's grounded practices to expose what they know. They, therefore, return to their comfort zones by dividing support for a claim with three reasons.

Many of the teachers who push against the FPT have seen generations of students who assume that the FPT is the best form because they envision it as the *only* form. Others see the FPT at least as the best starting place for the development of an academic structure. The ongoing attempts to move these groups of resolute disciples from this formulaic five-paragraph essay and into a sophisticated, unified, and convincing essay continue to prove problematic because students prefer to think less (by using a model that has oversimplified the writing process). In collegiate settings, when students who are still taught this formula transition from secondary into post-secondary classrooms, many instructors want to see a responsive form that reflects higher-order thought, and many have already concluded that the FPT falters along these lines.

The problem is simply that the FPT is used as a fundamental and oversimplified learning tool: students reliant on the FPT also tend to become more concerned with structure and less focused on content. One of the best examples that discusses this situation is Canadian Bruce Pirie's 1997 chapter from *Reshaping High School English*, entitled "'Mind-Forged Manacles': The Academic Essay." In his preparation for his discussion of the problems when students focus too much on hierarchal structures that typify the thesis-driven essays seen in American and Canadian classrooms, Pirie writes:

This kind of instruction sends a perversely mixed message. On one hand, it makes structure all important, because students will be judges on how well they have mastered the form. On the other hand, it implies that structure can't be very important: it clearly doesn't have any inherent relationship to ideas, since just

about any idea can be stuffed into the same form. [...] Indeed, the most common symptom of five-paragraph essay writing is the student's heavy-handed attempt to make unwilling material fit into those three obligatory body paragraphs. (77-8)

Pirie's book identifies other weaknesses as well when students look to the thesis through only a hierarchical lens; he writes, for example: "[A] hierarchy stresses relationships with the points above and below. Essay writers – certainly novice writers – who want to draw horizontal connections across strands can find themselves in structural difficulties" (84).<sup>59</sup> Here, Pirie explains well how students who replace invention strategies with organization structures, especially hierarchal and linear ones, fail to examine the overall relations between their ideas. In an effort to move away from these structures, Pirie notably discusses a need for "alternate expository forms," and he places the primary burden back on the discourse between the student and the teacher by asking for "dialogue" (86), which could be as simple as discussions with students about their writings.<sup>60</sup> Overall, Pirie and I agree that "students should make their minds as powerful and flexible as possible, and that means unshackling the rusty manacles of imprisoned thought," or, in other words, shedding their minds of the FPT (94). Pirie's concerns about the FPT and (solely) hierarchal thinking are just, and the need for new alternates is a present reality.

Before I fully explain my invention alternatives in the next two chapters, I find it important to recognize that some of the currently available alternative argument models have had some successes. For example, Stephen Toulmin's well-received argumentative model has

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<sup>59</sup> It makes sense to note here that the *x, y* thesis and Argument Guide model of inventions work together to become more of a horizontal model than a hierarchal one. See Chapter 4 for an explanation of the left to right and top to bottom construction of the Argument Guide

<sup>60</sup> In Pirie's book he does offer a few suggestions to move students away from the FPT, but at the core they all relate to dialogues: teacher-student dialogue, student-student dialogue, and internal dialogues. In particular, my invention models offer a theoretical context from which students can learn how to have such internal dialogues.

positively influenced a number of composition classrooms across the country because it asks for students to focus on content rather than on structure (although some students still mistake the model as one of arrangement because it has parts). Toulmin, in essence, introduces a warrant into the classical model and keeps rhetoric at the forefront of his model.<sup>61</sup> Many textbooks also add Carl Roger's psychology-based efforts to focus on common ground for effective argumentation, but some students want to tack on Roger's common ground in their opening sections and then proceed with their FPT as they always have prior.<sup>62</sup> Other noteworthy efforts come from Francis Christensen's and Frank D'Angelo's "generative" rhetorics that examine paragraphs and essays, respectively, through subordination and coordination and through alternate modes of discourse (the expressive, the persuasive, the referential, and the literary) and from Kenneth Pike's tagmemics, step-by-step processes for looking at the subject as a problem.<sup>63</sup>

Students need to be taught to shed their formulaic mindsets when they are introduced to any of these options, but I am afraid that these models do not overtly run against the FPT or formulaic compositions. All of these alternatives held promise but faltered when students found ways to fit them into their existing formulas or found ways to make formulas from them. For example, I have found that too many students look at the Toulmin model and the Classical model from which it originates as formulas, as checklists to follow to generate structure, rather than as frameworks to encourage prolonged thoughts (that will determine a structure). Such students cannot see that the Toulmin model, for instance, could encourage a composition that begins with a rebuttal because what they see through a linear lens is a textbook that defines in the following order the Toulmin model as one having a claim, grounds, warrant, backing, rebuttal, and

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<sup>61</sup> See Charles Kneupper for an introduction to this model.

<sup>62</sup> See Maxine Hairston for the seminal article that moved Roger's ideas into rhetoric.

<sup>63</sup> See Becker, Pike, and Young for a discussion of Pike's ideas.

qualification.<sup>64</sup> Rather than consider how the components can be (re)arranged to impact the overall argument, these students feel they must follow these arguments linearly as they have read them in explanation. In other words, these argument models serve well as initial alternatives, but students cannot shake their patterns to oversimplify, thus undermining these models with their own contemporary limitations. While I feel that the college writing community is justifiably pushing for Toulmin, Rogerian, and Classical arguments, I also feel that the typical high school English teacher is less aware of these models as pedagogical alternatives, especially as models that actually re-complicate the writing process and challenge the oversimplification of formulaic models like the FPT.

### **The FPT in Practice: Confusion Created by Many Composition Textbooks**

Although some of the current momentum disparages formulaic models like the FPT, many of the printed texts in circulation over the past couple of decades, especially those adopted first year composition readers, may undermine such energies. In this section, I will explore some of these textbooks to see how the situation surrounding the FPT in print is complex and paradoxical, in particular when the ironies of the theories and the practices are further examined.

I first noticed the ironies of FPT examples in handbooks and college composition books when I read a large suburban Atlanta school district's published and online *Research Guide* that includes sample essays with FPT theses.<sup>65</sup> The example research paper's thesis on the electronic version of this student guide reads, "Three primary aspects of the plans of the novel are

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<sup>64</sup> See, for example, the product of a quick web search on the Toulmin Argument: "The Toulmin Model of Argument." This online explanation of Toulmin's ideas from San Diego State University mirrors many the explanations in print and online. This particular site opens with an effective spatial model but then follows with these numbered parts that encourage sequence < [http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~digger/305/toulmin\\_model.htm](http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~digger/305/toulmin_model.htm) >.

<sup>65</sup> See, in published form, Hagan, Carson, Case, Lyons, Manguno, and Paulk's *Research Guide*.

Fitzgerald's use of chronology, point of view, and contrast, for they separately and collectively lead the reader to the major thematic considerations of the novel (Eble 95)." The 2006 print edition of the same guide reads "Ironically, Hardy uses the men in her life – Gabriel Oak, Mr. Boldwood, and Sergeant Troy, to show this independent woman's development from child to woman." The printed version of this *Research Guide* has been distributed to all other high schools in this district, and the online version is usually only a few clicks away from all of the schools teachers' blogs. Unquestionably, such teachers deserve criticism for vacillating between theory and practice when they disparage the FPT, but the county distributes published models that students perceive as advocating its use. Albeit the second model is better; even with the three-prong focus on three characters, it has more to say than the other. However, both students will see both models as something they can follow, and they will not discern the subtle differences between a FPT form (i.e. the electronic version) and an argument that happens to have three parts (i.e. the print version). Therefore, both models encourage formulaic writing because when students see models in print that match their own imprints, then they think these models are best. To break this pattern, students need new models that no longer send wrong or mixed messages.

With such examples that encourage FPT composition laying about my virtual and electronic classrooms, I became curious about how far back the FPT was encouraged in print. I thought it best to look next at the most common high school grammar and writing textbooks, those by John E. Warriner. Given how ubiquitously college freshman have absorbed the FPT essay structure, one might assume that that the high school writing textbook with the largest legacy would advocate its structure. Yet Warriner's texts offer a subtle approach to arrangement



and invention, and he, startlingly due to its popularity, does not seem highly culpable.<sup>66</sup> Even as far back as the mid-1980s, only one of four outlines followed the five-paragraph theme. He does write, though, in *Advanced Composition: A Book of Models for Writing*, the following advice about limiting the subject: “Limiting a subject requires analyzing it to divide it into its smaller parts. Depending on the subject, you may analyze it on the basis of such divisions as time periods, examples, features, aspects, places, uses, causes, or types” (Warriner 4). Somehow this limitation of subject and this practice of division were most often reproduced for the next twenty years or more following the five-paragraph model.

I followed this examination of high school materials that perpetuate restrictive forms with some examinations of guides designed for helping first-year composition teachers in order to see if the FPT is also continued at the college level. These texts sometimes receive a balanced perspective on the five-paragraph model, despite some identifiable contempt for it. The most notable example of this effort for balance comes from Edward M. White’s 1999 *Assigning, Responding, Evaluating: A Writing Teacher’s Guide*; here he summarizes at length the following in his section about “The Forty-five-Minute Essay”:

The formula [the five-paragraph theme] persists because it provides an easy, all purpose organizational scheme; however forced or mechanical, it does help students who cannot come up with an organization that reflects what they have to say. Those who dislike the formula complain that it provides an organizational scheme as a substitute for having something to say and so discourages creative thinking. When students use the formula mechanically, they are likely to produce

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<sup>66</sup> See “Learning to Teach the Five-Paragraph Theme” where the authors attempt to place blame on Warriner’s texts, despite the fact they acknowledge that the model is “not explicitly identified as a five-paragraph theme” (137).

essays that stick out during essay readings like a mannequin on a cheerleading squad. Most students will have more or less than three things to say; some students will have nothing to say, and dividing nothing by five (paragraphs) still leaves nothing, despite the appearance of an essay. The strategy is particularly weak on development (it disallows more than one paragraph for each subtopic) and coherence (which it almost ignores), not to speak of inappropriateness for some kinds of essay questions (such as comparison/contrast). But many instructors continue to teach it, on the grounds that some organizational scheme is preferable to none. (38-9)

In other words, college writing instructors hope that the students who come to them are no longer basic writers, but they face students, even at competitive schools, whose writing does not match the expectations one would infer from the students' GPAs, SATs, or ACTs.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, the FPT is sometimes brought back into these postsecondary classrooms to match, hopefully only at first, the needs of the students. But, if alternative and malleable non-formulaic forms could be vastly implemented in high school classrooms across the country, students would better understand their compositions as responsive rhetoric.

Interested in this genre of texts directed to college composition instructors, I also found other textbooks from the mid and late 1990s. For example, *Teaching College Writing*, published in 1995, attempts to address how the "five-part approach" functions. In this text, Maggy Smith attributes the common "funnel-shaped" diagram of the opening paragraph and the "inverted

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<sup>67</sup> See for a full discussion of such patterns Mina P. Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing*.

funnel” of the conclusion to Sheridan Baker.<sup>68</sup> Meanwhile, she offers Corbett to this audience as propagating a version of the five-paragraph structure through the “five parts of classical discourse” with the “[i]ntroduction,” “[s]tatement of the facts or circumstances,” “[p]oints that support the writer’s thesis,” “[p]oints that refute the writer’s thesis,” and “[c]onclusion” (108-9).<sup>69</sup> Rather than offering much insight, this textbook quickly slips away from the FPT and misconstrues aspects of Classical Rhetoric as part of the same sub-heading. If this textbook designed to help new TAs falters, then there is no wonder that some instructors without pedagogy courses return to teach essay writing as they were taught – with the FPT as the core of instruction. Likewise, another notable teach-the-teacher text that includes a focus on form writing is Robert Connors and Cheryl Glenn’s *The New St. Martin’s Guide to Teaching Writing*, published in 1999. Although they do not specifically name the FPT as a form, in the “Teaching Arrangement and Form” section they tackle the difficulties of offering responsive arrangements to students:

We cannot, then, merely offer our students one or two prefabricated, all-purpose arrangements. Instead, we must regularly ask students to recognize the interconnections between form and content and between genre and intention, and we must work to assist them in the subtle task of creating forms that fit their ideas and emphases. Whatever method of arrangement or forms you choose to teach, you will want your students to realize that you are teaching them conventions to be adapted and changed as the writer specifies the needs of a particular subject

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<sup>68</sup> See in full Sheridan Baker’s *The Practical Stylist*.

<sup>69</sup> To be just, Corbett begins this section with the claim, “Most rhetoricians recognized five parts for the usual argumentative discourse: *exordium*, *narration*, *confirmation or probation*, *refutation*, and *peroratio*” (259). I have found that *refutatio* is often missing in contemporary discourse, one again challenging this five part division in modern times.

and a particular audience. Methods of arrangement can provide a rough framework on which to build an essay, but they should neither limit the development of an essay nor demand sections that are clearly unnecessary. The prescriptive forms in this chapter, then, should be thought of and taught only as stepping-stones – not as ends in themselves. (202)

I agree wholly with their assertions. Their thoughts represent the stereotypical college writing teacher's attitude towards formulaic writing structures. However, their quick movements into non-classical means of arrangement, including Larson's "Problem-Solving Form" (215), D'Angelo's discussions of paradigms that recognize complete rather than partial units,<sup>70</sup> and Winterowd's "Grammar of Coherence" (229), feel rather terse and short-lasting for teachers with less confidence in teaching writing. Teachers need fleshed out explanations of such ideas to fight against their tendencies and the students' tendencies to oversimplify composition theory, instruction, and practice. In other words, Connors and Glenn raise some great points, including the hazards of teaching prescriptive forms without helping students move beyond them and an argument that validates outlining as a revision technique focused on metacognitive reflection, but most teachers who truly need this advice will need more exposure than what this text offers.

I also found that few sources discuss that college classes may share equal blame by extending this FPT comfort zone for at least another year during freshman composition courses. Richard Haswell, however, notes in his study of impromptu college essays the following:

But the percent of essays following the classic 'five-paragraph theme' format – introductions, point 1, point 2, point 3, summary – achieved a statistically

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<sup>70</sup> See D'Angelo's *A Conceptual Theory of Rhetoric*; here he writes, that for expository writers, the paradigm is "the core structure that represents the principle of forward motion" (56).

significant rise and decline: 9, 25, 23, 6, 3 ( $p < .05$ ). Apparently it is college composition teachers themselves who spread the five-paragraph theme, and it takes a year for older students to convalesce. (411)

According to Haswell's study, this rise in the 1980s of the FPT came from the same equivocating community who most often disdains this structure and places the onus for its continuation on high school English teachers. By the mid-1990s, I recall teachers who pushed against any type of formulaic structures via multi-genre or journal writing. My undergraduate experiences with instructors like Tom Romano and Donald Daiker were atypical, especially in comparison to students in other programs and other fields of study who often still used formulaic structures to guide their thoughts. Once I became a teacher myself in the late 1990s, I faced students who had never thought about essay writing in any other way. Almost fifteen years later, and having taught almost ten years of that time at both the high school and the college level, I have not seen too many changes to these engrained patterns of FPT discourse.

Textbooks aimed at college students may also be, in part, to blame for this oversimplification trend that continues twenty years later. These books often become the rhetoric to which composition instructors – often graduate TAs or adjuncts with degrees in Literature *and* scores or portfolios that excluded them from taking on the very academic course that they are tasked to teach – turn. One such college composition textbook is *Strategies for Successful Writing: A Rhetoric, Research Guide, Reader, and Handbook*, also published in 1999. Although the authors offer sound advice on writing a thesis statement, they proceed to offer one of two models following the five-paragraph theme, and they reinforce this model with two of eight samples for students to discuss as effective or not (and in these samples, both five-paragraph models are better choices than some of the others). However, this incorporation of

FPT samples is not unique to this Prentice Hall text. From a sampling of over twenty college composition textbooks directed towards the first-year writing student, texts which that I have used or acquired for review since the mid-1990s, I found a pattern that perpetuates the five-paragraph theme. From its title, I had high hopes for Sylvan Barnet and Hugo Bedau's *From Critical Thinking to Argument: A Portable Guide*. Yet, even in 2008, the authors facilitate the use of the five-paragraph thesis with an opening model that "[g]ive[s] the reader an idea of how the essay is organized" (150). They follow with praise for this model, rather fittingly, for being "concise, obvious, and effective" (152). Likewise, in the 2007 *Patterns for College Writing: A Rhetorical Reader and Guide*, Laurie G. Kirszner and Stephen R. Mandell offer no resistance to the five-paragraph theme in their exemplification section. Here they reiterate this tradition and show three outlines that all mimic the five-paragraph theme, and they emphasize how this model works to organize essays "chronologically," "in order of increasing complexity," and in order of importance" (208). Later, in the cause and effect section, they offer another topic sentence example with three parts (327), and they ensue with the advice that a thesis in a cause and effect essay "should tell your readers three things: the issues you plan to consider, the position you will take, and whether your emphasis is on causes, effects, or both" (334). These texts, especially in comparison to earlier ones, reveal how few gains have been made in this area.

Other college composition textbooks also share some responsibility for the continuation of this structural model, although they do not offer FPT examples in this direct manner. As far as severity of such offenses, the recognition of the FPT comes next. Lester Faigley and Jack Selzer, in *Good Reasons with Contemporary Arguments: Reading, Designing, and Writing Effective Arguments*, spin their 2004 discussions of the five-paragraph essay most effectively towards effective visual design. They recognize the pervasiveness of the five-paragraph theme

in “high school,” “business letters,” “short reports,” and even “PhD dissertations” before they show students how to “translate the five-paragraph formula to space” using the layout of a business card as their example (235). While they use the five-paragraph theme as an orientation to establish common ground, they do not openly criticize it. In contrast, another group of texts discuss the FPT in order to criticize its continuation in the postsecondary classroom. For example, in 2003, *The Craft of Argument with Readings* openly recognizes the five-paragraph theme in their discussions of Reasons and Evidence to discourage it. In this text, Joseph M. Williams, Gregory G. Colomb, John M. D’Errico, and Karen Tracey write:

Three reasons in parallel is the standard plan for the five-paragraph essay many of us learned in high school [...] Some good arguments actually have only three reasons, but so many bad arguments have been written in that form that the five-paragraph, three-reason essay has a bad image at the college level So avoid three if you can. (118)

In other words, they candidly discuss this form as an anti-form, but they leave open similar models for claims that have “reasons in parallel” (118) or “reasons in sequence” (119). This text clearly highlights a feeling that has percolated among a large number of composition instructors: three-reasons *may* work as a means of uniting coordinate ideas, but many composition teachers do not like to see them because they see the formula too often as a defining characteristic in some of their weaker student essays.

Overall these textbooks show how far and how deep formulaic models like the FPT reach. Making the composition community aware of the potential ambiguity of invention and structural models offered in numerous composition textbooks highlights a need for new invention models that break free from these structures. In other words, because there is a

difference between attaching ideas and building an academic argument, better writing can occur without the misuse of formulaic writing structures or oversimplified responses as invention tools.

### **Formulaic Writing Causes Formulaic Thoughts [A], Structures [B], and Conclusions [C]**

One of my foremost goals is to help instructors and students become aware of the potential limitations of formulaic structures and formulaic responses, like FPT-based essays. Formulaic writing most likely has been so hard to shake because students rely heavily upon models like the FPT as some sort of antiquated abacus to quantify the modern composition process. I think that open discussions about decreasing formulaic writing and increasing responsive writing will eventually help students respond to complex rhetorical situations successfully (by moving beyond the constraints of the FPT). Responsive writing takes invention, a process that has been virtually destroyed by formulaic structures and the oversimplification of rhetoric, and puts this nonlinear thinking act in the foreground of the writing process that flexes to its own needs. Many students want to learn better how to think on their own, and this growth will never occur when they are not figuring out what they want to write *and* how they can best write it. My experience has shown that such students desire ways to learn how to learn alternates to the restrictive patterns they now embrace, but ironically these patterns (i.e. FPT and JSM) serve as touchstones for discussion about better writing. Such new frameworks will need reinforcement and clarity. Moreover, having students practice these new ways of looking at the writing (from the inside out and the outside in) will most likely also show them that the FPT (or JSM) was a not a bad habit but was a stepping stone to better ones.

By using what students know and what they do as the instructional springboards, specifically what I think will work better than these current options are two invention models, the



*x, y* thesis and argument guide models. These invention models help show students how to move from their potentially limited formulaic thinking to alternate modes of less restricted critical thinking and writing. Modern compositionists like Frank D'Angelo who argued as early as 1974 in "Five Half-Truths about Composition" that "[w]riting is an art, and like drawing, or painting, or musical composition, rhetorical principals need to be taught in an orderly sequence" (85). If most teachers accept the FTP and other formulaic structures that have posed as invention strategies as the first stage, then a sequence to reclaim rhetoric is still possible.

By adding to a rather short list of instructional models to help write academic essays, the alternate invention models offered in the next two chapters of this dissertation challenge the logic behind formulaic writing. They encourage students to examine critically the overall effect of their compositions through the overlapping lenses of both content and form. Metaphorically, rather than looking at writing as a two-dimensional place to set their underdeveloped ideas, this overlap allows students to write three-dimensionally and to improve their depth perception as they learn how to better examine their own writings and others'. Such students learn to see how their ideas relate to one another with the writer's purpose in mind.

Too many of today's teachers are left with this unanswered question, "How do I teach students to write an analytical thesis or a developed essay that does not revert into a formulaic response?" In other words, while I have repeatedly heard some lively discussions that criticize formulaic writing, what I rarely hear discussed are tangible instructional means that help students to move beyond these restrictive discourse patterns. The *x, y* thesis and argument guide invention models should solve this lack.

## CHAPTER 3.

### THE X, Y THESIS MODEL OF INVENTION EXPLAINED AND DEFENDED

#### Introduction

Mina P. Shaughnessy concisely describes three writing pedagogies in *Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing*: “the pedagogy that stresses grammar,” “the pedagogy that stresses process,” and “the pedagogy that stresses the therapeutic value of writing and seeks the affective response to whatever is read or discussed” (73). Shaughnessy neatly triangulates these differences for basic writers, but her compartmentalized model may be limited when examined outside of basic writing classrooms. In particular, to begin an examination of the writing processes in most high school and college classrooms, it may be easier to visualize these varied instructional philosophies as components along a pedagogical writing continuum.

The conservative and liberal ends of this continuum can be clearly identified. At one end lays the FPT and other prescriptive methods like the JSM and formal outlines that restrict students to sharing knowledge or focusing more on restrictions in form than on other rhetorical elements; at the other end lays Romantic explorative pedagogies that nebulously encourage students to find themselves in their writing. However, many composition teachers do not desire to teach from either of these ends, and the current pedagogies do not help put these desires comfortably into practice. For example, many instructors who encourage non-formulaic process-oriented models find themselves victims of binary logic. Their negative reactions to oversimplified, formulaic writing push them towards Peter Elbow-like beliefs that organic free-writing will eventually find its path, of course after much “doubting,” “believing,” and

“cooking.”<sup>71</sup> Yet, what many teachers find too often from this search is a student’s writing product that is not only with little direction but also altogether often lost. These naturalist pedagogies ask students to make uncomfortable leaps. Likewise, the efforts to replace formulaic writing with discovery writing have many times only created discord and discomfort for students and teachers alike. Students often lose their way in their efforts to find themselves, their subjects, their voices, and their rhetorical purpose through such explorative writing. When students find themselves at the ends of this scale, or firmly nestled in Shaugnessy’s initial (current-traditional) grouping, they frequently return to the forms, the rigid structural forms, with which they have experience, even if they think that this formulaic response may be considered at best adequate.

While suitable for some test-taking situations to showcase knowledge, in process-driven composition classrooms, strict commitments to formulaic structural models like the FPT often hinder students’ understandings of the way an entire composition functions (or could function). Many students, when presently asked to compose an academic essay, frequently turn towards the FPT model – in particular its three-part (non)thesis – because this formula has made invention easier for them. When they do so, they usually make a onetime essay-driving decision that determines what and how they want to write. The linear writing that usually follows highlights how their initial thinking, connecting, and analyzing have waned. Therefore, when these students restrict themselves to the FPT, they often relegate themselves to superficial discussions.

What they need to ask themselves, instead, is how invention – their continued thinking

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<sup>71</sup> See Peter Elbow’s expressionist textbook *Writing Without Teachers*; here he fights against structure but still believes in unity. For example, he concludes the Cooking chapter, “All parts of a piece of writing are interdependent” (72). See also W. Ross Winterowd’s *A Teacher’s Introduction to Composition in the Rhetorical Tradition* in which he calls this expressionist pedagogy the “Romantic Rhetoric” of Peter Elbow and Ken Macorrie (39).

about their ideas in relation to their purpose – can drive the organization of their essay. The FPT encourages students to use three parts, set forth in the thesis itself, to move methodically towards a supposed whole. Usually more concerned with task completion than with quality, many students consequently look for ways to combine a collection of tangential pieces. What the FPT, therefore, does not teach them is how to create a thesis with clearly something at stake. What the FPT has taught, though sometimes criticized, is the notion that students start with their thesis and write from this hierarchical apex downwards. Many students consequently will find comfort – and focus – with opening discussions with their instructors about the values of thesis statements in academic arguments.

This chapter will explore not only the  $x, y$  thesis model and its practice but also the theories that surround it in order to explain this model completely. First, I will explain the details of this  $x, y$  thesis model by including sample responses to typical prompts in both literature and composition courses. For comparison essays, brief discussions of the  $x, y, z$  thesis model also introduce how the  $x, y$  thesis model expands into a third plane and third algebraic variable. The second part further examines the underpinnings of the model, by looking at the ways in which the model extends rhetorical theories and attempts to re-complicate the process of writing compositions in a rather uncomplicated way.

### **An Explanation and Opening Example of the Relational $x, y$ Thesis Model of Invention**

In contrast to the FPT and other formulaic structures that pose as invention models, the  $x, y$  thesis model offers flexible means to create relational patterns – in the shapes of algebraic sentence completions. This model encourages students to (re)consider what they want to argue by looking closely at the interactions between their ideas. With this altered entry point that

focuses on critical thinking rather than on explaining, the  $x, y$  thesis model offers a new origin and a new touchstone for students to explore the ongoing relations between their ideas (and under the aegis of an academic argument). The flexibility of the model encourages students to examine their theses from a mindset that is not stagnant or segmented. The model offers writers options that transform when the students explore areas of the writing continuum where they have not ventured and that blossom when these writers begin to build confidence in their own process writing.

The  $x, y$  thesis model offers eight sentence completions as the nucleus of the opening instruction. The following sentence completion thesis statements depend on varied relationships and encourage increased rhetorical awareness than formulaic structures; they are designed to help students examine closely the interdependency of the parts that typify these relations. In other words, these sentence stems prepare students to write better theses than the FPT model, which focuses solely on coordination:

1. Although  $x, y$ .
2. As  $x, y$ .
3. Because of  $x, y$ .
4. If  $x$ , then  $y$ .
5. In order for  $x, y$ .
6. When  $x, y$ .
7. [Subject] "incorporates"  $x$  (in order) to  $y$ . [note: "incorporates" or "uses" should be replaced with an alternative verb; how is  $x$  incorporated or used?]
8. In [text(s) or subject(s)]  $x$  [active verb]  $y$ . [note: Restructuring the above heuristic allows for discussions of direct impact with verbs such as "extends,"

“limits,” “challenges,” “shows,” “masks,” “shifts,” “complicates,” “unifies,”  
 “fragments,” “symbolizes,” etc.

These sentence completions explore identifiable means by which students may create oppositions, build relations, show sequences, and test importance. By inventing a thesis that has a clear hinge that connects two related parts, the purpose of the discussion and the sub-discussions become not only clearer but also more overtly unified. Moreover, these thesis stems affront formulaic theses: rather than merely outlaying speaking points, they ask students to consider the impact ( $y$ ) of something ( $x$ ) worth discussing in specific terms.

In other words, the  $x, y$  thesis model establishes relationships between two algebraic variables to help drive the essay to a cohesive end. As an accessible and flexible alternative to the FPT, this model uses such algebraic underpinnings, which help students view language symbolically, and subordinate relationships, which aids in their understanding of the syntactic dependency of parts. Rather than building ideas with forced coordinate relationships, it asks students to examine what relationships occur between their ideas about the subject or subjects. For students who wrestle with their theses – whether or not this struggle occurs at the prewriting, drafting, or revision stages of their writing process – these thesis alternatives come initially in the appearance of varied sentence completions that students can test for compatibility. The  $x, y$  thesis model also helps students pay closer attention to the overall effects of their compositions by looking at relationships beyond the coordinate connections to which the FPT is restricted.

The discussions from and around these models have likewise proven equally effective. When students learn that a thesis is a reflection of invention and not organization, then they no longer look to the thesis as a one-time decision. Many students, consequently, who have had difficulty with the concept of thesis writing, especially once they have the growing confidence to

remove the fetters of form writing, often readily wrap their minds around these algebraic thesis statements. This variety of sentence stems becomes a new tool not only to generate but also to reevaluate effective argumentation (and to continue thinking throughout the writing process).

In order to show readers how this example could work in a context similar to my opening FPT example, I have modified the previously discussed Regents' essay by inserting and overlaying my ideas that develop from a restructuring of the FPT thesis into one example of an  $x$ ,  $y$  model. What follows in bold are my additions and what remains in italics are the original writer's thoughts:

*Going out of Business Sale! Signs of this nature* **indicating failed businesses can be seen everywhere. Sometimes they come in the most unexpected places. For example, in my community there are many thriving car wash companies. In the past year, I heard of a new company that not only washed cars at a competitive rate but also catered to their customers' environmental concerns by trying to use as many renewable resources as possible, including offering the empty barrels that once held cleaning supplies to their customers as free rain barrels. Within months, even before I was able to see how well they cleaned my car and at what cost, I was told this "green" business had shut its doors. The other established companies along this commercial corridor, however, continue to thrive. Although opening a business, like this carwash, does offer some potential external rewards [x], the internal stresses associated with managing such a business make this business venture too frightening [y].**

**The romantic allure of opening one's own business speaks to the**

**American Dream in all of us. To make money, to build a successful business, to be your own boss, to contribute to the community as a sponsor, and to eventually sell the business to another investor all sound like exciting external benefits. However, these external rewards only can occur if the business is a success. And even if this aforementioned carwash had well researched business plans that accounted for costs, competition, recessions, and weather, then the success of the business is not guaranteed.**

**With such extrinsic risks come internal stressors, factors that I feel outweigh the potential rewards.** *The chief reason I would not want to start my own business is the great risk of failure. Today's statistics show that four out of every six businesses fail within the first year. Those are not very good odds for one just starting his or her own business.* **Such quick collapses mean that it would be most likely that entrepreneurs would never recuperate their opening costs. Therefore, [t]he second reason not to start my own business is the high cost of starting a business. Businesses take a great deal of money to get started, and for that matter to keep running. The first thing one has to do is find a place to put the business. Lots are very expensive. Then a building has to be built *or leased*, and merchandise to fill the building has to be purchased. In the case of this carwash, if machines were also purchased rather than leased, then this equipment was most likely sold back at a fraction of the cost of purchase. Such losses build to threaten the very American Dream that owning a business was supposed to fulfill. As such, owning a business can be stressful.**



*Being one's own boss can also be stressful to her or him by the way of having to make all of the important decisions, or **the responsibilities that were once left at work** can **now** cause stress at home. The stress at home can be very detrimental to the marriage, or **the financial losses could** even **impact** the family as a whole **if the owner did not have the money to take these losses in stride.** **Running the risk of injuring the present quality of life for my family does not seem like a good personal decision.***

*As I discuss the pros and especially the cons of this situation, I [c]onclud[e] this **idea of** owning a business is just one big headache. On the other hand some people are very successful, and they got that way by taking the risk of owning their own business. **In all honesty, I can say good for them, but I know this experience is not for me.** I personally don't think that owning a business is worth the risk, when working for someone else is a lot safer.*

This revised essay highlights how writing takes shape when not restricted by an organizational structure. This example also reflects the unity and asymmetry that occur when invented ideas rather than limiting structures drive discourse. As well, can model should also show how such invention strategies keep the writer engaged in a nonlinear process. For example, if I was writing this essay for the exam, I would return to the *x, y* thesis statement, here the “Although *x*, *y*” model of invention (see #1). In my next efforts to further unite the essay I would have then moved from the initial non-thesis (i.e. “*Today opening up a business can be scary, because of the extensive risk, high cost, and extreme stress.*”) to the above *x, y* thesis (i.e. “Although opening a business, like this carwash, does offer some potential external rewards [*x*], the internal stresses associated with managing such a business make this business venture too frightening [*y*].”) to a

final thesis that simplified these ideas even more than the others (i.e. “The likely internal stresses of opening a business outweigh the potential external rewards.”). With this last thesis in place, I then would revise the essay once again, assuming time allowed in a real testing situation, to make certain that all of the transitions are clear and that all of the ideas support my overall purpose. In other words, the *x, y* model helps writers – albeit in this case I played student – move from an essay driven by its organizational statement to one driven by related ideas that become the basis of the argument itself.

Rather than encouraging the oversimplification of the writing process and of writing products, the *x, y* model encourages students to learn how to use a model to build, to test, *and* to revise their ideas. Students must learn how to re-examine their writing in a rhetorical framework that encourages nonlinear analysis. The *x, y* thesis model, in particular, helps them consider how presenting their ideas as alternative arguments (not as structural arrangements) could better shape and emphasize their ideas.<sup>72</sup> During their revision efforts, students learn how to reshape the syntax and diction of their thesis in the context of their overall composition, and they learn how to reshape that context in response to this revised thesis.

The *x, y* thesis model offers an introduction to invention models that will help students create essays that *respond* to the *argument* that writers intend to unify and to extend. In contrast to FPT and some of the other formulaic options presently available, the *x, y* model allows writers to discover not only what they want to say but also how they want to say it. A discussion that begins thinking about relationships (rather than by identifying parts), begins the critical thinking process; importantly, the essay takes shape around these ideas, and the content – not the form –

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<sup>72</sup> See Max Morenberg and Jeff Sommer’s *The Writer’s Options* for help with this skill; this text, a well-designed example of a sentence combining textbook, shows students how different syntactical and paragraph structures create not only options but also alter emphasis.

drives an ongoing rhetorical process. Especially in comparison to formulaic FPT models, the *x, y* model helps students reexamine the thesis in a way that stresses the impact of their arguments in a pronounced manner. As I did with the above hypothetical revisions of this Regents' model, many times in these syntax-level revisions students write themselves away from the *x* or *y* variable altogether, but their developed and related ideas remain. Importantly, the final writing products will *not* always include theses that resemble these models any longer.

To improve the impact of such student writing, the *x, y* thesis model helps move stilted academic writing further towards effective argumentative discourse because it encourages ongoing invention and analytical thought. What ensues for these students is an exciting and palpable overall shift in thought about their methods to think about writing better arguments. In 2005, Richard Fulkerson writes in "Composition at the Turn of the Century," "Despite the shortage of composition scholarship on argumentation, evidence indicates that treating writing as argument for a reader is widespread" (672). In response to this demand as well as to the pushback from the FPT, the *x, y* thesis model will shift the focus from organization to argument.

As the above revision to the Regents' model indicates, rather than collapse ideas under organizational structures posing as invention models, the *x, y* model helps point students towards academic compositions that encourage an elasticity of form that allows for asymmetry and that foster convincing unifications of developed thoughts that clearly move readers from the writer's origin to their conclusion. A reader of this sample essay can see how the initial writer's reasons remain; however, these reasons now reside within a context that has a clearer purpose than an organizational statement. Because the thesis has a position and a direction, the writer refines their thoughts about the subject and shapes their reasons around an argument as they compose and as they revise. The *x, y* invention model helps to shape a discourse into one where readers

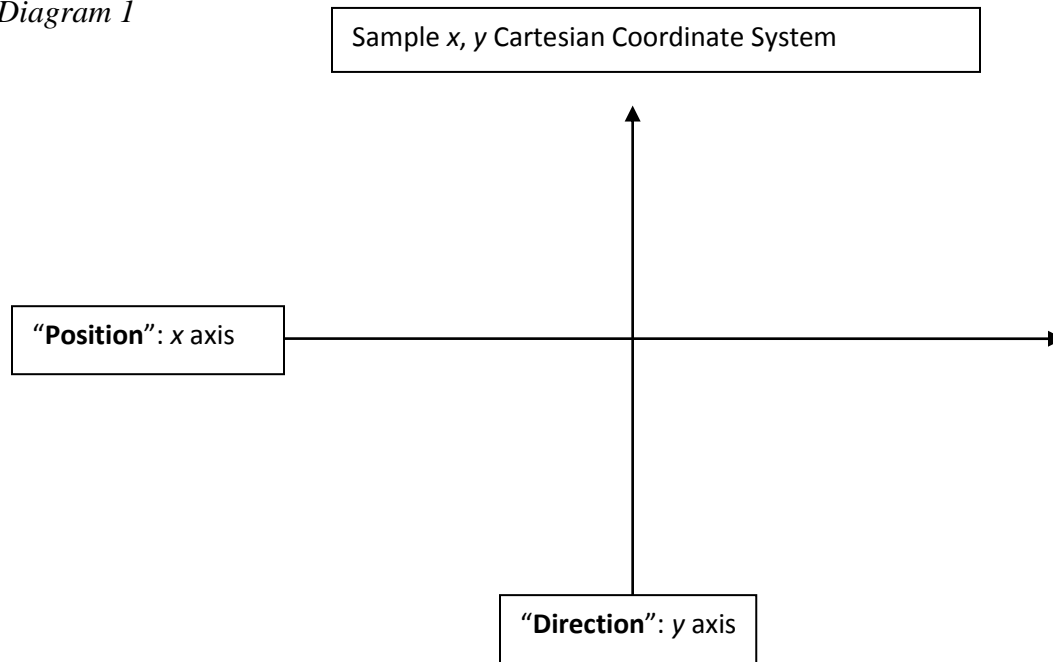
understand more what they are reading; without organizational statements predetermining their reading process, such readers make inquiries as they read: Why am I reading this? What is the writer arguing? What is their evidence? How has the writer reached a conclusion based on this evidence? In other words, the model forces the writer to have a purpose and encourages the audience to read actively. In the revised Regents' example, the reader can understand the writer's thoughts more clearly. Because the essay has a clearer purpose, it is more unified and detailed than the earlier draft framed from an organizational structure. As such, a prospective reader of this revision has an improved understanding as to why they are reading about this writer's anxieties in the greater context of entrepreneurship.

This revised Regents' example should also highlight how I am not trying to replace a restrictive form with another; instead, I offer nonrestrictive models to prompt invention and to serve as a middle ground between organizational strategies and expressionist writing. The *x, y* thesis model promotes such rhetorically aware writing in ways that formulaic models never will. By pushing towards a thesis that explores the relationships between their ideas, in particular the subordinate, contrastive, or dependent connections, students will learn how to create better arguments. The essay becomes an extension of an invented and arguable idea, not a replicated form (i.e. the FPT or even the oversimplification of the Toulmin model into sequenced parts).

The *x, y* thesis model responds well to the current situation in which thesis-driven expository and argument essays still dominate the types of writing assignments that most students face in high school and in first year English composition courses. A strong and identifiable thesis, as many teachers at these levels will acknowledge, makes a significant difference in the impact of the essay, from its efficiency to its effectiveness. To enhance these connections, the *x, y* thesis model, through a series of instructional diagrams, uses visual images

of the Cartesian coordinate system beginning with the Diagram 1.

*Diagram 1*



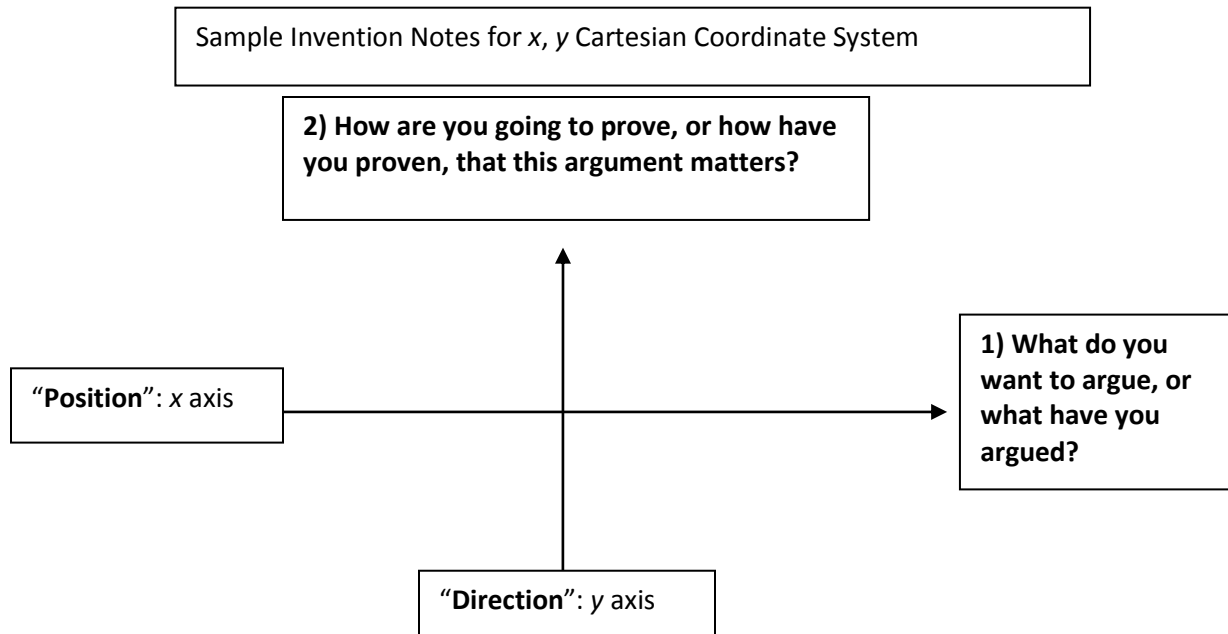
I first devised a few of the sentence completions and this first coinciding diagram during a classroom discussion about thesis writing with students in a first-year composition course at Southern Polytechnic State University. Located north of Atlanta in Marietta, Georgia, this four year college with foci on the sciences and technologies is a member of the University System of Georgia. Its mixture of traditional and non-traditional students, including mostly aspiring architects, engineers, and computer programmers who were students in my composition courses, certainly felt comfortable with hypothetical visual and mathematical manipulatives.<sup>73</sup>

By literally drawing the mathematical image of a Cartesian Coordinate system on the

<sup>73</sup> See Nagurney and Alnajjar's "Work in Progress – The Five Paragraph Essay in Junior/Senior Electrical Engineering Courses" from the 2008 Frontiers in Education Conference publications for a similar discussion about spatial intelligence about students from University of Hartford Electrical and Computer Engineering programs, arguing that for these students, many of whom are non-native speakers, the five-paragraph essay and corresponding graphic organizers work well. At <http://fie-conference.org/fie2008/papers/1186.pdf>.

whiteboard, I activated some of the students' prior knowledge. The  $x, y$  thesis model uses this mathematical framework as the basis to help show how alternative invention and organizational strategies work together to create better thesis statements than the FPT for the majority of academic essays. This diagram directly corresponds with the  $x, y$  pieces of the sentence completions: relational theses that instructors trace as a domain along the  $x$  axis and a co-domain along the  $y$  axis, renamed respectively for the sake of writing instruction as the "position" and "direction."

From this initial diagram, I enhanced the  $x, y$  thesis method to further use this multi-dimensional Cartesian coordinate system to help students create a thesis that truly argues something (see Diagram 2).

*Diagram 2*

When students use this second diagram as a prewriting strategy, it helps them to complete tasks: to test to see if a heuristic fits the relations they want to discuss, to invent the  $x$  variable to fill the position slot, and to invent the  $y$  variable to fill the dependent direction slot. By examining how ideas work as relationships, students examine the purpose of their discussion more because they realize an argument is now at stake. Because the thesis is now focused on argumentation rather than merely organization, these students learn to make these decisions based on the needs of the whole discourse rather than on artificial demands of inflexible paradigms, like the five-paragraph theme or Jane Schaffer Method. They no longer invent three reasons or measure ratios, but through one thought-provoking sentence begin to argue for a clearer purpose.

### ***x, y* Thesis Model Responses to Literature and Composition Assignments**

The *x, y* thesis model of invention would most likely work best if first introduced to students in secondary classrooms as part a larger continuum of ongoing writing instruction. Here the model will help improve the ways in which students write *after* they acknowledge the restrictions of the FPT (and potentially the JSM) essay as their default method and, if possible, *before* they reach college or college-level classrooms in which they are expected to write well. In other words, I do not find it necessary to rid the world of the FPT, but I do want to offer better models to beyond it.

While the timed expository essay works as an initial introduction, an example from a literature course will help further explain the flexibility of this model. To begin I will consider a rather common prompt that asks for students to explore the symbolism within a novel.<sup>74</sup> What many students at both the high school and college level will write is a list of symbols essay (i.e. “In *Moby-Dick*, Melville introduces archetypal symbols that relate to color, to the quest, and to the fear of the unknown” or “Melville creates the white whale, the open sea, and the gold doubloon as symbols in *Moby-Dick*). In part, a faulty research question causes such a response that produces this type of non-thesis statement. The faulty question is misinterpreted as “What are the symbols?” For some students, this question may be followed with, “How do they relate?” In any case, the typical non-thesis statement response is “The symbols are.” Students, therefore, need to learn how to ask – and first they need to be asked – a question that demands for a relationship between the writer’s symbols and the writer’s purpose. When this line of inquiry

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<sup>74</sup> My initial examples will be from literature courses, specifically American Literature. At the high school level many states have a course that teaches American Literature; in Georgia, for example, all students must pass a semester of American Literature in order to graduate. As well, this is a course I often teach. The majority of high school English courses are tied directly to the literature – and writing about this literature. This example could also easily extend to the open question for the AP Literature exam or to a college literature prompt.



occurs, what proves difficult for some students is the invention of the “direction” – the y axis of the graph that lies perpendicular to the first – to determine this purpose. Here students must answer the “so what” or “to what effect.”

In many cases, an artificial writing situation begets artificial writing and artificial feedback. The *x, y* model helps to reclaim an opportunity for students to understand authentic rhetoric even when asked to write in pseudotransactional situations. Too commonly, the audiences in these academic situations are teachers looking for grammatical correctness, and the students’ limited rhetorical tasks are to write enough error free sentences to earn a good grade. Teachers need to ask more of their students and they need models that encourage their students to respond to these higher expectations: if these changes occur, the *x, y* model helps students understand what they have been doing and what they now need to do differently.

It is probably best to use a specific text on which many high school students write essays to explain this model more. F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* should work better than my last reference to Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick* as an example because teachers often assign this work to students and because the discussion of symbolism already started relates well to Fitzgerald’s novel. Students who want to discuss the significance of the symbols in *The Great Gatsby* should ask these questions to test their y variable and their overall relations between major ideas:

1. Why does the symbolism in the novel matter?
2. What does it do?
3. What or who does it develop or influence outside of its own symbolic representation?
4. For instance, does the symbolism or a specific symbol influence

characterization or theme?

With these questions and the  $x, y$  invention models as guiding principles, students could learn to latch onto a specific thesis, one with a position and direction, one that is arguable and cogent. For example, these questions and the eight sentence completions (see pages 116-117) could lead to the following examples:

1. Although Fitzgerald works hard to establish \_\_\_\_ symbols in the novel ( $x$ ), he fails to connect these symbols to \_\_\_\_\_. ( $y$ )
2. As Fitzgerald develops \_\_\_\_ symbols in the novel ( $x$ ), he connects them to specific character flaws. ( $y$ )
3. Because the \_\_\_\_ symbols become an integral part of the story ( $x$ ), they support Fitzgerald's theme concerning \_\_\_\_\_. ( $y$ )
4. If the frequency of the \_\_\_\_ symbols seems overdone ( $x$ ), then the subtlety of the language describing them helps to balance the overall aesthetics. ( $y$ )
5. In order for Fitzgerald to develop the \_\_\_\_ symbols ( $x$ ), he must explain the (dis)connection to the \_\_\_\_ setting. ( $y$ )
6. When Fitzgerald emphasizes the \_\_\_\_ symbol ( $x$ ), he prolongs an important discussion of \_\_\_\_\_. ( $y$ )
7. Fitzgerald incorporates \_\_\_\_ symbols ( $x$ ) to further develop his thoughts about \_\_\_\_\_. ( $y$ )
8. The consistent use of \_\_\_\_ symbols ( $x$ ) helps unify the ways in which different characters respond to \_\_\_\_\_. ( $y$ )

These examples are certainly not inclusive, but they show the possibilities for discourse that reside outside of formulaic writing. In other words, the  $x, y$  thesis model is not limited to these

eight sentence completions or these responses to these stems, but the instructional discussions that begin with these algebraic options work well once there is a clear context – like the significance of symbols in Fitzgerald’s novel – to which this pedagogy is linked.

Like students have done with their experiences with the FPT model, students must brainstorm the potential symbols for discussion. In Fitzgerald’s text, for example, consider the following inconclusive litany of symbols they could ponder: Gatsby’s car, the green light on Daisy’s dock, the advertisement for Dr. T.J. Eckleberg, the ash heap, Myrtle’s dog’s collar, the Eggs, the weather, the various colors, and Wolfsheim’s cufflinks. Students have used these symbols for decades to create five-paragraph theses that explain that “*The Great Gatsby* is a novel in which Fitzgerald includes symbols of the Roaring Twenties with *a*, *b*, and *c*.”

Understanding the *x*, *y* thesis model allows students and their teachers some potential means to improve this effort. In particular, the *x*, *y* thesis model of invention opens a new window from which students can make informed and ongoing rhetorical decisions that will impact their entire arguments. A student once plagued with the *a-b-cs* now has an umbrella framework from which they could successfully write a five paragraph, a five page, or a five chapter project.

For discussion, the thesis stem “[Subject] ‘incorporates’ *x* (in order) to *y*” works well as a starting point. This sentence completion can readily become “In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald emphasizes the shattered symbols of the Jazz Age (*x*) to represent his portrayal of Modernist loss (*y*).” Using this invention model, a hypothetical student can narrow his or her selection of symbols to those that are not only shattered but also indicative of the historic era. Here, a long list shortens based on the writer’s needs. Rather than the FPT formula encouraging a random selection of three symbols for presentation, the *x*, *y* thesis model helps students work

simultaneously on invention and selection. Such selections are then based on specifically chosen content that will encourage discussion around refined arguments.

When students examine their theses and arguments according to the  $x, y$  model, then they can learn to discern to what degree the position impacts the direction. In other words, students often do not have problems identifying that there are symbols in *The Great Gatsby* (or even in more complicated and layered texts like *Moby-Dick*), but they do struggle to find a way to discuss a symbol or connected symbols in a meaningful way. The sample  $x, y$  thesis, “In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald emphasizes the shattered symbols of the Jazz Age ( $x$ ) to represent his portrayal of Modernist loss ( $y$ ),” already encourages a writer to focus only on symbols that can be discussed as “shattered.” From the earlier list of symbols, Gatsby’s car, the green light on Daisy’s dock, the advertisement for Dr. T.J. Eckleberg, the ash heap, Myrtle’s dog’s collar, the Eggs, the weather, the various colors, and Wolfsheim’s cufflinks only a few of these can be discussed as “shattered,” or in related terms.

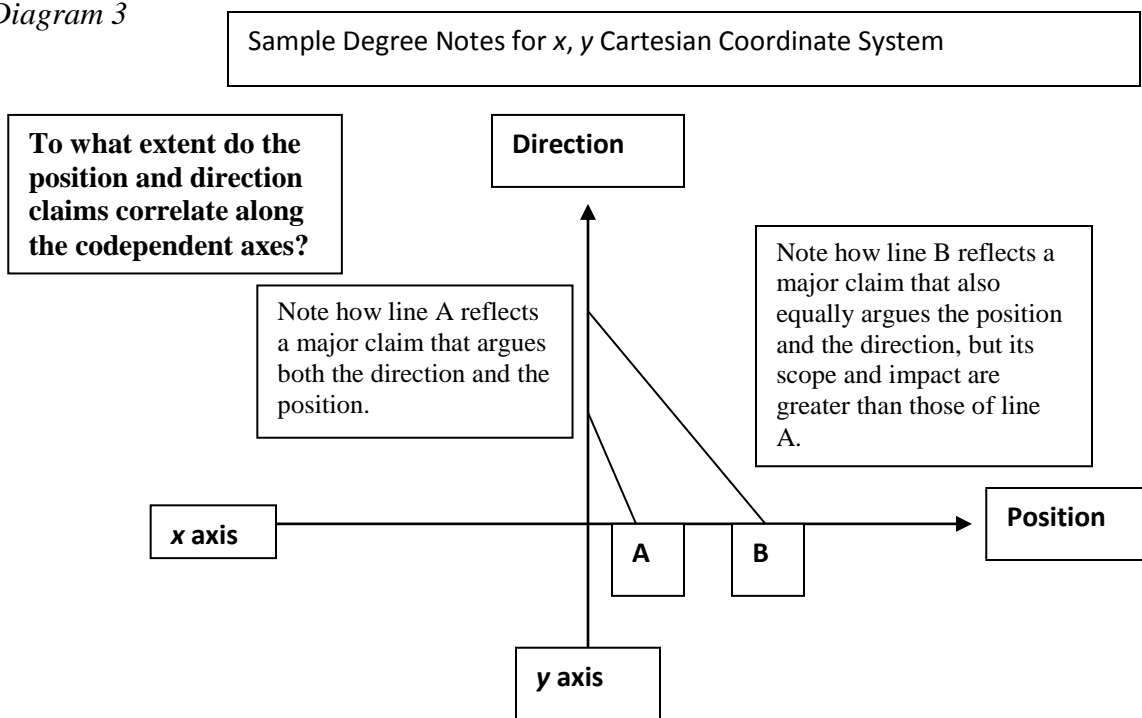
Moreover, once this selection of Gatsby’s car, the green light, the advertisement for Eckleberg, and the ash heap is made, then students have to analyze to what degree these symbols portray Modernist loss. Thus, the writing process continues not only as a matter of selection but also as one of continued invention. With this example, the connections between the Cartesian Coordinate system and the  $x, y$  model can help students clearly assess what symbol has or what symbols from this narrower list have more importance in their arguments. Understanding that different symbols have relative positions on the  $x$ -axis could help students also become a function of degree examining the strength of the symbol in terms of “shattered” (or, for another example, in another essay, the degree could be the strength of the character development as a function of chronology).

Additionally, the  $x, y$  thesis helps students better understand what some of their teachers may discuss as “significance.” By establishing the relationships between the position and the direction (here in the connections between one of Fitzgerald’s literary features, “symbols,” and a potential theme thread, “Modernist loss” [during the “Jazz Age”]), a student creates real arguments that do more than point to a series of examples (or non-examples) along the  $x$  axis; they move into real argumentation (and into the positive quadrant of the Cartesian Coordinate model with their direction itself).

Because the  $y$  axis position exists as a dependent variable to any points along the  $x$  axis, a student explores these concepts of correlation, of (in)dependency and codependency to create separate  $y$  positions based on a relative scale of degree (see Diagram 3). The difficulty of the position is often in the process of narrowing the selection of options to advance an overall rhetoric, not in the initial invention of topics to explore. Yet, this selection process is crucial for students to select the best examples that can extend their arguments in a convincing and focused manner. In other words, writers need to continuously reanalyze the choices they make when writing. In this case, a discussion of the green light (see line A in Diagram 3) may limit discussions to just *Gatsby* and *Daisy*; however, a discussion of Dr. T.J. Eckleberg (see line B in Diagram 3) would open up the discussion to include almost any of the characters. Depending on the scope of the essay, the writer now has a means to make choices, and these invention decisions are ongoing because students have to decide what to include and to exclude based on their overall purpose (and not from a preselected number of sub-topics). Many times the only way for these rhetorical decisions to be made is to test the ideas in context of the essay itself. What the  $x, y$  thesis model does is facilitate and expedite such tests because students begin to question whether or not their theses have something – some relation – to argue. Arguments

make more sense when the ideas correspond in a clear and dependent (i.e. not merely additive) manner. As composition instructors, we know these features of effective writing, but, based on the frequency of formulaic compositions, we struggle to convey these ideas to our students. And the  $x, y$  thesis model helps them to see what we understand in a way that they can also comprehend and practice.

Diagram 3



The introduction of the  $x, y$  model proves effective because students find terms that share common descriptions ( $x$ ) and relational impacts ( $y$ ). In this example, the selection of symbols is initially restricted by the term “shattered” and then further restricted by the discussions of “Modernist loss.” In some cases, depending on the scope of the essay, this move is not enough. Looking at Diagram 3, line C offers the best approach for the essay. I would argue the student should use this model to help narrow his or her selection even further: he or she needs to close

their figurative umbrella with continued selection of topic and continued revision of argument. For example, a student could now write, “In *The Great Gatsby* ( $\neq z$ ), Fitzgerald emphasizes the shattered symbol of a decaying billboard ( $x$ ) to portray his concerns about loss ( $y$ )” as a thesis to extend as far as possible on both the  $x$  and  $y$  axes (i.e. line C).<sup>75</sup> Shutting the umbrella in this way helps such a student to make  $x$  and  $y$  choices that remain distinct and dependent, that become arguable and rhetorical.

As they were accustomed with the FPT, I consent that many students will first move towards opened umbrella theses that arch over multiple and sometimes disparate claims to create a false sense of greater unity. For instance, a student may write, “In *The Great Gatsby* ( $\neq z$ ) Fitzgerald uses characters to reflect the symbols of loss.” The discussions of various characters could then discuss various symbols of loss. Such theses are slightly better than five-paragraph theme organizational statements, but examples like this one leave much room for growth. The teacher could help the students understand how adding adjectives to modify the sentence creates more clarity: to define the characters, the symbols, and the loss refines the argument. Another important conversation could occur here around the verb if the instructor poses the question, “How does Fitzgerald ‘use’ these characters?” While this initial sample using the  $x, y$  model shows thought and does not oversimplify an argument with an organizational structure, without a means of uniting the characters as the focus of the composition, such weaker  $x, y$  thesis statements that still wish to oversimplify the writing process could still lead to overly fragmented discourse. Without further specification, the reader could still feel that the student appears to have willy-nilly narrowed his discussion to the number of characters necessary to fulfill the

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<sup>75</sup> See Diagram 4 and related discussions for more information on the  $z$  axis, noted here as  $\neq z$  to indicate that this sample thesis only addresses one primary text.

assignment.

Another weaker  $x, y$  sample with potential for such development and instruction could read: “In *The Great Gatsby* ( $\neq z$ ) Fitzgerald uses figurative language to develop a sense of hopelessness.” What I worry about here is a move that would repeat the FPT pattern, paragraphs discussing various types of figurative language like personification, metaphor, and imagery without ever truly forming a cogent argument that explains “why” or “so what” these connections are made.

The essay model discussed in the last chapter from the *Research Guide* provides even another telling example of the fragmented models to which students often cling as advocates of the FPT. The model reads: “Three primary aspects of the plans of the novel are Fitzgerald’s use of chronology [a], point of view [b], and contrast [c], for they separately and collectively lead the reader to the major thematic considerations of the novel (Eble 95).” Note how chronology [a] and point of view [b] are fairly straightforward and easily sistered concepts in comparison to their [c] cousin, “contrast.” Contrast of what? Of chronology? Of point of view? If these are the amorphous and variegated positions, what is even worse is that this sample thesis ends with the obtuse direction “major thematic considerations.” This hypothetical student has failed to clarify a unified focus. To add to this confusion, the writer offers a citation – ironically in their thesis of all places – but no direct quotes. A reader must decide on his or her own to decide what is cited and what is paraphrased. In other words, if I am the instructor who reads this sample essay, then I wonder whether or not any of this hapless thesis is even the student’s own. If this is the model offered by a district publication, I feel it is safe to assume that many other language arts teachers face theses similar to this one. Here I would suggest that the student choose a, b, or c as the position based on the theme they wish to define as the direction of the essay. I would



also ask the student, “In what aspect of Fitzgerald’s writing are you most interested in exploring as your direction of this essay? His ‘use of chronology [a], point of view [b], and contrast [c]’?” Sometimes these conjunctions and fragmentations occur as well in the direction, but instruction that uses the *x, y* model as its grounds for thesis instructions help to empower students to look for these patterns in their own writings. In short, the *x, y* model, at every phase of the writing process, helps students and teachers critically discuss the purpose of the essay (and the writing decisions that shaped this essay).

With the *x, y* thesis model students can also learn to write better theses when they are encouraged to make judgments. Let us look again at the one of the aforementioned sample Fitzgerald theses that could fall victim to FPT oversimplification, “In *The Great Gatsby* ( $\neq$ ) Fitzgerald uses characters to reflect the symbols of loss.” Here a better discussion would identify which character best reflects a specific symbol or aspect of loss; the writer could create a contrast between two characters that would allow for a more of a unified essay, i.e. “Daisy’s return to Tom better reflects Fitzgerald’s focus on nothingness than Nick’s return to the Midwest.” Here the student offers an argument with more at stake and with a more concrete focus. Using the *x, y* framework, an evaluation argument with a better thesis develops. The writer now enters the text to inform their discussion rather than merely move around its surface.

The other weaker sample that casts its net too widely, which reads “In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald uses figurative language to develop a sense of hopelessness,” needs a different type of response. This theoretical writer could ask himself or herself which literary device gives them the most to say in my own voice (i.e. the most overt). Or he or she could ask, which literary device is most easily overlooked (i.e. the most subtle)? What happens in both of these examples is that too often students who wrestle with writing argument essays about literature frequently

cast their nets too widely and too shallowly. The FPT is indicative of this pattern, and the  $x, y$  model helps show students how these FPT-like entrance points will fall short. The new model shows them how to discuss these shortcomings in ways that make their own theses stronger.

The  $x, y$  thesis model is not a quick fix because it no longer oversimplifies thesis writing or the writing process. Instead, the model highlights the concerns that many composition instructors have about the pitfalls of writing formulas and the trends to oversimplify discourse, concerns can be discussed openly in composition classrooms. Yet, such discussions rarely occur when students write five-paragraph theme theses and when their teachers have no accessible means to move their pupils along the continuum. When explained fully, the  $x, y$  invention model helps instructors teach students to make better choices when examining their purpose, their content, and their structure; therefore, the invention process and the thinking process become part of the overall writing process once again. Thus, the overall model – the sentence stems and their connections to the Cartesian Coordinate system – can be defined as a heuristic in the classical rhetorical sense: the  $x, y$  model introduces additional ways for students to assist discovery or to find information (to help define and redefine the purpose and methodology of their argument).

When students focus some of their sustained attention on this one thesis sentence as a source of argument, then they see how the essay interacts more logically from it and more relationally around it. Students also see how they can reshape their thesis during any phase of the writing process in response to the purpose of their essay. Throughout these efforts students begin to see that the syntax and diction of their thesis statements in academic essays are paramount. For example, consider another sample thesis: “In *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald’s tone becomes progressively more depressing ( $x$ ) as it mirrors the ongoing

disappointments in Nick's life ( $y$ ).” Such a thesis statement would create a strong framework that allows for a unified argument to develop. The essay could show how aspects of the novel prove this thesis. A more specific thesis with a clear codependent  $x$ ,  $y$  relation helps to steer a student to write a more analytical argument. Such responses better explore the inside of a text and its nuances, rather than meandering on its surface.

So far, I have only explained a literary analysis that focuses on one text. I have also devised a variation of this model to help students envision the means by which they make comparisons, especially in literature courses; this expansion of the  $x$ ,  $y$  thesis with two dimensions is a three-dimensional model with  $x$ ,  $y$ , and  $z$  axes (see Diagrams 4 and 5 on the next pages). This  $z$  axis extends into a third plane where what I call the “connection” ( $z$ ) in the comparison still depends on both  $x$  (position) and  $y$  (direction). In contrast to the  $x$ ,  $y$  model, using this third plane its corresponding variable sets up a longer thesis, a longer analysis, and an responsive form, one where the writer, for example, will need to make important decisions about block or alternating paragraph development.

Students may also construct a  $z$ -axis to engage in comparative studies. In particular this model shows how a dependent relationship is defined – connected – across texts or situations in similar symbolic terms. The three-dimensional model helps show students how to stretch a viable relationship across texts, most likely in a comparative or contrastive manner. With such a model, students could apply it across numerous texts by the same author or across texts by different authors or across texts from various literary periods in a survey course. The  $z$  axis, the “connection,” enters classrooms when instructors of survey courses ask for comparisons in cumulative essay examinations (i.e. in Diagram 5 see how *The Great Gatsby* and *The Beautiful and the Damned* could be connected along this  $z$  axis; also note how I moved up the abstraction

ladder to enable more maneuverability with this  $x$ ,  $y$ ,  $z$  thesis).

Diagram 4

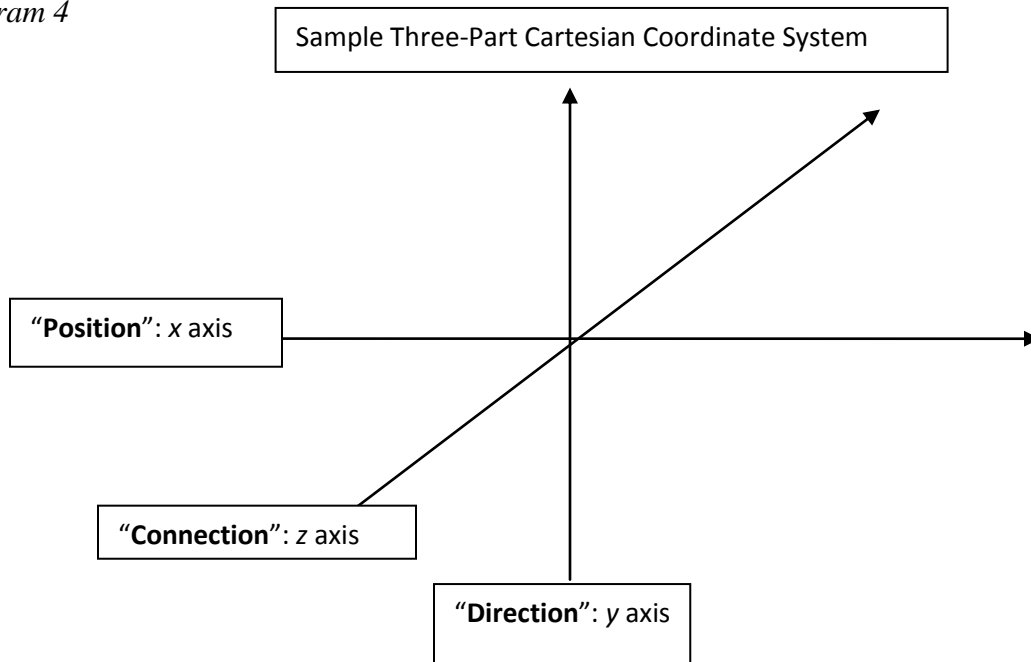
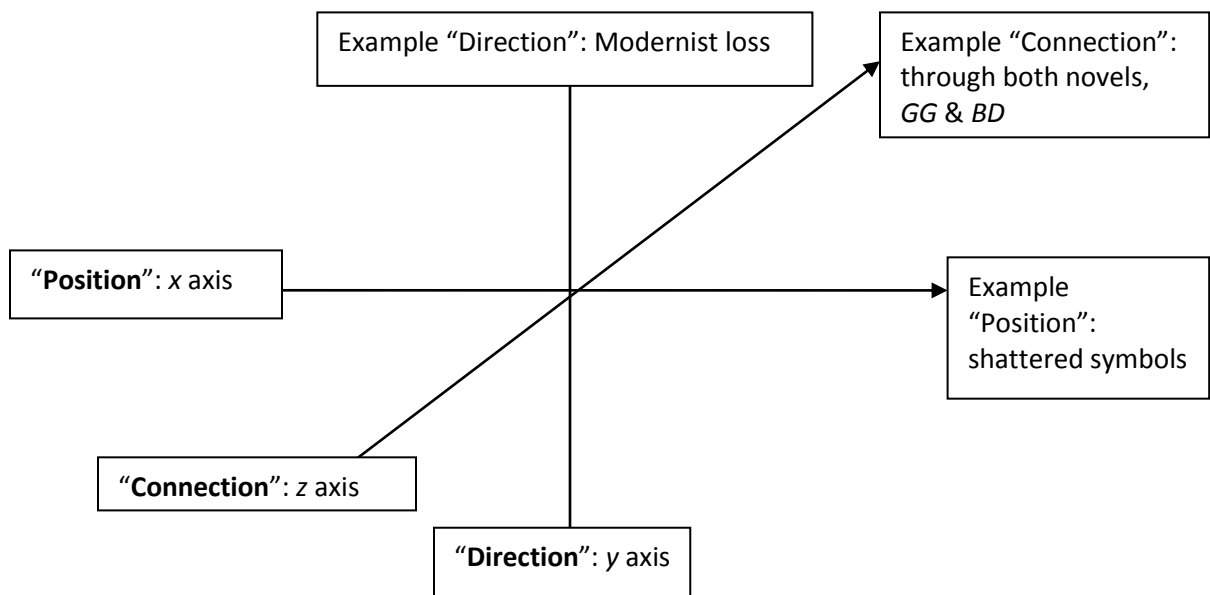


Diagram 5

Diagram 5 illustrates a Three-Part Cartesian Coordinate System with an Overlaid Example. The system consists of three axes originating from a central point: a horizontal axis labeled "Position":  $x$  axis, a vertical axis labeled "Direction":  $y$  axis, and a diagonal axis labeled "Connection":  $z$  axis. A title box at the top of the diagram reads "Three-Part Cartesian Coordinate System with Overlaid Example".

Example: "In *The Great Gatsby* and *The Beautiful and the Damned* ( $z$ ), Fitzgerald emphasizes shattered symbols of the Jazz Age ( $x$ ) to offer his portrayals of Modernist loss ( $y$ )."



A more defined example of a sample comparison thesis using the  $x, y, z$  thesis model will help show such possibilities. I will attempt to address the similarities between these same two Fitzgerald texts; a student, for example, could write, “Although Nick Carraway and Anthony Patch can be described as failures ( $z$ ), both characters move from their initial conformist actions ( $x$ ) towards self reliant thoughts ( $y$ ). These essays that juggle more than one text prove a little harder for students, but the patterns that the  $x, y$  thesis model offers help them extend their understanding of compositions through a more rhetorical and a more applicable lens than they have usually been offered prior. Even better versions of the  $x, y (z)$  thesis model take more of a stance with such comparisons: using the prior example, a student could explain how one character fails more than another or how the shattered symbols of the Jazz Age in *The Great Gatsby* work more effectively to offer portrayals of Modernist loss than in *The Beautiful and the Damned*. It is such argumentative and inventive thinking that the  $x, y (z)$  thesis model encourages and sustains. Therefore, the products of such efforts – and of the  $x, y (z)$  thesis model – are theses that make decisions from dependent rather than independent relationships. They ask students to think about what they have read and to examine what their arguments want to prove.

Because many English courses do not revolve solely around literary analyses, the same  $x, y$  thesis model lessons I have discussed already in literature courses likewise apply to composition and rhetoric components in both the high school and collegiate courses. Students in these courses are typically responding to argument prompts. In comparison to literary analyses where they know their text is their penultimate source for evidence, in many cases, these composition students often have fewer ready-made materials from which they draw ideas and find evidence. What has made many of these freshman composition classes such an interesting

gateway into college is the collegial aspects of the classes that ask students to discover what they what to say about a researchable topic that they want to discuss. This task proves difficult for many first year students, especially when these students have to learn so much more about the world around them before they know what they feel about it. Here, the invention process is often harder than literary analyses with which they usually have greater familiarity. New invention models can help ease this stress and reduce the chance for students to oversimplify their rhetoric.

To begin examining hypothetical  $x, y$  thesis models of invention and how they can shape responses to composition assignments, released AP Language exam prompts present excellent topics. I will look, therefore, at the three varied types of sample instructional rhetorical situations from the AP Language exam. Presently there are three components to this AP Exam: the synthesis essay, the rhetorical analysis, and the argument essay. All three bend towards argument writing and, consequently, offer good loci for sample  $x, y$  thesis responses. These prompts are similar to some assignments also offered in first-year college composition courses. Students who enter this AP course, like many who enter first year writing courses, often present FPT theses that injuriously fragment their rhetorical analyses. In other words, these rhetorical arguments often suffer from the same breadth and lack of depth as their literary counterparts.

The AP Language synthesis essay asks students to incorporate – to synthesize – materials from at least three of seven or eight documents from different sources into an argumentative essay. The two-hour essay portion of the AP Language exam breaks down in a way that each of the three essays occupies about forty minutes of the examination itself. Significantly, the students do have fifteen minutes of reading time to review these materials as preparation time. A sample 2006 published synthesis prompt reads:

Read the following sources (including any introductory information) carefully.

Then write an essay in which you evaluate what a business or government agency would need to consider before transferring a hardy but indigenous species to another country. Synthesize at least three of your sources for support.<sup>76</sup>

Some students may have little personal knowledge about this topic, and I have found that any stressors – here a timed-writing situation on an unfamiliar topic in a complicated analytical framework – lead students to oversimplified formulaic structures.

In this synthesis example, even more challenges push writers towards non-invention models of argument. First, of all there is an inclination from some students to let the sources rather than the argument drive the essay. Some of these students would create a FPT thesis that contains a respective thread from the three required sources. If students begin in this manner, then each paragraph would respond to each of these sources, often via paraphrase rather than argument. The other oversimplification trap, of sorts, here is that some students would create a response that details disparate responses by both a business *and* by a government agency. Without clear connections, neither of these fragmented and formulaic responses (i.e. a source a, source b, and source c organizational statement or a business + government non-thesis) would earn the highest marks, even if well polished.

A student could turn to the *x, y* thesis model to invent an argument thread in response to this sample prompt. If the writer decides that the essay could be framed in contrast, the first sentence completion becomes a viable option: “Although *x, y*” (see #1). A student could test these variables with the following: “Although a government agency may have good intentions when introducing a non-indigenous species (*x*), the destructive results of these nonnative species

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<sup>76</sup> For electronic copies of all released AP Language free response questions see [http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/apc/members/exam/exam\\_questions/2001.html](http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/apc/members/exam/exam_questions/2001.html).

outweigh the gains (y).” Another student may opt for a response focuses more on causality: “Because of  $x$ ,  $y$ ” (see #2).<sup>77</sup> Such a response could read, “Because of the hazards of introducing nonnative species to new environs ( $x$ ), businesses need to take much consider the cautionary measures that they use as part of their transportation networks ( $y$ ).” The next sentence stem, also works in a similar manner, but it introduces the conditional to this causal pattern, “If  $x$ , then  $y$ ” (see #4): “If government agencies want to exercise the necessary caution when introducing a non-indigenous species ( $x$ ), then they need to research the potential impacts upon the native habitat ( $y$ ).” Note how all three of these examples allow the writer to explore relationships by proving the position ( $x$ ) and showing the impact of the direction ( $y$ ). Theses framed from such codependent relationships help push the writer to take a stand and to integrate the sources as evidence because they no longer offer mere organizational statements. They have created – invented – the origins of an argument that can shape the composition and revision of the essay. These models, therefore, help test the writer’s burden – his or her thesis – to extend the analysis and the writer’s refutation to solidify the argument’s momentum.

With only one set text or sometimes with a set of short paired passages, the AP Language rhetorical response differs from the synthesis essay. Often called question two, it has included in the past as directions as simple as the following in 2002 when students received Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address and a little of the history that surrounds it, “Write an essay in which you analyze the rhetorical strategies President Lincoln used to achieve his purpose. Support your argument with specific references to the text.”<sup>78</sup> Other years, like 2009, have been more specific

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<sup>77</sup> Note the similarities between this heuristic and two others that relate to causality: “In order for  $x$ ,  $y$ ” and “When  $x$ ,  $y$ .” Such overlap helps students see these relationships and encourage revision to the thesis statements themselves based on the needs of their essays.

<sup>78</sup> The opening part of the prompt reads, “In his Second Inaugural Address, given one month before the end of the Civil War, United States President Abraham Lincoln surprised his audience – which expected a lengthy speech on



with the focus of the thesis. This prompt reads in full, by comparison:

The two passages below, both written by noted contemporary scientist Edward O. Wilson, appear in Wilson's book *The Future of Life* (2002). In the passages, Wilson satirizes the language of two groups that hold opposing attitudes towards environmentalism. Read each passage carefully. Then write an essay in which you analyze how Wilson's satire illustrates the unproductive nature of such discussions.

I think it is crucial to note how this seven-year period has moved writers to respond more narrowly to the prompt itself. A writer who does understand the satire in Wilson's paired pieces, for example, cannot discuss the strategies that inform this purpose. I will spend some time exploring another prompt from 2004 (Form B) that offers some difficulty of its own:

In 1962, the noted biologist Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring*, a book that helped to transform American attitudes toward the environment. Carefully read the following passage from *Silent Spring*. Then write an essay in which you define the central argument of the passage and analyze the rhetorical strategies that Carson uses to construct her argument.

Whether or not test writers lead students to open or to more directed theses, all three of these sample AP prompts, from 2002, 2004, and 2009, become potential traps for those students who only know how to write FPT themes.

In the AP Language exam, these traps were set accidentally. Because good composition and rhetoric teachers want students to understand the Aristotelian rhetorical triangle as a core

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politics, slavery, and states' rights – with a short speech in which he contemplated the effects of the Civil War and offered his vision for the future of the nation.

component of their courses and textbooks, many students in this AP course try to forcefully unify a discussion of a text using a FPT formula by examining how the text exemplifies appeals to *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. Unfortunately, these efforts usually accomplish very little. The appeals function due to the relations among the writer, reader, and text; as such, despite the strengths of the FPT in these types of scenarios, it usually becomes too hard to discuss a text in a timed setting that handles all three appeals equitably and that reaches an end where it can truly be defined as an argument. The *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* essays become a means by which the students can show a reasonable understanding of rhetorical terminology that parlay to discussions *around* the text but rarely engage with the nuances *in* the text itself.

The 2004 AP Language prompt allows a good topic to explore further the *x, y* thesis model some more in terms of these tenuous FPT-style *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* responses. Students have two tasks: to define the central argument (*x*) and to analyze the rhetorical strategies (*y*). What many students, consequently, will want to create is a response that could read, “Carson shows the dangers of manmade poisons through specific examples, rhetorical questions, and criticisms of political decisions that do not consider the environment.” Yet this response is a slightly masked *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* FPT-style response. This student most likely would follow to discuss how Carson establishes credibility (*ethos*) with specific evidence, engages the reader’s emotions (*pathos*) with rhetorical questions, and moves towards a logical conclusion that places blame (*logos*). A better approach would be an exploration of some of the heuristics offered by the *x, y* model. The writer could start with the contrastive “Although *x, y*” (see #1): “Although Carson raises a number of questions about whom is to blame for deadly poisons like Parathion (*x*), she shows the reader that the answers lie in improving government responsibly for the environment (*y*).” Or the writer could use the “In order for *x, y*” (see #5)

sentence completion: “In order to make her concerns about the mistreatment of the environment more effective ( $x$ ), Carson shows how the same poisons that kill wildlife provide potential dangers to human beings ( $y$ ).” As well, the writer could rewrite the following: [Subject] “incorporates”  $x$  (in order) to  $y$ ” (see #7): “Carson offers scare tactics ( $x$ ) to make her readers more concerned about environmental poisons ( $y$ ).” These relational invention models help the writer narrow his or her focus and help move the writer towards a response more argumentative in nature. By shifting the focus to an argument that centers firmly on purpose rather than one that loosely emphasizes appeals, the argument subordinates thoughts about such appeals or strategies in order to discuss the piece as a whole rhetoric with a specific audience, purpose, style, or effect.

The third AP Language question falls more in line with arguments in response to the social, personal, and global issues that typify standardized writing tests across the nation. The writers of the question may include a quote to open the prompt, but they do not include a set text like question two or a packet of research like question one. The 2009 prompt, for example, reads in full:

Adversity has the effect of eliciting talents which in prosperous circumstances would have lain dormant. —Horace

Consider this quotation about adversity from the Roman poet Horace. Then write an essay that defends, challenges, or qualifies Horace’s assertion about the role that adversity (financial or political hardship, danger, misfortune, etc.) plays in developing a person’s character. Support your argument with appropriate evidence from your reading, observation, or experience.

The broadness of this prompt pulls many writers back to FPT theses in which they would offer

three (or if pressed for time only two) people who have overcome adversity. What these responses need though, in most cases, are clear connections (i.e. transitions) to show readers how these pieces work together. Few essays actually discussed “people” as diverse as Bill Gates [a], Hester Prynne [b], and Michael Jordan [c]. But these were the types of a, b, c responses that ensued from this prompt. To frame a clear and focused discussion, what writers needed to do was find a commonality or a contrast in adversity in order. For example, the following sentence completion could occur, “When  $x$ ,  $y$ ” (see #6): “When some individuals faced external conflicts that restricted their career goals ( $x$ ), they found out their how their true characters derived from the strength of their intrinsic motivations” ( $y$ ). With such a thesis a writer could make more disparate comparisons and contrasts because they would have an argumentative framework – not an organizational statement – from which they could posture their responses. Such a response would also beg the question for those who chose groupings like these: for figures like Michael Jordan is professional athletics a career in a similar or disparate manner as the way Microsoft became Bill Gate’s career? Likewise, it would ask the writer – and reader – to ponder how and if the selections of fictional characters (i.e. Hester’s career as a seamstress) fit into such comparisons.

These example responses in both literature and rhetoric help to show that no matter what course or types of analyses are attempted, students employing the  $x$ ,  $y$  model for argument compositions make improved selections of topics and have significantly more to say. Many teachers have already expressed concerns about this lack of depth in their students’ essays. The  $x$ ,  $y$  thesis model encourages a more focused analysis. As well, it helps students to reconsider the sequencing of their ideas because it helps students continually look at the effects of their content (purpose) and form (analysis) – in terms of their thesis – as they compose and revise.

In contrast, students who invent their theses according to the FPT model often suffer from non-argument thesis statements. These students who use the FPT falter because they expose to the reader – most often unconsciously – an overt disregard for the relationships that take place in better compositions. They do plan what will come first, second, and last, but this planning occurs without the transitional and “interaction[al]” thinking that happens when writers consider the relationships among the parts (that extend beyond merely setting expectations for sequence) (Enos and Lauer 79).<sup>79</sup> When students learn to see their thesis as a place where a relationship is at stake, then they (re)examine the essay as something full of potential, a place where they argue a position more progressively and more rhetorically. Students learn to examine what the reader may need to know first and how the progression of paragraphs will best move the reader towards the conclusion that they (as writer) want the reader to consider. In sum, students can learn to match their invention strategies to their composition’s content while [re]considering the overall purpose of their rhetoric.

### **A Defense of the $x, y$ Thesis Model**

The combinations of the sentence openers and the corresponding diagrams of the  $x, y$  thesis model become connected heuristic frameworks to help students further understand how to invent an improved thesis statement with both a position and a direction. Students’  $x, y$  theses answer the ubiquitous “so what” questions that teachers too often ask. The model helps students think and write about what they know and what they do not.

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<sup>79</sup> See Richard Enos and Janice Lauer’s “The Meaning of *Heuristic* in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* and Its Implications for Contemporary Rhetorical Theory” in *A Rhetoric of Doing: Essays Written in Honor of James L. Kinneavy*. Here they summarize their overall argument, “that Aristotle used the term *Heuristic* to capture the way meaning is created between rhetor and audience and how, through this process of interaction, participatory meaning is shared” (79).

The flexibility of the  $x, y$  thesis model is quite a paradigm shift from the confines of current traditional pedagogies and products. For example, Sharon Crowley discusses at length in *The Methodical Memory: Invention in Current Traditional Rhetoric*, how many students want to demonstrate what they have remembered from what they have read. I also find students wanting to regurgitate what their teacher has taught them. Yet when asked to show their ability to write an essay in which they have to think about the nuances of the topic, they struggle to write arguments, especially ones that make claims that their readers feel need support and analysis. The  $x, y$  model and its corresponding diagrams help such students work with language that abets such argumentation. Rather than merely spitting out an organizational statement, a non-thesis, the  $x, y$  model helps students find confidence in a model that flexes with their needs. Inventing ideas to fill the variables initially reduces the stress of composition by producing a manageable range of experimental heuristic frameworks from which students begin the writing process. In other words, students can use these alternatives to test how their ideas fit together to advance their purpose (i.e. linearly) or they can test their purpose to see if they have any sustainable ideas (i.e. non-linearly). The  $x, y$  model of invention, consequently, helps students find theses that reflect their argument, and it helps abet the entire writing process because it focuses on relationships that beg to open discourse rather than on listing reasons that close discussions.

The model becomes transferable to other academic communities, especially those engrossed in writing across the curriculum movements. Students learn how to develop their essays and their skills at rhetorical writing. These heuristics help the students' writing become more rhetorical by asking writers to consider how they are going to persuade readers of particular relationships. When students continually revise, this instruction helps to remind them

to prove something exists ( $x$ ) and why that matters ( $y$ ). Rather than locking the model into a particular pattern of paragraphs or repeating the same patterns of sentences in each paragraph, this model asks the writing to respond to the particular task assigned.

While the  $x, y$  model will help explain ways to make arguments more successful to almost any student, it appeals to a group of students who are often missed in language arts and composition theories. In almost any given classroom there is a group of students for whom math speaks a language much more discernable than anything that their English teacher has ever said after the word “thesis.” This mathematical faction of students often falls silent in their composition or literature classrooms as the verbal-linguistic group, whether as a majority or as an overpowering, outspoken minority, attempts to dominate the conversations. The  $x, y$  framework becomes a comfortable means to introduce these students to thesis writing from a defamiliarized standpoint but with familiar concepts. These mathematical students see how evidence along both of these axes brings them into the positive portion of the graph, the first quadrant; they visually comprehend that discussions of the relations between their  $x$  and  $y$  components will make their essays arguable, analytical, complete and manageable.

Many of these students understand math well, but they need some help seeing language through an alternative scrim that flips their mathematical understanding of symbols. In a May 2008 correspondence with Georgia State University Math professor Mariana Montiel, she explains the complexities of using math as a language:

In terms of math as a language there is much to say. Mathematics has a strong symbolic component, but rarely is mathematics presented as a symbolic language in isolation (where this might happen is in a computer program). The symbolic language is embedded in a mathematical English [...] which in itself is a register

of the vernacular language. Math is written, read, spoken, and comprehended, and much of learning math has similarities with learning a language.<sup>80</sup>

The *x, y* thesis model uses students' understandings of spatial concepts and its related mathematical language to look at a writing task differently than they have previously, in particular from a multitude of perspectives that examine among other issues progress, unity, and coherence. Students now enter the discourse with this mathematical portion of their mind engaged. These alternative mathematical access points, with their different schemata, carry prior knowledge and positive experiences that differ vastly from those of a potentially frustrated math or science oriented learner who has become flustered that not all essay concepts can be dogmatically divided into three organizing ideas. The *x, y* thesis model works to create an overlap between what has become two disparate academic discourse communities, an intersection where the vernacular of writing instruction has been increased by the relationships formed between the Cartesian Coordinate System and thesis writing because the worlds and words of math and writing have become less disparate.

Other compositionists have already tried to link language and symbols through math, beginning with one of the most important precursors to my *x, y* model, Duane Nichols's version of the FPT. He aligned his efforts to improve "articulation" (903) with mathematics. For instance, he offers the following formula: "Because of A, B, C, X is true" (905). He explains this elongated syllogism with the explanation of the contents,

IIA is true because of  $1 + 2 + 3$  under it, 1 plus 2 plus 3 equals A. The same

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<sup>80</sup> In our discussions Montiel also offered the structure as a mathematical function:

$(x, y) = (x, f(x))$  where  $f(x) = y$ .

$(x, y, z) = (x, y, g(x, y)) = (x, f(x), g(x, f(x)))$  where  $f(x) = y$  and

$z = g(x, y) = g(x, f(x))$



addition applies in each paragraph of the body. Taken together the sub-points prove, illustrate, explain, describe, or define – as the case may be – the topic idea of the paragraph. Sometimes this algebraic Mickey Mouse works as an explanation of a paragraph when all else has failed. (907).

In other words, the major claim is true because its sub-points reinforce its likelihood. My model uses some of these components – a thesis formula with writing stems and math principles. Yet, it updates them to acknowledge the limitations that Nichols acknowledged:

Also subject to expansion is the five-paragraph outline. The length of the body is directly proportionate to the limitation of the topic.

Such a formula has drawbacks as a teaching device. The young and not overtly alert writer may try to cram any topic from any form of discourse into this frame. [...]

The better writers readily can improvise upon this theme and should. For them the device has value mainly as a point of departure (908).

To respond to Nichols, I want to create another “point of departure,” “[a]nother means of articulation but not, of course, the only one” (908). The  $x, y$  thesis model encourages students to acknowledge “some kind of order of importance” (907) and to reflect upon their overall effectiveness of argument as something that exceeds “order.”

Some writers since Nichols have also made some attempts to use algebraic symbols to teach essay writing. Three efforts in particular, offered by John D. Ramage and John C. Bean, Richard Fulkerson, and Gyula Tankó and Gergely J. Tamási, stand out. What these writings help establish is a shared belief in creating a contact zone where algebraic equations may help teach thesis writing. For example, when Ramage and Bean attempted to explain their thesis with

“tensions,” they briefly dipped into algebra to create variables in both their introductory subordinate clause, and their ensuing clause: “Whereas most people believe X, this essay asserts Y” (44). Another notable effort comes from Richard Fulkerson’s spin on Fahnestock and Secor’s modal taxonomies. As he summarizes their claims, he creates parenthetical algebraic equations that do not appear in their own work; he writes these patterns in his extension:

For them the types of thesis claims are

1. Categorical propositions (“X is Y”)
2. Casual propositions (“X causes or results from Y”)
3. Evaluative propositions (“X is Y” where Y is an evaluative category)
4. Proposals (which answer: What should we do about X?) (Fulkerson 39).

These parenthetical summations, especially the second causal proposition, relate closely to the dependent model that Ramage and Bean discuss. However, this mathematical language falls flat onto the page without the visual framework of the  $x$ ,  $y$  thesis model to show students how these variables create an argument when their position and direction work together to achieve one unified relationship. Moreover, Fulkerson does not continue to use math to explain what he feels are the “three categories of thesis statement”: “Substantiation,” “Evaluation,” and “Recommendation” (256); his definitions of these divides help some, but they do not offer a continuation of these algebraic frameworks from which students build their own thesis statements (and eventually complete essays that test these theses).

If Fulkerson errs on the side of oversimplification, Hungarian researchers Gyula Tankó and Gergely J. Tamási lean towards over-complication. In “A Comprehensive Taxonomy of Argumentative Thesis Statements: A Preliminary Study,” they also use algebra to offer models that identify types of thesis statements. They first divide their taxonomy into “Non-relational

theses” and “Relational theses” (5). They divide the “non-relational thesis statements” into “simple evaluation” (both “positive” and “negative”) and “simple policy” (both “positive” and “negative” and offer respectively “X is [not] Y” and “X should [not] be done (about Y)” (6). They continue to divide the “relational theses” into six subcategories: “Categorical,” “Similarity,” “Complex Evaluation,” “Sign,” “Causal,” and “Complex Policy.” They offer similar algebraic forms to match these relational thesis and their subsets, but with fifteen subsets, even the student who recognizes these models in print will have difficulty knowing when to implement them. The overall instruction is lost without a larger framework that brings these taxonomies together. Another flaw in Tankó and Tamási’s model is that the researchers examining 225 essays ran into trouble classifying theses that “proved to be bifurcated or trifurcated (i.e. there were two or three controlling ideas in the thesis statement)” (11). In other words, these researchers found enough evidence of five-paragraph and four-paragraph themes, to conclude that it would be useful if students “have the opportunity to generate a large number of argumentative theses on the basis of one thematic aspect and then select the one which they can best develop into a convincing argument” (16). Most students will never emerge from their invention processes if they run through the trials and errors of fifteen modes.<sup>81</sup>

The mathematical division of the thesis into two algebraic and multidimensional dependent parts – the position ( $x$ ) and the direction ( $y$ ) – is supported by some definitions of

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<sup>81</sup> See as well Richard H. Haswell’s “The Organization of Impromptu Essays.” Although without the algebra offered by Fulkerson or Tankó and Tamási, he offers another means reduction and classification of essays to confirm what he calls the “*top-level* organization” of writings (403). In this article he aptly distinguishes fourteen sub categories: unchained symmetrical patterns of essays (“Partition” [“collection” and “classification”] and “Seriation” [“degree,” “development,” and “comparison”]); unchained asymmetrical patterns (“Consequence” [“causation” and “process”] and “Argument” [“inference,” “choice,” “solution,” and “dialectic”]); and chained asymmetrical patterns (“Recursion” [“causal chain” and “sorites”] and “Sequence” [“sequence”]) (404-6). However helpful these organization patterns might be to know, they do not offer students much more than more another large number of modal subdivisions that become as overwhelming as starting points.

thesis statements offered in various college composition textbooks. Yet, my research found that the terms of these halves vary greatly depending on the source. The  $x, y$  model creates consistent terms for a relational thesis that unites the topic along arguable and dependent lines, but a “two reason” thesis divides two topics in relation to a claim. This two reason thesis that some books discuss is, in essence, a five-paragraph theme whittled down to four paragraphs. Consider the following explanation offered in the Classical Argument sub-section from *Arguing in Communities: Reading and Writing Arguments in Context*, from 2003: “This sample thesis consists of one claim (introducing a flat rate tax is a good idea) and two reasons (such a tax would make the government more efficient and would have long-term benefits for the economy)” (Hatch 228). In this four-paragraph theme, the reasons mirror a two-prong rather than a three-prong divide. Yet what I do like here, and why I begin with this example indicative of the FPT, is the divide that Gary Hatch uses to discuss the thesis: “claim” and “reason(s).” Hatch and others who have taught variations of the FPT assert that every thesis should have something at stake (a “claim”) and something to say about this claim in its defense (“reasons”). This expected bifurcation, which students will understand well due to their experiences with the FPT, offers a solid springboard to examine other explanations that advance better efforts to define a relationship-based thesis and to move writers away from FPT preview theses that tend to separate rather than to unify parts.

With its simple heuristics and its inherent flexibility, the  $x, y$  thesis model does not only address a logical-mathematical subgroup, but it also expands to influence English-minded thinkers for whom writing courses are most often designed. These verbal-linguistic students are sometimes resistant to math or are reluctant to use visual or spatial learning methods, such as graphic organizers. They consequently may have some reservations when their English teacher

draws  $x$  and  $y$  axes on the board and labels them as such. I argue, however, that today's students, have always lived with the fragmentation of their electronic world, specifically through hypertext discourse and text messages, and they have always functioned by consistently putting disjointed or disconnected parts back together to create a whole. Many of these students will dismiss the math, but the prolonged tendencies to oversimplify writing instruction and writing products establishes a pressing need for instructors to expose students to more writing models (and some of these will appeal more to some students than others). These invention models specifically encourage discussions about language and rhetoric, about how language functions in relation to not only parts and wholes but also wholes and parts. With an understanding of tensions and relations that help show engaged thinking, what the  $x, y$  model offers is a place other than free writing or clustering where an often frustrated group of students learns to maximize the writing process. Conceivably, it also helps students recognize the limitations of their prior FPT methods.

Without using math overtly, some writers of other textbooks – with their discussions of thesis statements – also feel that such guiding argumentative statements can be encouraged along these lines of relationships. For example, in *The Engaging Reader*, from 1996, Anne Mills King discusses in the glossary of her third edition that a thesis consists of a “subject” and an “attitude” (396). Similarly, in the glossary of *Literature for Composition: Essays, Fiction, Poetry, and Drama*, from 1996, the definition of a thesis discusses the “argument and perhaps purpose” (1336).<sup>82</sup> In Bruce Ballenger's 2001 *The Curious Researcher: A Guide to Writing Research Papers*, he offers students the advice, “Purpose (and its sister *focus*) is a statement of intention”

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<sup>82</sup> See *Literature for Composition: Essays, Fiction, Poetry, and Drama*. 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. Ed. Sylvan Barnet, et. al. New York: HarperCollins, 1996. Note that the “Compact Edition” of this same textbook, published in 2003 by Longman, moves away from this language in their Summarizing section to state that a thesis “sets forth the writer's central point” and “states the *point* of the work” to become “a very brief summary of the argument (not of the narrative) of the work” (177, italics Barnet's).

(208).

Similarly, in the 2000 textbook *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Writing*, John D. Ramage and John C. Bean discuss a “thesis with tension” (44). Here they integrate math and language much like my model does to encourage relationships between parts:

One of the best ways to create tension is to begin the statement with an *although* or *whereas* clause: “Whereas most people believe X, this essay asserts Y.” The *whereas* or *although* clause summarizes the reader’s “before” view of your topic or the counterclaim that your essay opposes; the main clause states the surprising view or position that your essay will support. (44, italics theirs)

In other words, they favor this notion that tension involves “risk” to help students create thesis statements that will “surprise” the reader (45). These terms, including Ramage and Beans’s “thesis” and “tension” are all two-fold; they create two separate but dependent parts that work together rather than work separately, as the FPT usually treats its parts.

Since I first constructed the  $x, y$  model, my research about thesis writing and trends towards oversimplification has showed me quite clearly that other compositionists have tried in similar ways to remedy formulaic writing with some comparable algebraic explanations as I offer with the  $x, y$  thesis model. While I am glad to see that others have had similar ideas, nowhere have I found an expanded list of sentence stems like I offer. These relational stems push firmly against coordinative constructions that tend to fragment discourse. Nor have I found an effort to tie together such practical heuristics with such a corresponding visual model – in my model, the Cartesian Coordinate System. The combination of these two ideas—the flexibility of the invention strategies and the ways in which the model promotes engaged thought—make me hopeful that my model will have more impact than these other blips on the radar. Most

importantly, although the heuristic focuses on a thesis statement, the *x, y* model engages the student in the entire rhetoric.

In other words, the *x, y* model does not propose a two-*part* thesis, but challenges students to think about ways to make those parts *relational* to one another. Much of the potential successes of the *x, y* thesis model hinge on classroom discourse that expands what students already think theses do. A wide range of students will benefit from such instruction. I, for example, have found that many students want to argue solely claims of fact. That something *is*, however, does not always make for an argument. With the *x, y* model these students begin to witness how their position and direction work together because their thesis exposes the connectivity of its parts. Many students understand that a thesis helps to *define* the main idea of the essay. However, it does not have to *shape* it. Many, of course, also think the writer must argue three reasons to prove that main idea. What the conversation usually spins towards first is this discussion of the FPT, then, second, what a divergent discussion of theme in which students must learn to think about their writing in terms of purpose, and, third, a series of complaints about what they feel is the difficulty of writing a good thesis.

I have had heard many students, who I have taught at both the high school and college levels, explain that their writing block originates in the invention of their theses. For such students, their invention strategies falter, even though today's college composition textbooks and the writing program philosophies of major universities consistently maintain process writing theories that encourage free writing or other means of explorative writing. Yet, such good advice that encourages the reader to write first and revise later does not help the students persevere to overcome what they perceive as a two gross paradoxes: one that asks them to wander in a rigid system and another that asks them to move directly in an undefined nebula.

Many of these students do have an idea about what they would like to say and maybe even how they want to argue. In defiance of some process theories, many students want to begin with the introduction, especially for the timed writing that they face in stressful test-taking situations. These students, many of whom are more methodic due to their time-management skills or their logical-mathematical intelligences, want to take a step-by-step approach to the composition process. They feel that once they have created a thesis, the essay almost writes itself, first directly (linearly) and then more recursively (non-linearly).<sup>83</sup>

As a component of the writing process, the  $x, y$  model becomes something students consider during and after their explorations of their topics. Once they have thought more about their ideas and have drafted their paragraphs, these heuristics offer a means to unify the directions in which their responses have headed. Rather than create an organizational statement that will foreground where the essay has spread itself, the  $x, y$  model helps students examine why readers should invest themselves in the arguments presented.

The patterns encouraged in this model are not foolproof if students do not place them into a nonlinear process that reanalyzes their effectiveness to convey their purpose. Using sentence openers as this part of the  $x, y$  thesis model has its own potential pitfalls as formulaic writing, especially if used merely as a prescription for struggling students. If the entire model is explained and implemented, students will understand the content that drives the discourse itself. The model encourages dependent connections between their ideas and promotes nonlinear revisions to the essays *and* to the thesis throughout the writing process.

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<sup>83</sup> See Sondra Perl's "The Composing Processes of Unskilled College Writers" *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory: A Reader*; here she discusses that students went through a "'back and forth' movement [that] appeared to be a recursive feature: at one moment students were writing, moving their ideas and their discourse forward; at the next they were backtracking, rereading, and digesting what had been written" (34).



For some students none of these patterns will fit their intents, but for many students the very fact that they are considering something other than the FPT is substantial headway. In contrast to the FPT, the patterns challenge students to examine the scope of their assignment more closely. They also showcase how stronger argumentative theses help generate arguments and how stronger arguments create such theses.

I also concede that students and teachers who are going to experiment with these patterns must be willing to set aside, at least temporarily, any prejudice against mathematics or linguistics. Some academic linguists and self-proclaimed grammarians will argue that their fields are most mathematical. In particular, the correspondence of language and symbols comes from a long line of linguistic theories, most notably from the semiotics models of Umberto Eco, Ferdinand de Saussure, and Frederick Nietzsche.<sup>84</sup> Linguistic theories from such intellectual heavyweights convincingly assert that students are already predisposed to think of language symbolically, although many of them are not conscious of these abilities.<sup>85</sup> By looking more closely at how the thesis functions through an algebraically familiar and syntactically representational lens, the  $x, y$  thesis model helps students consider possibilities rather than limitations. It extends the ways in which students examine the rhetorical options present in their academic essays, compositions written in and out of English classrooms.

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<sup>84</sup> For example, Eco's *A Theory of Semiotics* (1976), stresses that communication occurs when a shared understanding of the "expression" (the sign) and the "content" (the meaning) exist in the same codependent manner – mathematically as domains and codomains – as the  $x, y$  model – in my terms as position and direction. Likewise, de Saussure asserts that language is a system of signs and signifiers. In his seminal *Course in General Linguistics* (1916), he creates his "dyadic" and symbolic relation between the "signifier" and the "signified" in a manner that becomes an "articulus," a unit in which the signified depends on the acceptance of the signifier to convey a relationship. Frederick Nietzsche also wrote in *On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense* (1873) that all language is metaphoric for something that it is not.

<sup>85</sup> See James Moffett's *Teaching the Universe of Discourse* for a discussion of language as naturally learned symbol system. For an argument against this theory see Anne Berthoff's *The Making of Meaning: Metaphors, Models, and Maxims for Writing Teachers* and "Is Teaching Still Possible? Writing, Meaning, and Higher Order Reasoning" for discussions about the dangers of looking at language as a code, something potentially divorced from meaning and interpretation.

With such examinations, the  $x, y (z)$  model helps students learn how to *see* and to *approach* not only thesis writing but also rhetorical writing (i.e. invention, drafting, and revision) in a recursive manner that challenges formulaic patterns. In particular, the  $x, y$  thesis method offers an alternative to fragmented FPT formulaic writing by returning discussions to the thesis, the core of the argument itself. This model also offers an entry point into higher order analytical or evaluative arguments by encouraging students to show relationships rather than point to facts. Students need to learn how to make their own arguments, and they need to understand methodologies from which they make their arguments matter. Using the  $x, y$  model or even the language that it encourages, such as position and direction, has proven most effective for many of my students at all stages of their writing to improve the overall nature of their arguments.

In summary, the  $x, y$  thesis model helps students learn how to avoid two major composition pitfalls: the fragmentation common to FPT-based structures and the movement towards summary rather than analysis. If this model achieves change even at these two levels, then it will make some significant progress to re-complicate student composition in a manageable way. At the very least, it helps students find relationships in their ideas and encourages them to develop arguments around these relationships. For such students, the  $x, y$  modeled thesis is an understandable instructional model that helps them write more effective self-generated argumentative discourse. What English teacher would not be excited about their students shedding the constraints of formulaic writing to seek such improvements in invention strategies or in overall academic thought-processes?

## CHAPTER 4.

### THE ARGUMENT GUIDE EXPLAINED AND DEFENDED

#### Introduction

The Argument Guide presented in this chapter gives students another model of invention to help them move past the confines of oversimplified formulaic essays by understanding the rhetoric that shapes academic writing more completely.<sup>86</sup> This model extends the nonlinear thinking that occurs with the *x, y* model. Moreover, because it draws key distinctions between organization and order, the argument guide model helps students learn how to invent and to embrace options that consider the relations between content and form indicative of good compositions.

The *x, y* thesis model helps students move past the five-paragraph theme (FPT)-style thesis, in particular, into a new position on the writing continuum. Rather than accepting an organizational statement or predisposed structure as the best framework for an essay, students can begin to see the differences between organization and order because they are no longer restricted by the sequence they offered in a non-thesis organizational statement. As well, students learn to discern that the thesis may occur anywhere in a well-composed and rhetorically aware composition. These shifts in thought are very important to re-complicate academic writing in a comfortable way, but they still focus mostly on one sentence of many in an entire essay. Therefore, for some students, the compositions that they write, especially if not overtly

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<sup>86</sup> Many of my students prefer this term, Argument Guide, as a term; it reflects the model's purpose better for both reading and writing than maintaining a titular attribution to the source, the Brace Map, especially due to the significant modifications I have made from this origin. I credit the term, in part, to Charles R Twardy. See his essay "Argument Maps Improve Critical Thinking" in *Teaching Philosophy* available at <http://cogprints.org/3008/1/reasonpaper.pdf>.

encouraged to try to break from oversimplified molds, still revert back to the very structured FPT essays from which many began.

The x, y thesis model works rather well to write a stronger argumentative thesis; yet, the lasting impact of the overall instruction works even better when extended with the supporting framework of the Argument Guide. These models combine to help students learn how to forego formulaic theses and corresponding oversimplified structures; they help students let their writing take shape without the restrictions of the FPT (five-paragraph theme), the JSM (Jane Schaffer Method), or restrictively and artificially balanced formal outlines.

As George Hillocks writes, the common problem with models is that “the persistent study of models leads some students to the notion that they must sit down and produce a finished essay without the necessary intervening processes” (229). The Argument Guide helps create a different type of model, an anti-model of sorts that does not oversimplify the process because only the writer’s thoughts can create the form. Therefore, the argument guide helps students focus on these “intervening processes” that help make student discourse – and understanding of others’ discourse – more coherent, unified, progressive, and successful. In this model, students manipulate the visual representation to think about the ways in which parts of a composition – their own, their peers, or published pieces – work together. They discuss how they can analyze these elements at play.<sup>87</sup>

In order to present and to explain the Argument Guide, this chapter will look similar in sequence to the last one. It first examines the origins of the model, including the selection of the

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<sup>87</sup> See Kenneth Pike who discusses language and thought in his writings about tagmemics; specifically, in “A Linguistic Contribution to Composition: A Hypothesis,” he avows, “If one assumes that thought itself is not fully structured until it is articulated through language – a view which I personally hold – then an analysis of language forms would feed back on an analysis of thought structure” (83). Metaphorically, the skeletal, muscular, and vascular systems are exposed in a similar manner as an anatomy book with overlaying transparencies.

four terms that make out the overlapping portions of the Argument Guide; the next section of this chapter provides potential examples from both literature and composition courses as sources for discussion, in this case using two of the  $x$ ,  $y$  thesis models proposed in the last chapter as the source for these extensions. The latter part of this chapter examines how viewing writing through these layers has organizational advantages that mirror developed compositions. These discussions explore how the argument guide model helps students learn that effective writing is created linearly, recursively, and asymmetrically.

### **An Opening Example of the Argument Guide Invention Model and Explanation**

The Argument Guide originated in a classroom, much like the  $x$ ,  $y$  thesis model did. Four years ago I taught in a Georgia high school on the No Child Left Behind's Annual Yearly Progress List of schools. With subgroups who needed to improve their standardized test scores (i.e. AYP), the district looked for ways to improve student performance. In-service hours included how to implement David Hyerle's 1988 Thinking Maps®. As part of the adoption of Thinking Maps®, all teachers were required to submit evidence of their use in the classroom. I was definitely reluctant after the last wave of research that promoted graphic organizers waned, but I found a use for the Brace Map® as a way to enhance my writing assignments. One of their eight designs highlights, in their terms, "thought processes" in a way that shows "whole-part relationships" (and, when read recursively, part-to-whole relationships) with the most complete ideas of a structure on the left and its components and subcomponents moving to the right in more specified sub-sections. The current sample image of a Brace Map on the Thinking Maps website, for instance, shows an example of this whole-to-part relation via a asymmetrical "What are the parts of a butterfly" diagram: the image of a butterfly is on the left; the next sub-section

separates the head, thorax, and abdomen; the third layer identifies four characteristics about the head, two about the thorax, and none about the abdomen; as well, there is a fourth layer – extensions of the butterfly > “thorax” > “6 legs” line – that further distinguishes this sub-category with the information that the butterfly has “2 fore legs” and “4 hind legs.”

In an English classroom, which does not usually feature such visual conceptions (especially of established facts like a Science or History lesson might), save a grammar lesson that revived sentence diagramming, this map at first appears tangential to high-level thinking (especially in contrast to reflective knowing). Yet, with the encouragement of one of my colleagues, Dr. Jon Epstein, who first thought to implement the Brace Map as a framework of essay writing outlining, the Brace Map’s intended design disappeared. What emerged was a visual forum from which students could (re)frame, (re)arrange, and (re)examine their essays.

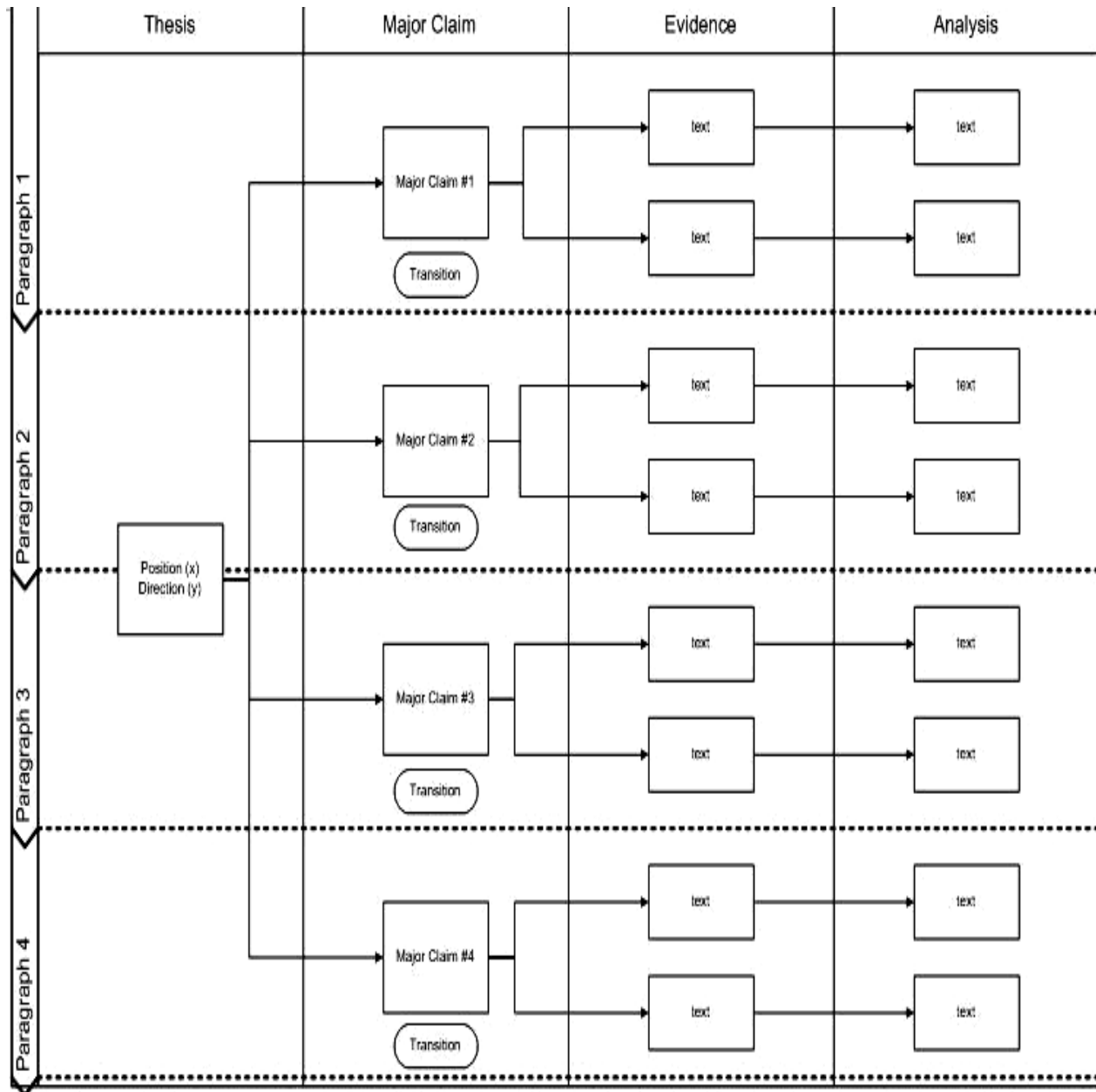
Since these initial efforts, based on feedback I have received in the classroom and in response to the composition research I have conducted, I have modified the Brace Map from a diagramming tool into its present structure, transforming it from one focused on product (i.e. established fact) into the current Argument Guide focused on process (i.e. writing with a purpose). Because of its design, the Argument Guide encourages students to connect the thesis – to extend the relationship they wish to prove – throughout the entire composition (see Diagrams 1A and 1B on the next pages). The Argument Guide also helps students learn how to invent and continually revise all of the major components – the thesis and claims and evidence and analysis – that drive a unified academic argument of any length and of any order. In order to show this model more clearly, I will use the extended Regents’ sample essay from last chapter as the content for a sample Argument Guide. In Diagram 2, I have inserted the major components of

the essay into a flexible Word template.<sup>88</sup> Looking at the sample essay in this way highlights the flexibility of the model that encourages a reshaping of the essay itself.

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<sup>88</sup> Diagram 2 shows how the Argument Guide shapes itself around the writer's thoughts, and how the product and process derive from Diagram 1B.

Diagram 1A

**Argument Guide for X, Y Thesis Model [Microsoft Visio Version]**

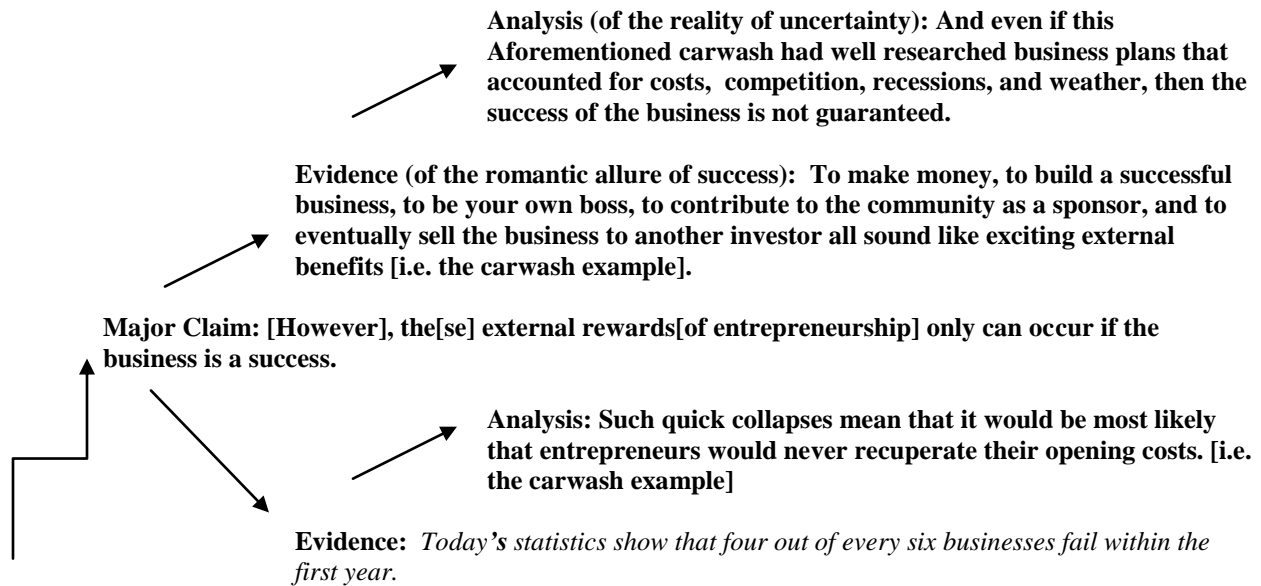


*Diagram 1B***Argument Guide for X, Y Thesis Model [Microsoft Word Version]**

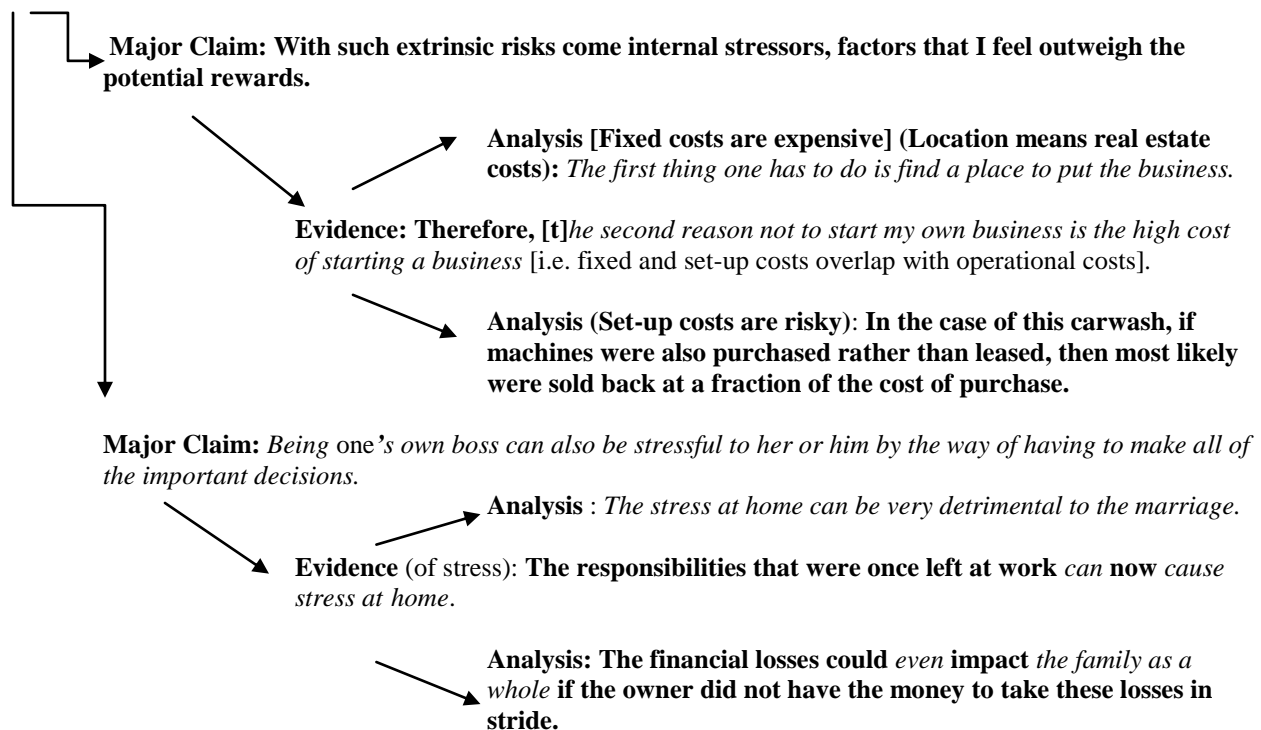
	→	<b>Major Claims</b>	→	<b>Evidence</b>	→	<b>Analysis</b>
		_____		_____		_____
		_____				
		Driving Question ¶1		_____		_____
		(transition)				
		_____		_____		_____
		_____				
		Driving Question ¶2		_____		_____
Position (x):		(transition)				
_____						
<b>Thesis</b>						
Direction (y):						
_____				_____		_____
		_____				
		Driving Question ¶3		_____		_____
		(transition)				
		_____		_____		_____
		_____				
		Driving Question ¶4		_____		_____
		(transition)				

Diagram 2

### Argument Guide for X, Y Thesis Model [Microsoft Word Version]



Although opening a business, like this carwash, does offer some potential external rewards [x],  
the internal stresses associated with managing such a business make this business venture too frightening [y].



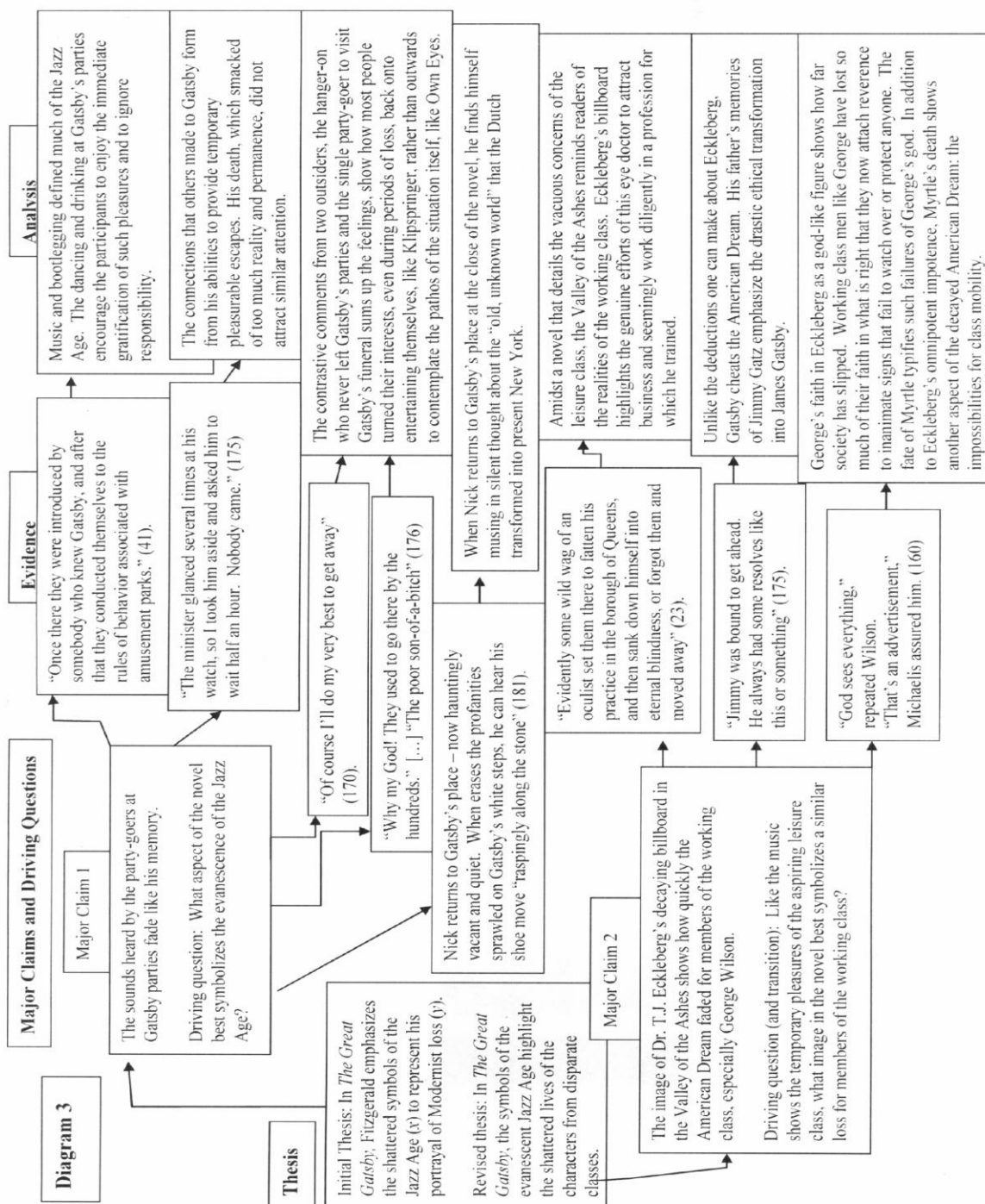
Using the Argument Guide as I have done here in Diagram 2, at a mid-point in the composition process, identifies what the writer (in this case the initial student and me together) has said clearly and what they could clarify better. As the parenthetical notes and bracketed notes identify in the Argument Guide, my earlier writing could use some refinement, some revision. For example, the parenthetical notes indicate that I could clarify better and juxtapose the romantic allure of success and the reality of economic uncertainty; as well, I could draw more attention to the negative impacts of the stresses in the final paragraph in order to transition clearly to this third body paragraph. The bracketed notes show, for example, how I am tying in the opening example about the carwash into the entire discourse, and they show how I could have done a better job showing my understandings between set-up, fixed, and operational costs. Thus, the visual interactions with the Argument Guide help encourage further thought about this subject because they highlight the rhetorical decisions I made to create paragraphs and to extend the discussions in ways that were much different from the initial writer's. When he or she used an organizational statement posing as a thesis, his or her essay became more restricted and less developed. My additions work better because they create a logical sequence that engages with the topic more specifically and more analytically; however, the argument guide helps show me how to make this essay more complete and convincing than my initial efforts.

### **Argument Guide Model Responses to Literature and Composition Assignments**

Some examples from American Literature courses and composition courses will help explain further how the  $x$ ,  $y$  thesis model extends into the Argument Guide.

To begin with the literature examples, in the last chapter, I offered a thesis that read, "In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald emphasizes the shattered symbols of the Jazz Age ( $x$ ) to represent

his portrayal of Modernist loss (y).” I took this thesis as a starting point and shaped an Argument Guide around it (see Diagram 3): what follows the diagram is a sort of “think-aloud” about my composition processes – my extended invention processes – that attempt to extend this thesis.



I thought first of Dr. T. J. Eckleberg when I reread the initial thesis's focus on shattered symbols: "In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald emphasizes the shattered symbols of the Jazz Age (x) to represent his portrayal of Modernist loss (y). To test this thesis, I created Major Claim 2 first: "The image of Dr. T.J. Eckleberg's decaying billboard in the Valley of the Ashes shows how quickly the American Dream faded for members of the working class, especially George Wilson." This sentence helps focus the discussion on the ways in which this billboard's decay is analogous to the decay of Wilson's American Dream.

Much of this paragraph could focus on the ways in which the American Dream slipped away from the characters who worked hard for their successes. Such discussions would also allow me to show that Gatsby may have failed because he attempted to shortcut this dream. Part of this discourse could also explore how everyone retreats, how everyone fails, how the novel slips into a theme of nothingness reminiscent of the Valley of the Ashes. In other words, once I had thought about this Major Claim, my ideas started to spread, but I did not want to move too much further without another Major Claim to contrast this one.

Once I had created this major claim and had thought about some of the potential ways to extend it, I needed to test this thread in the overall argumentative context. I decided to attempt to make transitions from Eckleberg to the American Dream to the collapse of this dream among the working class like Wilson. I liked the direction that such a discussion could head, in particular its focus on the working class ideology in peril. Still thinking in broader terms, I tried to find another thread to let me to explore, in contrast to this working class argument, the attitudes of the leisure class in the novel. I concluded that really the entire novel slips into this peril of nothingness. Therefore, if I was going to focus on the image of Eckleberg in the Valley of the Ashes as means to discuss the ways in which the working class was collapsing, I thought that the

sounds of the music at Gatsby's house could similarly highlight the ways in which the leisure class was also subject to decay. In response to these thoughts, I wrote Major Claim 1 to tie together the ways in which Fitzgerald describes attitudes towards the music and towards Gatsby's life; I wrote, "The sounds heard by the party-goers at Gatsby parties fade like his memory." I planned to revise this claim more to highlight my discussion of the leisure class better, but I also liked how this major claim clearly extends the thesis's concerns about the "Jazz Age" without overtly outlining my plan to contrast the two classes.

Like I did with the other section focused on Major Claim 2, I worked through my analyses for Major Claim 1. Here I attempted to unite my discussions of ways in which people looked for entertainment from both the music and from Gatsby. At this point, I reshaped the thesis to reflect the shifts that the major claims made towards evanescence rather than the opening position concerning "shattered symbols." Here are these changes:

1. Initial thesis: In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald emphasizes the shattered symbols of the Jazz Age (x) to represent his portrayal of Modernist loss (y).
2. Revised thesis: In *The Great Gatsby*, the symbols of the evanescent Jazz Age highlight the shattered lives of the characters.

With these changes in place, I thought about a way to discuss in my introduction that when Nick reflects upon his first party of Gatsby's he asserts that the times were full of "easy money" (42). The novel indicates that nothing was actually "easy."

Once I revised the thesis, I created the driving questions as an overlapping means to check the order and focus of these two body paragraphs. In order, they read (with the transition in the second driving question marked in parentheses):

1. Driving Question 1: What aspect of the novel best symbolizes the evanescence of the Jazz Age?
2. Driving Question 2: (Like the music shows the temporary pleasures of the aspiring leisure class), what image in the novel best symbolizes a similar loss for members of the working class?

I have found that creating such driving questions helps me focus the purpose of my paragraphs.

As well, it helps me see if the paragraphs indeed offer means to extend my overall thesis.

With a stronger thesis, driving questions, and a hypothetical transition, now I needed to make certain that analyses of the text could support this growing argument. This developing framework came together more tightly as I found evidence from the sections of the text that I thought would prove useful. The rest of my ideas for the paragraph about Major Claim 2 came together much like I planned. I readily found evidence that discussed Eckleberg's advertisement: "Evidently some wild wag of an oculist set them there to fatten his practice in the borough of Queens, and then sank down himself into eternal blindness, or forgot them and moved away" (23). I also located evidence that showed Gatsby's initial adherence to the American Dream: "Jimmy was bound to get ahead. He always had some resolves like this or something" (175), and read through the section of the novel that showed George lost his hope in the American Dream so completely that he turned to the image of Eckleberg as a surrogate god: "'God sees everything,' repeated Wilson. 'That's an advertisement,' Michaelis assured him." (160).

Satisfied that such evidence could prompt effective analysis, I turned my attention to the first major claim and driving question. The evidence for this first major claim took some prolonged thought. I decided that inserting evidence for the music at the parties was not necessary. Instead, I looked for passages about guest's behaviors, although I had not recalled



“amusement park” behavior that Nick explained about Gatsby’s guests (41); in full, this section of the novel reads, “Once there they were introduced by somebody who knew Gatsby, and after that they conducted themselves to the rules of behavior associated with amusement parks” (41).

In this section of the Argument Guide as well, I had to scour for evidence that extended my focus on sound at the end of the novel; I was looking in particular for something when Nick returned to Gatsby’s house after the funeral. I found a quote about the sounds of his shoe when Nick returns to Gatsby’s place – now hauntingly vacant and quiet; Nick erases the profanities sprawled on Gatsby’s white steps, and he can hear his shoe move “raspingly along the stone” (181).

However, I no longer liked its placement in relation to the argument that was now developing. I moved the evidence and its corresponding analysis that I had intended to follow the party scene to the close of this section. With Nick’s reflections now at the end, it made sense to move from the life of the parties to Gatsby’s death. I chose as well to move from the discussion that “Nobody came” (175) to close the paragraph and to emphasize two characters’ behaviors in particular that I felt were outsiders to the action; for clarity, the entire quote that I included in the Argument Guide reads, “The minister glanced several times at his watch, so I took him aside and asked him to wait half an hour. Nobody came.” (175). Klipspringer, when asked by Nick if he will attend Gatsby’s funeral, offers the following lip service, “Of course I’ll do my very best to get away” (170). In contrast, Owl Eyes, who seems like a more minor character thus far in contrast to Klipspringer, comes to the funeral to state, “Why my God! They used to go there by the hundreds.” [...] “The poor son-of-a-bitch” (176). Rather than spend time with particular characters who had more attachments to Gatsby like Wolfsheim, Daisy, Tom, and Jordan, I thought that the focus on these party-goers would help define the selfishness and the ephemerality of the era best.

I wanted to detail this invention process – this thinking process – in order to highlight how the flexibility of the Argument Guide comes from nonlinear process writing because there the model asks for continued thought, continued analysis, and, therefore, continued revision. The model re-complicates the writing process to push against oversimplification, but it does so in a rather simple way because of its flexibility.

Such flexibility is evident in the product, the diagram, itself. For example, the quotes by both Klipspringer's and Owl Eyes are discussed in the same box of analysis. Here, I thought that I would need to discuss the following: "The contrastive comments from two outsiders, the hanger-on who never left Gatsby's parties and the single party-goer to visit Gatsby's funeral sums up the feelings, show how most people turned their interests back onto entertaining themselves, like Klipspringer, rather than outwards to contemplate the pathos of the situation itself, like Owl Eyes." Such imbalance, which comes from the analytical relationships at play in the argument, highlights the potential for the Argument Guide to encourage responsive writing rather than formulaic writing. For example, a closer look at this entire Argument Guide (see Diagram 4) Major Claim 1 has five examples of evidence and four threads of analysis, and Major Claim 2 has only three examples of evidence and three threads of analysis. In other words, the outline responds to the ideas about the text and the evidence within it. Showing such a model to students does work particularly well. It helps to show them how real writing usually looks – imbalanced but cohesive and progressive.

Because some students have a hard time recognizing the asymmetry that the Argument Guide encourages, I will typically use the following version of the argument guide as a topic of discussion once they have had some exposure to the model (see Diagram 4). Using this diagram, I discuss how the initial model (Diagram 1B) has symbolically taken shape to reflect the

evidence and analysis that the writer needs. Looking at this model students see how the first major claim (and corresponding paragraph) has only one level of evidence, yet that evidence is symbolically discussed in two alternative or connecting ways with two layers of analysis. In contrast to such development, the next paragraph models a paragraph in which the two examples share a single thread of analysis. To further emphasize the asymmetry the third major claim in this diagram spreads itself much further with three layers of evidence and three corresponding layers of analysis; the final paragraph in the diagram takes shape in contrast to this longer third paragraph with only one layer of evidence and one layer of analysis. Once students attempt the argument guide on their own, this variation of the initial model helps them understand more how the content impacts the form; it helps them see that that rhetorical writing responds to the needs of both the writer and the reader because it balances content and form.

Diagram 4

### Argument Guide for X, Y Thesis Model [Microsoft Word Version]

	→ Major Claims	→ Evidence	→ Analysis
			____1____
	_____ Driving Question ¶1 (transition)	____1____	____2____
	_____ Driving Question ¶2 (transition)	____1____  ____2____	____1____
Position (x): _____ <b>Thesis</b> Direction (y): _____		____1____	____1____
	_____ Driving Question ¶3 (transition)	____2____	____2____
	_____ Driving Question ¶4 (transition)	____3____  ____1____	____3____  ____1____

In order to further highlight the potential flexibility of the Argument Guide, I will present another sample, this time in response to the 2004 AP Language (Form B) strategies prompt. Here I will also follow a similar strategy to help my readers further understand how a student could use the Argument Guide to shape alternative responses to the FPT, especially in a timed testing situation like this one (see Diagram 5).<sup>89</sup>

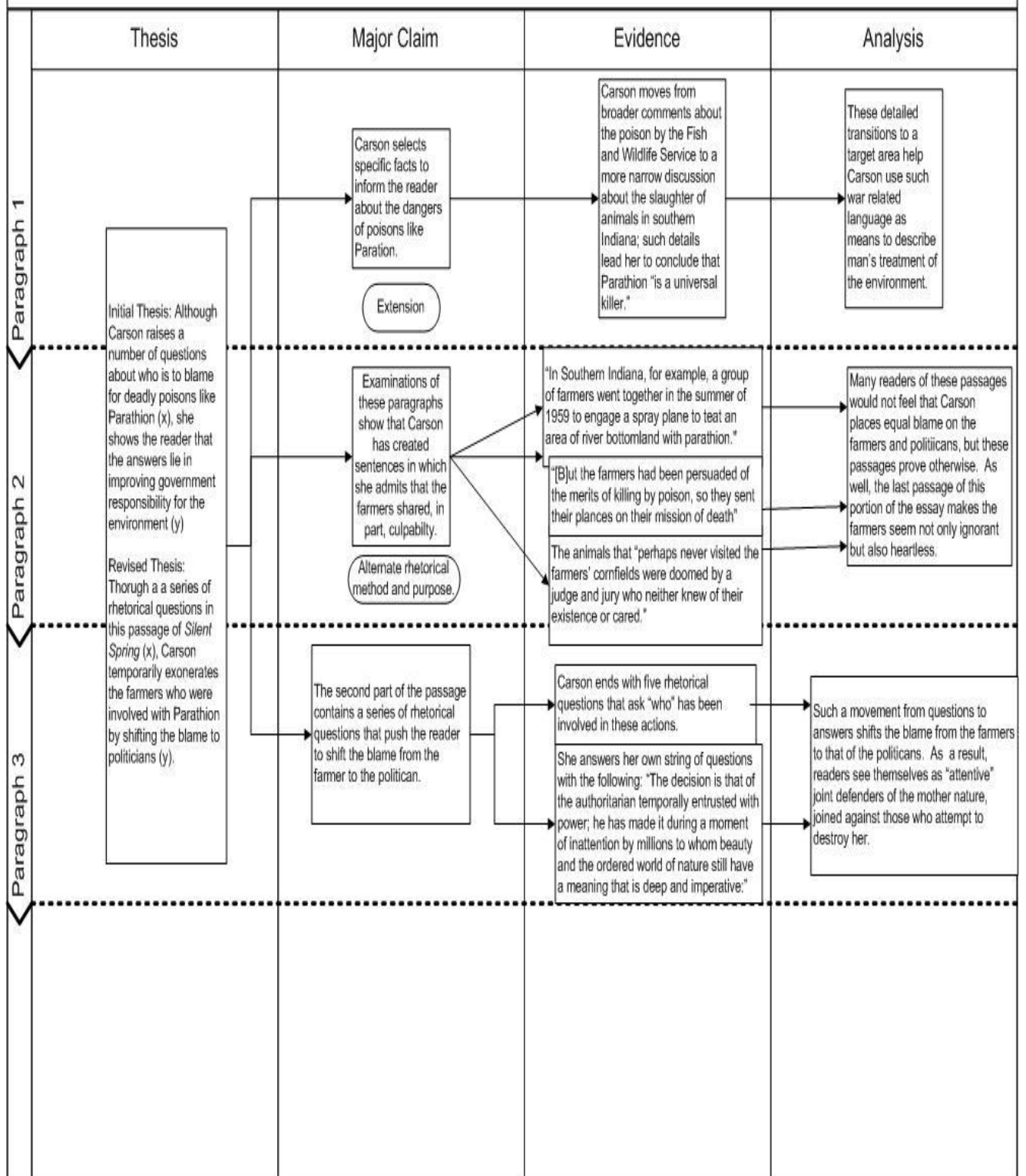
After reading the 2004 Form B passage, I began with the following thesis: “Although Carson raises a number of questions about who is blame for deadly poisons like Parathion (*x*), she shows the reader that the answers lie in improving government responsibility for the environment (*y*). Like an AP Language student would, I reread and annotated the passage to see if this thesis would hold. What I found was that I recursively altered not only my thesis but also the focus of my discussions as I explored the chunks of the passage more closely. The Argument Guide encourages such process writing and rhetorical decisions.

The reason for my revisions came from some nuances I found in the text that I had not noticed during the first reading. In particular, there is a firmer divide in the piece between the second and third paragraphs than I initially noticed. Because I was able to see how my ideas were separating in the argument guide, I recognized that I needed to focus on a relationship between these parts; therefore, I transformed my sample response to react to this aspect of the text. I spent some time unpacking what I thought was Carson’s sharing of facts about the evils of aerial pesticides. What became more tangible during this re-reading was the amount of blame that she placed on the farmers involved in the 1959 event.

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<sup>89</sup> Note here that I created this model, Diagram 5, when I was still using the term “Brace Map Outline” rather than “Argument Guide.”

## Brace Map Outline for X,Y Thesis Model



To expose this divide further in my Argument Guide, I created two major claims focused on the first half of the excerpt: “Carson selects specific facts to inform the reader about the dangers of poisons like Parathion” and “Examinations of these paragraphs show that Carson has created sentences in which she admits the farmers shared, in part, culpability.” The first paragraph contained much data; the evidence to support my first major claim was quite lengthy so in this section I chose to paraphrase her data. In her language, when she calls for example the poison ““a universal killer,”” I recognized a climax in language that built more towards “war related language,” as indicated in my analysis.

I created the next paragraph from the second major claim to highlight how Carson includes the farmers as agents in this destruction in order to extend this first paragraph. Here I found three key passages that place the blame on the farmers themselves, and not the government as my initial reading led me to believe. In practice, this evidence would accumulate in a rather long paragraph with interspersed discussion to conclude with the analysis for this section was able to group this evidence together to discuss. In the Argument Guide, I indicated these relationships in the following manner, “Many readers of these passages would not feel that Carson places equal blame on the farmers and politicians, but these passages prove otherwise. As well, the last passage of this portion of the essay makes the farmers seem not only ignorant but also heartless.”

In the next portion of the Argument Guide, I discuss how Carson’s series of rhetorical questions build in a similar manner but identify a different climax. The major claim for this portion states this shift directly, “The second part of the passage contains a series of rhetorical questions that push the reader to shift the blame from the farmer to the politician. Here as the evidence in the Argument Guide indicates, this call(s) and response arrangement answers the

questions about “who” is to blame: “the authoritarian temporarily entrusted with power.” What I planned in the remaining portions of this paragraph would be a detailed analysis of this shift in blame from the farmers to the politicians. In particular, Carson separates her readers from both groups; as I wrote in the analysis portion of the Argument Guide in connection to this section, “As a result the readers see themselves as ‘attentive’ joint defenders of mother nature, united against those who attempt to destroy her.”

As I did with the prior literary example, I continuously revisited the thesis to pull these portions together better. Here I revised the thesis to read: “Through a climatic series of rhetorical questions in this passage of *Silent Spring* (x), Carson temporarily exonerates the farmers involved with Parathion by shifting the bulk of the blame to politicians (y). I feel that this thesis not only discusses the content of the excerpt better, but it also anticipates a discussion of her form better. In effect, I subordinated the initial discussions of her strategies like rhetorical questions in the first thesis to the form and to the purpose. Such a move allows for discussions of the strategies, but rather than merely pointing to them I have some impacts – form and purpose – to which I tie these discussions.

I wanted to create this example in this manner as well because I wanted to show that although this Argument Guide outlines a five-paragraph response, it does not follow a five-paragraph theme. Instead, it highlights the flexibility and asymmetry for the Argument Guide. The first paragraph hinges on paraphrase, the second on three chunks of evidence that share the same analysis, and the third on two related sections, which like paragraph two, share a common analysis.

Looking at this Argument Guide alongside the one I wrote for *The Great Gatsby*, it should become clearer how these new models are used in different ways and at different layers of



specification: the Argument Guide offers a new and flexible heuristic that shows students how to create and how to examine their writing nonlinearly. In addition, the model helps students examine part-to-whole and whole-to-part relationships and transitions, and it helps students break free from oversimplified formulaic structures that impede the composition of rhetorically aware arguments. The two Argument Guides show how the amount of evidence and responses to this evidence in the analysis will differ. And I hope that my think aloud responses help show how the model leads the reader recursively through the composition outlining and show how the two models work together to encourage a process that is by no means formulaic because it is responsive.

### **An Analysis of the Four Layers of the Argument Guide as Heuristic Tools**

As these examples help show, much of the strength in the Argument Guide pedagogy comes from building a stable and focused lexicon that corresponds with a simple visual framework. Like the discussions from the  $x, y$  thesis model that build from the terms “position” and “direction,” students can carry the Argument Guide model and its terminology with them from classroom to classroom, year to year. This alternative helps their efforts to identify, analyze, and improve aspects of their writing by reducing the numerous synonyms that many composition textbooks loosely use as “Argument Terminology” (Wood 132). In order to simplify and specify the layers of argumentation that work together, I selected the terms “thesis” (rather than claim, proposition, or controlling idea), “major claims” (rather than sub-claims, reasons, main ideas, lines of argument, or support[ing arguments]), and “evidence” (rather than support, reason, data, grounds, or statistics). As well, I prefer the term “analysis,” usually missing from other models, but I like this term to the one I used previously in early drafts of this

model, “connections,” because it connotes higher-order thought beyond making analogies or coordinate additions. For similar reasons that link analysis to critical thinking discourse, I also prefer this term to “interpretation” or “reflection” (DiYanni 5). From my experiences teaching not only high school English, Social Studies, and Reading courses but also college Rhetoric and Composition and Literature courses, I selected these four terms – thesis, major claim, evidence, and analysis – because they emphasize argument. As such, they transfer best across modes, genres, disciplines, and levels of instruction. The creation of this communal and accessible lexicon could be one of the model’s most lasting strengths; the interplay of these distinct but related layers helps the Argument Guide become a heuristic that guides students towards improved analytical thinking that usually supports better writing.

The term major claim indicates a demarcation from other models and discourse focused on topic sentences. Because this term takes into consideration the discussions about what a topic sentence is and how it functions, it is helpful to look at how some compositionists have already begun this discussion. Some studies of topic sentences, like Richard Braddock’s 1974 “The Frequency and Placement of Topic Sentences in Expository Prose,” support a movement away from the topic sentence in both theory and practice; Braddock stresses that “students should not be told that professional writers usually begin their paragraphs with topic sentences” (180).<sup>90</sup> In contrast, Frank D’Angelo in “The Topic Sentence Revisited” feels otherwise; he argues that the topic sentence, using “readability research” as his guide, works well for writers “to organize their ideas” and for readers “to follow the logical development of the writers ideas” (431), especially for beginning students “to divide a text into meaningful units” (438). D’Angelo concludes his

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<sup>90</sup> See D’Angelo’s clear summary of these findings, including those by Braddock, Brooks and Penn Warren, Burke, Christenson, Martin and Ohmann, Rockas, and Rodgers.

defense of the topic sentence with the following: “[I]f the occasion, audience, intention, and kind of discourse warrant it (as, for example, in some kinds of expository writing whose aim is to give clear directions or advice for a general audience), then students might profitably use topic sentences or macropositions or some other form of explicit representation of global structure to organize their writing” (439). Other compositionists agree with D’Angelo to support the existence of or the continued use of the topic sentence. For example, Christensen’s often-referenced “A Generative Rhetoric of the Paragraph” admits that according to his studies “the topic sentence occurs almost invariably at the beginning” (146). Likewise, Connors and Glenn write that for students, the topic sentence has “three characteristics: it isolates and specifies the topic or idea of the entire paragraph; it acts as a general heading for all the other sentences; and it usually incorporates, at least implicitly, a transition from the other paragraph that proceeds it or to the one that follows it” (274).<sup>91</sup> Additionally, Carol Cohan in “Writing Effective Paragraphs” writes, “Defined in manageable terms, the topic sentence is that sentence which implies a *question to be answered by the rest of the paragraph*. To be effective, the topic sentence, a statement of commitment, must elicit this reaction. [...] Each and every sentence of support must directly answer the question implied by the topic sentence” (364, italics hers).<sup>92</sup> I concur with Cohan and feel that students need to learn how paragraphs function individually and collectively. Writing instructors should teach students to understand the expectations for a topic sentence and how to make distinctions, when applicable, between theses, topic sentences, and major claims.

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<sup>91</sup> See Connors and Glenn “Teaching the Sentence and the Paragraph” in *The New St Martin’s Guide to Teaching Writing*. Here they effectively distinguish for students the differences in “unity” as “a semantic concept – the paragraph’s single concept,” “development” as “movement,” “coherence” as “various methods for connecting the sentences of the paragraph,” and “cohesion” as “the whole-essay counterpart of unity” (274).

<sup>92</sup> See “Writing Effective Paragraphs” in *College Composition and Communication*. In the closing she notably concedes, “As the beginner gains experience, he will be able to stray from the confines of this rigid structure because he will have acquired the sense for relevance and development that he lacked earlier” (Cohan 365).

The major claim concept works well for students and teachers who feel that every paragraph needs a traditionally placed topic sentence *and* for those who think that a topic sentence may fall elsewhere or even nowhere in this particular paragraph at this specific point in the essay. This attention to the relationships between the parts of the essay helps students reconsider a sentence as a major claim because they think more about *what* it does in the paragraph than *where* it falls. Rather than restricting style or ignoring the needs of the audience, this shift in thought from a (topic) sentence to a (major) claim helps students to complete the essay rather than to write a sentence that works solely to complete a paragraph within it.<sup>93</sup> James Crosswhite helps clarify the term “claim” more clearly in *The Rhetoric Of Reason: Writing and the Attractions of Argument*; here he writes that in more general terms, “‘Claim’ comes from the Latin *clamare*, which means to call or to cry out. There is something already social about a claim: someone makes a claim about something to *someone*; someone calls out to *someone else*” (Crosswhite 55). Following his ideas, I explain to students that the major claims set up mini-arguments that in most cases could be pulled out – at least the developed paragraphs that they outline – and still understood.

Once instructors explain these distinctions, many of their students will remain overly concerned with the placement of their major claims in their essays. I feel that these anxieties come too soon because the Argument Guide establishes more of a way to visualize the major components of the overall argument than to outline it, but these discussions about placement will

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<sup>93</sup> See Sylvan Barnet, Marcia Stubbs, and Pat Bellanca’s *A Practical Guide to Writing with Readings and Handbook*, from 2000, for the following explanation of how a composition relying on topic sentences implements inductive reasoning (yet without this logical terminology):

When the topic sentence is at the end, the paragraph usually develops from the particular to the general, the topic sentence serving to generalize or summarize the information that precedes it. Such a topic sentence can be especially effective in presenting an argument: the reader hears, considers, and accepts the evidence before the argument is explicitly stated, and if the evidence has been effectively presented the reader willingly accepts the conclusion. (54)

most likely arise. Therefore, I explain that some students' experimentations sometimes include the ideas in their major claim, or revisions to it, as the "clincher" sentence (as the closing or the delayed topic sentence). I also discuss how other students sometimes bury the major claim within the paragraph itself (building to it deductively and from it inductively) and how a few omit the major claim to make it more understood (i.e. omitted in the discourse but identifiable on the argument guide itself). As time progresses, during the internal composition process and through the external feedback that the models encourage, students learn to make choices about the best placement for these major claims in their paragraphs. They also learn to pay attention to the purposeful placement of this paragraph and this claim. Such choices show that students have begun to examine how a paragraph functions on its own and in connection to the overall discourse, in this case the thesis-driven essay in which it is situated.

I concede that despite this instruction, in many cases a student's topic sentence will be their major claim. While it is nice to encourage students to experiment more with their forms, it is not the placement of the major claims, after all, that will determine the overall impact of the composition. Many teachers and instructors, as well, may expect the major claim to come as a topic sentence (and I would hope that their students are made privy to these expectations). For instance, I remind my high school AP and IB students and my college students still facing their standardized writing examinations that their examiners read their papers rather quickly; in these rhetorical situations, I do encourage students to locate their major claims more overtly as either the topic or clincher sentences. Here such placements function as discourse markers to help make the readers' jobs that much easier.

But as an instructional composition term, the term topic sentence becomes too restrictive to placement. This debate is not just an argument of semantics but one of theories that influence

practices. In recognition of Richard Braddock and of process theorists who encourage more flexible forms, using the term major claim, therefore, helps to show the malleable organization of the Argument Guide. What follows the thesis in the full composition should advance the argument: sub-arguments continue to put something at stake that logically correlates to the thesis. Students who learn the details of Argument Guide learn how to make such major claims that have such relationships to the thesis. Therefore, instead of being an argument of semantics, I find that much of the success of the Argument Guide comes from the portion that details the differences between a major claim and a topic sentence. Because major claims do not always begin paragraphs, the Argument Guide helps to ensure that students respond to the rhetorical situation by generating their own forms. The Argument Guide helps such composition instruction because it highlights exigency rather than completion: it shows that each paragraph needs a driving major claim to advance their thesis. This focus on effect (i.e. on thought and on rhetoric) rather than on location (i.e. the first sentence) distinguishes a major claim from a topic sentence. With this shift in thought, the Argument Guide helps students reconsider additive arrangement formulas (i.e. A+B+C five-paragraph themes). It also helps students to learn how to construct simultaneously the content and form of an argument by considering the demands of the rhetorical situation and the goals of their argumentative response (i.e. their major claims that extend their thesis).

The next layer of the Argument Guide asks students to add evidence that further proves their thesis and major claims. For high school students, I do prefer that the majority of evidence – either direct quotes or paraphrased ideas with parenthetical citations – comes directly from the texts that they use as support. I feel, like Sylvan Barnet and Hugo Bedua, that paraphrase should

only be used for clarification.<sup>94</sup> This restriction to using citations to abet their argumentative voice helps students move away from their habits of summary and into the analysis that follows. Whether this evidence comes in the shape of primary or secondary citations, students examine more closely whether or not they have successfully defended their claims with corresponding evidence.

In these Argument Guides, students locate their evidence between the major claim it intends to support and the analysis that discusses the evidence in the terms of this claim. Examinations of both the IB World Literature rubric and the AP Language scoring guides demonstrate how this ability to incorporate texts into a self-generated argument is a crucial skill for college-bound students. For example, in the IB rubric the highest mark under the domain “Interpretation of Text” reads “the analysis is consistently detailed and persuasively illustrated by carefully chosen examples” and the highest mark for the domain “Appreciation of Literary Features” reads “the analysis is detailed and illustrated by carefully chosen examples.” The AP Language holistic guide includes the following language at the “Effective” level for the 2008 synthesis essay: “They support their position by successfully synthesizing\* at least three of the sources. The argument is convincing, and the student uses the sources effectively to develop a position.” Even though I have only spent twelve years in and out of college classrooms as a first year composition teacher, I feel that these organizations have narrowed their similar concerns accurately. Along these lines, I find this evidence layer of the Argument Guide essential to move students towards better argument essays that have something significant to discuss and to

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<sup>94</sup> See *From Critical Thinking to Argument: A Portable Guide*; Barnet and Bedau write as “A Rule for Writers”: Your essay is *likely to include brief summaries* of points of view that you are agreeing or disagreeing with, but it will *rarely include a paraphrase* unless the original is obscure and you think you need to present a passage at length but in words that are clearer than those of the original. If you do paraphrase, explicitly identify the material as a paraphrase. (34, italics theirs)

analyze.

Incorporating evidence as part of the Argument Guide also helps to show how effective writing follows both inductive and deductive logic.<sup>95</sup> Instruction always falls back onto the students to recognize the needs of the reader, and the power of this model is that students make choices under a guided and flexible hierarchical framework. In this case, what students really seek in these paragraphs is focused, unified support – evidence – for a major claim. With this growing self-awareness of argumentative composition, students begin to write more complete and more unique essays.

Students show how they make the essential connections that complete their analyses by linking their evidence back to the major claims and their theses. In the fourth layer of the Argument Guide, students craft the portions of their essays that become the key to their voice in the essay. If students have read a long text, finding potential evidence for support comes rather easily. This portion of the Argument Guide uniquely asks students to clearly explain and to connect their ideas, rather than to merely find potential evidence. Mina P. Shaughnessy identifies this level of selectivity, of critical thinking, as problematic for Basic Writing students in her influential study *Errors and Expectations*;<sup>96</sup> she recognizes as well the “economics of energy in the writing situation” that lies at the heart of the Argument Guide: “[T]he speaker of writer wants to say what he has to say with as little energy as possible and the listener or reader

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<sup>95</sup> See Christophe Schroeder “Knowledge and Power, Logic and Rhetoric, and Other Reflections in the Toulmin Mirror: A Critical Consideration of Stephen Toulmin’s Contributions to Composition” in *Journal of Advanced Composition* at [http://www.jacweb.org/Archived\\_volumes/Text\\_articles/V17\\_I1\\_Schroeder.htm](http://www.jacweb.org/Archived_volumes/Text_articles/V17_I1_Schroeder.htm). Here he discusses the ways in which composition textbooks and instructors struggle to explain these two forms of logic. I feel that when textbooks often look for a stronger divide between these two types of logic, the overlaps between them in academic discourse makes this effort of division rather tenuous.

<sup>96</sup> See *Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing*, where in her chapter “Beyond the Sentence” Shaughnessy offers that the Basic Writing student “may not have acquired the habit of questioning his propositions, as a listener might, in order to locate the points that require amplification or evidence. Or he may be marooned with a proposition he cannot defend for lack of information” (241).



wants to understand with as little energy as possible” (11). When shared as part of the writing process, the Argument Guide reduces the energy expended by both parties; it narrows its focus on core relational components that underlie the critical thinking that occurs when students face academic compositions.<sup>97</sup> Writers and readers can then discuss with one another how well the writing responds to these components in order to become a better essay.

Such interactions between evidence and analysis become crucial to a writer who truly wants to make an argument work well. This idea appears rather straightforward to composition teachers, but many students leave out this analytical layer of their arguments. Other sources have already explored these connections; for example, Howard Kahane and Nancy Cavender, writing in *Logic and Contemporary Rhetoric: The Use of Reason in Everyday Life* (2005), maintain,

In a sense, of course, all reasons or premises offered in support of these constitute evidence in its favor. The important point here is that reasons themselves often need, and receive, supporting evidence. Indeed, good essay writers always support reasons in this way except when confident that readers will accept them without further argument. (175)

Yet, too often students write without extending their discussions to show how the ideas actually fit together. These students may paraphrase the evidence rather than engage in a discussion with

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<sup>97</sup> See Michael Scriven & Richard Paul’s “Critical Thinking as Defined by the National Council for Excellence in Critical Thinking” at [http://criticalthinking.org/aboutCT/define\\_critical\\_thinking.cfm](http://criticalthinking.org/aboutCT/define_critical_thinking.cfm); here they offer the following definition for critical thinking that fits well with the other literature I have read:

Critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. In its exemplary form, it is based on universal intellectual values that transcend subject matter divisions: clarity, accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reasons, depth, breadth, and fairness.

it in terms of their overall argument. They may think that many paragraphs can end comfortably with a citation, or even worse, that adding a citation at the end of the paragraph clears them from all accusations of plagiarism. When confronted, students admit that they did not consider that in order to increase clarity, they should to connect the evidence to their claims. In many cases, students need to further understand that it is their voice that needs to drive the essay and that evidence needs to be synthesized into their argument.

Rather than students merely placing ideas near each other (i.e. FPT) or following a formulaic means for limited analysis (i.e. JSM), the Argument Guide encourages students to learn how to examine relationships and to learn how to visualize the whole argument connecting with itself. This rhetorical thought process is most important. As students look for evidence and begin to prepare or to revise their compositions at this phase of the outline, they see how well they support the claims they wish to make and in the next section see if they have anything to say about this evidence. At this stage of the writing process students often make more global revisions, many of which carry through to revisions of the major claims and the thesis that these claims want to support. In other words, invention and thought never cease.

The Argument Guide model, therefore, pushes students towards more rhetorical readings of their own language by encouraging them to respond recursively to what they have written and to what they want to say during all stages of the writing process. Students learn better to use writing to compose their thoughts as they invent, pre-write, write, revise, edit, and publish, even if they do not follow this pattern linearly. When I write it helps when I ask myself what question a paragraph specifically attempts to answer. Thus, sometimes I have students organize their Argument Guides in such a way to include the articulation of their driving questions. Here they see how their questions and major claims correlate or fail to correspond. The Argument Guide

helps students witness what an essay intends to argue and how the progression of ideas will attract the attention of their readers. Successful at various stages of the writing process, the driving question overlay encourages such development during pre-writing, drafting, and revision efforts.

The model does not work solely for writing instruction; in particular with the addition of the driving question component, I have recently found success transferring the initial models for the Argument Guide from writing into reading instruction. Students start to see texts three-dimensionally by recognizing how parts connect. When I have students read nonfiction texts, I sometimes have them look at the essay more closely by annotating in a way that expands gist statements for each paragraph to the identification of respective driving questions and major claims. Other times I have them use four different colors (i.e. real or electronic highlighters) to identify as they read where the writer asserts his or her thesis, major claims, evidence, analysis, and/or transitions. By turning the Argument Guide writing model into a reading guide, students further examine published models to see how the parts fit together.

The Argument Guide allows for students and instructors to analyze writing and reading acts for such related thought processes more openly and more easily. So far, I have found this inversion of the Argument Guide into a reading tool as a successful way to transfer the ways in which reading impact writing and vice-versa. In some ways, I opened in this chapter with such an inversion. I used the argument guide as a reading or mapping strategy to analyze the components of my modified Regents' model essay, the one that I had composed for chapter three (to show the ways in which the  $x, y$  model can change oversimplified, formulaically-structured writing).

To also show students the ways in which oversimplified formulas detract from their

purposes, I further examine the unity of students' discourse or of others' by using the Argument Guide as a tool to examine transitions. By overlaying corresponding transition labels, students add another layer to the model that helps them see how the pieces work together and on their own. As shown in Diagram 1 and Diagram 2, when a group of students still has trouble with unity, I refer to W. Ross Winterowd's seven transitional relationships discussed in "The Grammar of Coherence" as a point of discussion. Such students begin to see the need for real transitions between these major claims that do more than indicate order. They start to understand how the FPT's common and rather monstrous "firstly," "secondly," and "thirdly" are false transitions that do not indicate an order of ideas but a sequence that follows only to match the organizational statement from the preview thesis. Students begin to see how an essay extends much further than the FPT model allowed. Therefore, underneath the major claims in the Argument Guide itself, the students identify how the paragraph fits into the next with Winterowd's transitional relations: "coordinate" (addition), offered with transitions like "and" and "furthermore," "obversative" (contrast), offered with transitions like "but" and "yet," "causative" (causality), offered with transitions like "for" and "because," "conclusative" (summation), offered with transitions like "thus" and "therefore," "alternative" (option), offered with transitions like "or," "inclusative" (examples or definitions), usually offered with a colon, and "sequential" (order), offered with transitions like "first" or "earlier" (831-2). This metacognitive layering, in a manner similar to the driving questions, helps students learn much more than the ability to label what they have done; like the learned abilities to identify the position and direction of their theses, these metacognitive efforts help them examine and explain how their discourse fits together. Finding this means of progression is often difficult for the aspiring writer, who may think that tenuous discussions around a topic will unify their efforts

when their formulaic structures falter. While this level of metacognition would work best in the early writing processes, I have found, it helps students examine their movements during all stages. It gives them an accessible tool with which they can step back to view their essay as a whole.

The Argument Guide is a better heuristic than oversimplified models because it offers a conscious means of examining the order and extension of their thoughts, and it does so without rigid rules. Students have a hard time understanding that their content should help shape the form and the movements within the essay. Winterowd also understands this difficult play between the writer and reader well, and he asserts, “we [the reader] perceive coherence only as the consistent relationships among transitions” (830). The reader only accepts what comes next when the writer provides a natural order; good writing matches the reader’s anticipations with related paragraphs. The Argument Guide creates such a place for writers to assess if their organization works not only to create these anticipations but also to see what the composition may need to meet them.

Because the Argument Guide focuses on such a visual place, the overall layout of the Argument Guide safely assumes that many students have been exposed to symbolic representations of composition. In *The Methodical Memory*, Sharon Crowley discusses the hazards of what she perceives as current-traditional rhetoric: “[I]t translates invention out of the originating mind and onto the page. In other words, this rhetoric assumes that the process of invention can be graphically displayed in discourse” (13). In this greater passage, Crowley criticizes these aspects as too methodic. In particular, she discusses how in the expository mode the expectations were set forth for the “synthetic movement general to specific” (54). I agree with Crowley that too much of academic writing became a replication of form(ulas) rather than a

place for thought; I also agree that the Brooks and Warren outlining trend became overly “fascinated with its etiquette” (84) than with content as a response to the discourse situation itself.<sup>98</sup> If students create an effective argument, then they often allow room for exposition, for narration, for description, for analogy, and for logical (i.e. rebuttal) subsections. It is in these choices where students learn how to write more successfully. They learn to see how writing leads to new thoughts and to new responsive forms.

The symbolic Argument Guide helps students move more easily from known formulas, like the FPT and JSM, into more explorative forums, not new rigid forms because it re-complicates oversimplified writing practices. Specifically, it bends students’ discourse away from constraints perpetuated by the five-paragraph theme essay or by traditional outlines that mandate balance. The model is rhetorical in the classical sense because it extends invention throughout the writing process. As a fresh alternative, this model should appeal to those instructors who have tired of re-teaching students to write in ways that defy set forms, and it should appeal those teachers who have tired of the controversy around such formulaic writings.

### **A Defense of the Argument Guide**

This analytical representational model succeeds as part of a recursive writing process. Although the product matters more than some process theorists will concede, having taught high school and college level writing instruction to a variety of learners, I argue that the Argument Guide outline allows for simultaneous design and revision, even despite what some may criticize

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<sup>98</sup> See also Crowley’s concerns about outlining, including those discussed in the following passage:

Invention is still a matter of forecasting, of predicting, what will follow in writing. The forecast is drawn from an introspective review of what a writer remembers about what she knows and what she thinks about it. Composing occurs in a neat linear fashion that is precisely mirrored in an outline. Writing itself has become almost irrelevant, since it only fleshes out the material encapsulated in the outline. (93)

as an initial rigid appearance. It privileges the (re)examination of the most important parts of the essay while reinforcing the power of the whole – the overall purpose of the piece in a flexible framework that can be simultaneously altered and examined at all moments in the composition process. Teaching students along a continuum that pulls from a variety of instructional levels and from a large variety of student learning profiles, I have found continued success with what is at its core an outlining alternative. While I admit that some students will return to their Roman numeral portrait models, many students quickly embrace this landscape model of learning and its left to right hierarchical image. For years, I saw in classrooms, balanced traditional outlines that stressed parallel structure and equivalent treatment of ideas. However, I rarely recall superb essays that emerged from these artificial constraints that often dismiss process writing theories and ignore recursive practices.

The Argument Guide helps students understand the critical thinking acts that shift at each level yet remain relational on one another. The strength of this model comes from such entities working together and from the four layers creating a complete framework. The Argument Guide model helps students visualize how all aspects of the essay relate to one another, specifically how the thesis statement relates to all of these parts. Together the pieces collectively create a product that reflects a hierarchical order indicative of reading process. Rather surprisingly to some students the model also shows how this product defies hierarchical organization. The dynamics at play between these subcomponents help enhance the broad range for effective implementation of the Argument Guide, especially in support of extending the *x, y* thesis model.<sup>99</sup> Students, in particular those at first reluctant to continuing such instruction

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<sup>99</sup> I need to address what some readers could criticize as the omission of the introduction (save the thesis, unless the position of this claim comes in a delayed form) and the omission of the conclusion. I concur with Richard H.

through the writing process, witness that as they integrate this language, embrace the concept, and revise with these important interconnected aspects of their essays in mind, they write papers that indeed argue something cogently. Without the structural limitations of traditional outlines, the artificiality of FPT arrangements, or the set patterns of the JSM, the flexibility and opportunity for expansion far exceeds the limitations of these formulaic confines. The Argument Guide helps students visualize how the movements that occur in a three or thirty page essay are similar because all of the pieces still work together to maintain unity.

Many of the successes of the Argument Guide come from its acceptance of and encouragement for asymmetry. A response to rhetoric (i.e. the connections between purpose content) rather than form is a characteristic indicative of process writing that shows an ability to follow through with an idea as far as the discourse itself requires. This model reintroduces invention as part of this process writing. Ruth M. Mirtz expresses a similar concern when she writes, “[I]f we continue to see student writing as a nongenre or as only genre practice, then form-finding will not become a part of the writing processes we want our students to experience and think through in powerful ways” (195). This creation of responsive form in a manner that best reflects the intentions of the essay makes writing work well and that makes the Argument Guide a viable model. Richard H. Haswell, as another example, concludes that the “most characteristic adult strategy of chaining” shows how asymmetry usually signifies more sophisticated writing (412). He also notes how the five-paragraph structures and its cousins move towards more conservatism: “In sum, on entering college the better writers tend to use simple static patters and the worse writers more complex and progressive patters. But as

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Haswell who states in “The Organization of Impromptu Essays” that “[a]nalysis of an essay begins by elimination of introductory and summary material” (407). These portions of the essay help frame or situate the elements on which the Argument Guide focuses.



students mature this reverse occurs; good writers find and poor writers discard the advantages of asymmetry” (415, footnote 12). Unlike the FPT or Jane Schaffer Method (JSM), the Argument Guide allows for this good writing to develop (and gives poor writers something onto which they may still grasp for safety). Some paragraphs in more complex discourse will be longer than others; some will include more evidence than others; and some will need more discussion of that evidence than others. Rather than the restrictive ratios of the JSM, the Argument Guide outline encourages the flexibility to begin paragraphs with more traditional (deductive) topic sentences and others with more inductive models. It shows how analysis links together evidence and how inversely this analysis relates the evidence it discusses, the major claim dependent on this evidence, and the thesis that is supported by this major claim.

A clearer sense of focus on the composition’s content comes when students slow down to examine what they are writing and how they are doing it. Looking at the Argument Guide helps some students feel more focused than if asked to examine the whole draft. Like the *x, y* thesis model, the process of revising and organizing their Argument Guide components becomes even more successful when students consider syntax. The Argument Guide works even better when students become actively conscious to examine if eliminating linking verbs and conjunctions from all of the “power positions” in the Argument Guide (i.e. the thesis, major claims, and, to some degree, the analysis portion) will help improve the composition’s movement and focus. This version of Richard Lanham “Paramedic Method” (*vi*) helps these major claims work more effectively because as argumentative leads, they have moved forward the “root action” (22). With this close focus on clarity, the best models frequently become eventually devoid of linking verbs and, as possible, conjunctions that fragment the focus of that paragraph. They become resultantly clearer and noticeably more focused. Students sometimes have a harder time with the

distinctions between conjunctions that fragment and those that unify. Usually unless a comparison is being made between two or more concepts or ideas, looking at these conjunctions helps students see how they have created a paragraph that attempts too much or how, in homage to the FPT, they have tried to link two or more ideas that do not inherently fit together. Notably, students learn to self-examine their compositions, thought processes, and language, with this outline as their learning tool. These students learn how to write more effectively on their own.

With such self assessment, the Argument Guide helps students consider both methodology and outcome. In composition and rhetoric terms these entities are also discussed as process and product. Students' thought processes have been examined by some psychologists interested in critical thinking, like Diane F. Halpern. Halpern recognizes that "[c]ritical thinking is sometimes called directed thinking because it focuses on obtaining a desired outcome" (5). In this case, the "outcome" is a clearer and more convincing composition. For this product to emerge, students and teachers who attempt the Argument Guide should agree with pundits like Carol Booth Olson when they assert that "writing is a learning tool for heightening and refining thinking" (30). In other words, students who utilize the Argument Guide have an alternative tool from which they show how they have moved to think critically about their argument as a rhetorical object dependent on a complex rhetorical framework. Michael Scriven and Richard Paul explain, "Critical thinking can be seen as having two components: 1) a set of information and belief generating and processing skills, and 2) the habit, based on intellectual commitment, of using those skills to guide behavior." The Argument Guide encourages both of these components and creates a schema from which this habit is not only repeated but also altered as needed depending on the rhetorical situation presented to the students.

This increased rhetorical awareness and further understanding of their compositions'

flexibilities also helps students better understand methods of assessment. I think that many teachers and students would concur with Dan Melzer, who writes in *The Subject is Writing: Essays by Teachers and Students*, from 2003: “Unlike a quantitative subject like math, writing is qualitative and subjective, and different teachers value different things and read your works in different ways” (157). Many writing instructors have consequently had some students disclose that they never really understood what teachers examined when they read essays, in particular with the movements towards more holistic grading. Especially without rubrics or detailed teacher comments intended during the writing process, these students thought that grades came from a subjective analysis of the student themselves, or, if they had a high emotional intelligence, if the teacher “liked” them. Yet, when students retrospectively use the Argument Guide to dissect their essays as a post-writing tool for revision, analyze their peers’ essays in writing workshops using this model in reverse, or attempt the Argument Guide as a pre-writing outlining strategy, they understand better how teachers evaluate a rather objective relationship between claims and evidence, between thesis writing and coherence and unity, between higher order thinking and analysis that truly shows thought rather than points to topics.

The Argument Guide helps to show these students what their readers will remember most: rather paradoxically, it exposes a spatial yet linear view of a recursive hierarchical system. Louise Wetherbee Phelps explains this hierarchy more eloquently, “Everyone who studies written discourse distinguishes between the higher, more global levels of structures – the topics, themes, and ideas dominating paragraphs and longer sections of text; and the lower or local levels – meanings derived from phrases and sentences” (19). She continues by discussing a study of people and their recall of texts: “[w]hen memory for text is tested [...] they remember the higher or ‘macrolevels’ of structure better than the ‘microlevel,’ the details” (19). With the

Argument Guide students test to see how their “macrolevel” and “microlevel” ideas work together. They begin to see how their “local” parts create a “global” whole, and they begin to see how the overall form and content rely on one another. Flower and Hayes also write, “[P]lanning is not a unitary stage, but a distinctive thinking process which writers use over and over during composing. Furthermore, it is used at all levels, whether the writer is making a global plan for the whole text or a local representation of the meaning of the next sentence” (262). They continue later in the article to assert: “Finally writers not only create a hierarchical network of guiding goals, but as they compose, they continually return or ‘pop’ back up their higher level goals” (266). The Argument Guide shows students that their stylistic presentations should amplify these respective “macrolevel” or “global” ideas. In other words, readers will not remember how well *it* was said or *who* said it, if they cannot recall what *it* was.

I also feel that the Argument Guide establishes an improved comfort zone for many struggling students. The *x, y* thesis model, when first introduced, resembles the thesis-driven models that the FPT taught (but did so too prescriptively). As students embrace the *x, y* thesis model they learn how to recursively revise their compositions and theses to better reflect their thoughts. As an extension of this model, the Argument Guide, when first introduced, appears to reinforce a hierarchal order. Writers like Bruce Pirie critique the limitations of current models; in *Reshaping High School English*, for example, he claims that there is no room in these models for students to “draw horizontal connections across strands” (84). By reading left to right and subsequently top to bottom in the Argument Guide, students see how a hierarchy of their ideas presents itself in their writings. This new model *turns* and *broadens* the linear movements that occur while reading to further exposes the substance of their claims. It opens their minds to viewing essay writing as a process that creates an overall image that may be (re)shaped in a

nonlinear manner. Students' analyses of the four pieces as part of a whole argument help them see what many teachers and instructors expect as the skeletal system that supports varied academic efforts. Of course, their essay is not complete without the other rhetoric that completes their argument. With the layout of the Argument Guide, students confirm a layering that, if complete will allow for a successful academic essay. This layout shows students how readers examine the relations in their essays and how they metacognitively assess their own progress:

1. Is there a thesis statement that will drive or confirm an argumentative essay?
2. Is the essay organized in a logical and effective manner?
3. Does the evidence fit into this portion of the argument?
4. Does it clearly support the claims and consequently the thesis of the writer?
5. Does the writer have something to say about the evidence?

A thorough Argument Guide outline gives students a better mental picture of their overall argument. Many arguments do not necessitate the balance that a formal outline supposedly mandates; moreover, students, especially with longer essays, often end up with body paragraphs that are interchangeable and have no logical succession. The Argument Guide outline helps students reanalyze the sequencing, the inclusion, and the exclusion of their content and their responsive form. Like a complex machine, students learn to examine the parts and the whole as a functional system made of identifiable and interconnected parts.

Not only some struggling students who hold the FPT closely but also more mathematical and logical students will all find comfort in the initial linearity of the Argument Guide's design. These students will often build the pieces towards a whole by beginning on the far left with the thesis. As the model indicates, on the two lines on the far left students present their  $x$ ,  $y$  ( $z$ ) thesis statements. Here effective instruction challenges FPT preview theses to favor theses that truly

argue and, as writing teachers often preach, that show rather than point. Even if students only understand part of the model and if they follow the Argument Guide more linearly, then some gains will be made. These students still invent a tentative claim, one much better than an organizational statement because it will drive an answer to the ubiquitous “so what” question. This thesis can help drive the entire essay, regardless of length and paragraph number, to its end for timed writings and through recursive writing phases when more time for revision is encouraged. While this group of students will not take full advantage of the model’s potential, they still have a more focused argumentative response to the needs of a twenty-first century English classroom.

For this linear-minded student, the remaining Argument Guide takes shape around this thesis and from the rhetorical situation. After the thesis, the ensuing layer of lines indicates the students’ major claims, not necessarily their topic sentences, which unify the body of the essay. Here, as Diagrams 1, 2, and 5 indicate, I often present students with four lines on the initial model to stress how this model breaks free of the five-paragraph model; however, the model could be introduced with as many lines as the teacher or instructor desired. Students may have two, three, four, or more body paragraphs; yes, they may even have a five-paragraph essay that does not follow a five-paragraph model. To emphasize this characteristic of the model, many times I open the file and start deleting and adding lines in order to highlight how the model flexes with their needs. My belief is that this helps students see how to move into slightly longer and more analytical thesis-driven essay writing.

More readily than other existing forms or models, the Argument Guide model offers a shared lexicon and a framework of expectations. The model shows how qualitative writing may be representational and still avoid overly formulaic or quantitative approaches. It offers to both

students and teachers a new tool for them to discuss the global and more localized choices that occur within a composition. Despite efforts for real world writing models and audiences, most of the writing that still occurs in a secondary classroom is a transaction between the student and the primary reader, the instructor.<sup>100</sup> I often have students turn in the drafts of their essay with an accompanying Argument Guide. Teachers who try this tool may read either first, but together the outline and the composition offer much insight into the writer's intentions. More importantly, the inclusion of the Argument Guide as part of the instruction encourages a place where constructive dialogue about methodology and about content occurs between student and teacher.

In order to conclude this explanation of the Arugment Guide, I will address the potential oppositions to it. The first of these may be more pragmatic in nature: How will students create these Argument Guides for themselves or for their instructors? In order to present the Argument Guide in its entirety, I have had students use portrait and landscape models, some on large posterboards and some more simply on legal-size papers. Maybe graduate students could use whole walls to compose their theses, much like William Faulkner did when composing the seven days of *A Fable*. The size or materials of these outlines is not significant. Rather than becoming a deterrence, the means by which any Argument Guide is created or presented is pretty open-ended. Instead, these examples show the flexibility of the model to extend the *x, y* model into the body of a convincing essay.

More technological students will often choose to create electronic Argument Guides.

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<sup>100</sup> See Phelps, for example, where she discusses the influence of process writing as more of a belief in a dialectic between the writer and reader – both engaged in their own types of processes. She argues that “[r]eaders comprehend texts through progressive integration, projecting an anticipatory holistic structure which they continually reform, clarify, enrich, and fill in to whatever degree fits their goals and capabilities” (20).

This move reflects an industry that makes software for similar purposes. For example, the discussions that praise software for visuals like Argument Maps have remained mostly in the field of philosophy; one article by Charles R. Twardy entitled “Argument Maps Improve Critical Thinking” discusses why he favors the electronic models. His online draft of this essay asserts that “revising pencil-and-paper maps just isn’t practical” and that “computer software takes care of the layout and redrawing for you, making it easy to rearrange *and rethink* the argument and add new considerations” (5).<sup>101</sup> Twardy’s praise for Argument Maps extends the logic behind increasing the need for metacognitive analyses as part of the writing process, “[A]rgument maps force us to make a distinction we normally do not consider: do two claims form part of a single reason, or are they separate reasons?” (7).

No matter what resources or programs are used in its composition, such analytical thoughts lay at the heart of the Argument Guide. I admit that I do like the idea of implementing electronic software, but I also think that students receive the most value in the composition process rather than in the trials and errors of learning software as a means of accomplishing the composition. Students comfortable with the text boxes in Microsoft Word must be reminded to save their products as PDFs in order to not lose the formatting. These PDFs may then be scanned as JPEGs for reinsertion into another Word document. In contrast, electronic software like Microsoft’s Visio has already been utilized for many years by industrial engineers and logisticians who create among many visuals intricate process maps for their customers to indicate the flow of activity or processes (see Diagram 1 and Diagram 6).<sup>102</sup> These process maps

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<sup>101</sup> See, in published form, Charles R Twardy’s “Argument Maps Improve Critical Thinking” in *Teaching Philosophy* at <http://cogprints.org/3008/1/reasonpaper.pdf>.

<sup>102</sup> Microsoft’s Visio is often utilized because these process maps can be moved into Microsoft’s PowerPoint with ease.



can also be turned by such companies inwards to consider their current methods conceptually; for instance, many corporations use these visuals to try to simplify some of the most complex supply chains. Having experimented myself with Word, PowerPoint, and Visio for this dissertation, I regret that these electronic models take some time to figure out, but I cannot stress enough that they maximize the ways in which the writer considers maneuverability (i.e. revision). With the Argument Guide, students evoke a schema through which they examine the writing theories they have already learned. The learning curve, though, could unfortunately lead some high school students to feel overwhelmed with such software. And, because the Argument Guide can be used effectively with a pen and paper (and with tape and scissors, if needed), no greater technological or budgetary restrictions arise than other pen and paper assignments.

In addition to the potential woes of creating electronic Argument Guides, I also readily concede that this rhetorical model tends to work best for argumentative compositions. I prefer use the term “argument” rather than “persuasion” because most academic discourse tends to push writers to “conviction,” to “discover a truth” rather than into “action, to “know a truth” (Lunsford, Ruszkiewicz, and Walters 6). This model of invention overtly hinges on the same notions set forth by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca in *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, perpetuated by Richard Weaver, and more recently extended in varied discourse communities in Andrea Lunsford’s textbooks pertinently titled *Everything’s An Argument*, all of which claim that all rhetorical discourse is indeed argumentative discourse. In twenty-first century classrooms, many teachers want their students to learn to write and to learn to engage in a subject by putting something at stake in their writings.<sup>103</sup> The Argument Guide model gives

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<sup>103</sup> See Lloyd Bitzer’s assertions in “The Rhetorical Situation” that argument and rhetoric move together:

students a place for graphic invention and analysis but with more variability than any extant model.

Like this focus on argument, I also concede that for some humanities purists the idea of incorporating mathematical (or linguistic) concepts into their disciplines will remain an academic faux pas. Yet, the vast majority of our students are not entrenched in one discipline like we are. Consequently, academics quickly and eagerly embrace efforts to teach writing and reading across the curriculum. This model looks through this writing across the curriculum mirror, bringing the math back into the English classroom instead of vice-versa. In its most simple underpinnings, the Argument Guide is a visual and a mathematical model, one that helps a group of students see writing as something meaningful.

Despite their relative simplicity, some teachers may still worry that the Argument Guide is too advanced or too cumbersome for their high school students who already struggle to overcome rudimentary formulaic writing. I feel though that such students are ready to move forward with a model that fits their developmental conflicts better than the current oversimplified and misused models. Linda Elder and Richard Paul, in “Critical Thinking Development: A Stage Theory (With Implications for Instruction),” argue for six stages in which critical thinkers advance. In their discussion of the fourth stage, the Practicing Thinker, where many high school and some college students fit, they offer the following pedagogical advice:

We must teach in such a way that students come to understand the power  
in knowing that whenever humans reason, they have no choice but to use certain

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In the best of all possible worlds, there would be communication perhaps, but no rhetoric – since exigencies would not arise. In our real world, however, rhetorical exigencies abound; the world really invites change – change conceived and effected by human agents who quite properly address a mediating audience. (225)

predictable structures of thought: that thinking is inevitably driven by the questions, that we seek answers to questions for some purpose, that to answer questions, we need information, that to use information we must interpret it (i.e., by making inferences), and that our inferences, in turn, are based on assumptions, and have implications, all of which involves ideas or concepts within some point of view. We must teach in such a way as to require students to regularly deal explicitly with these structures.

The Argument Guide offers to these students a conceptual model of invention (and rhetoric). At first they may affix themselves rather didactically, but they will later learn to manipulate the concepts as they become more confident in their own more complex thought processes.

Such students begin to see how the Argument Guide model of invention reveals exactly how their ideas truly function in writing. They begin to see how the components of a composition work together to move a reader from one point to another. Students will reveal that they become bogged down with local issues before they have considered the global ones. They first miss the *mot juste* and then the sentences, the paragraphs, and the essay. The Argument Guide helps them turn their perceptions of the essay on its head. With this flexible heuristic, students learn to “wrestle with language to articulate meaning” (Wiley 64). The *x*, *y* (*z*) models and the Argument Guide allow for left to right and top to down analyses at all points of the recursive writing and reading process. Students anticipate the moves that the reader will make, moving left or right, to the bottom or top, by simultaneously juggling invention, revision, and exploration without any restraints on expansion.

In other words, restrictive models like the formulaic five-paragraph theme (FPT) and the Jane Schaffer Method (JSM) spend too much time focusing on replicating the framework or

mimicking the formula. Rather than examining the value of the content, these rigid constructions do not allow the content to drive the model. Erika Lindemann complains in *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers* that for students who use the FPT “form precedes content,” this stringent focus on arrangement injures the entire compositions (134). She adds in favor of process writing:

Teaching paragraph-as-process implies, then, what we teach students how to discover relationships among ideas, words, and sentences. Instead of focusing instruction on *what* paragraphs are, we need to teach students *how* to discover relationships and express them in units of discourse. To be sure, it’s much easier to teach students “about” paragraphs, isolating shapes and labeling them, but if we want students to “do” paragraphs, we must teach paraphing*ing*, not paragraphs. (151, italics hers)

From a pedagogical standpoint, instructors often teach writing as set of skills that not only build upon each other but also work collectively.<sup>104</sup> The processes and products of student composition will be improved when students learn to look at arrangement with both “whole-to-part and part-to-whole approaches” (Tomlinson and Strickland 9). In contrast to formulaic writing, the two interconnected models, the *x, y* thesis model and the Argument Guide, appeal to students because they offer methods to identify what resides at the core of writing assignments, especially as they matriculate in and out of classrooms where teachers and instructors vary in their approaches towards the writing process.

The Argument Guide provides a flexible and visual schema. I feel in contrast that the

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<sup>104</sup> See James R. Bennett’s discussion of Henry Burrowes Lathrop’s 1918 thoughts about composition; he states, “If we follow Lathrop’s closely reasoned critique, we see that he calls for a fuller and more flexible definition of the paragraph not only as particle but as a wave and as significant segment in the total field of meaning” (22-23).

FPT has remained dominant due to its simplicity and the ways in which responds to a wide range of prompts, including those that appear to occur only in academic discourse. Unlike the FPT, the Argument Guide encourages students to create and to examine their own writing as a model. It creates not only a “skeletal framework” but also a natural overview of the entire discourse.

Rather than the flexible heuristics of the Argument Guide, educational research has found that the current complex alternatives to the FPT and the extensive use of models often mask the underlying schemata. For example, George Hillocks, Jr. writes,

[S]tudying a complex literary model is not the same as learning a schema. Schemata are skeletal frameworks, the elements of which can be carefully defined and shown to exist in every instance of the type represented by a given schema, e.g. goal-oriented stories. The complex models studied in composition programs are often so fully elaborated that whatever schemata may underlie them are obscured. [...] It may be that useful schemata have not been or cannot be abstracted from the types of works assigned to students in schools and colleges. (Hillocks 228)<sup>105</sup>

Rather than being overwhelmed with the sophistication and impressive voice of models most often shared in composition readers, students learn from their own writing and from others writing.

If students treat the Argument Guide model as a set system rather than a malleable invention and revision tool, it too will unfortunately fall victim to formulaic fallacies. What could happen is that English students still turn to reading as a “search for facts that can support simple first impression claims and where writing about literature becomes a mechanical act of

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<sup>105</sup> Page numbers indicate original publication; electronic page numbers are 263 and 264 respectively.

displaying little nuggets of ‘lessons learned’” (Wiley 66). As well, too many students could fall back towards theories that the paragraph opener should be the major claim, rather than consider other explicit or implicit models. Because “[a]ll discourse is context bound” (Witte and Faigley 229) and because “thinking, learning, writing [...] become bound to the context of a particular discourse” (Bartholomae 598), students need to learn that not all modes of discourse and not all rhetorical situations fit such models. They learn to see why some rhetoricians argue that good writing slips in out of genre, modes, and aims.<sup>106</sup> The Argument Guide responds to a tangible need for an alternative and highly flexible, yet approachable, model that not only reflects discourse driven rhetorical choices but also leaves room to check for coherence, cohesion, style, and overall effectiveness.

In conclusion, with such characteristics, the Argument Guide offers a rhetorical means for students and instructors to discuss the essay as it is and as it could be. Exposing the major elements in this way – the thesis, the major claims, the evidence, and the analysis – and considering the overlays – transitions and guiding questions – allows teachers to find areas on which they want their students to work. The part to whole construction and whole to part construction encouraged by the Argument Guide presents to students and teachers new tools from which thesis-driven composition occurs. This writing model emerges as a flexible way to view composition that begs for highly cognizant, continuous reflections on relationships, rather than on parts. With such practice, when students write for the academy, they learn to internalize and to visualize the pieces and processes of this model in order to respond more effectively to the varied writing situations which they will face as they continue their academic paths. Students

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<sup>106</sup> See E.D. Hirsch, Jr.’s “Objective Interpretation”; here Hirsch states the following: “By classifying the text as a belonging to a particular genre, the interpreter automatically posits a general horizon for its meaning. The genre provides a sense of the whole, a notion of typical meaning components” (1694).

use this alternative visual model to analyze metacognitively their own essays (or others) throughout the writing process. With such efforts, students come to realize that writing is always a formative instructive act, one that carries forward to each ensuing rhetorical situation and, for students, its accompanying academic performance task.

For many writing purists, it becomes difficult to accept that for many students writing is simply a performance. If such instructors worry that the Argument Guide does not meet social-constructivist ideas, I argue that most academic essays promote an artificiality of audience and form that arises from the artificiality of the imposed context.<sup>107</sup> Students readily recognize the differences between their academic writing acts and their other means of real world and electronic communication. For the most part, despite many compositions instructors' efforts otherwise, students write in reaction to how and to what they think their teachers want to read. What the Argument Guide offers to ease this situation is a flexible hierarchical framework that shows these students how to compose a better essay: they learn how to write well (and most likely receive a better mark for these efforts). The Argument Guide model is responsive and flexible enough to not only persevere from such artificiality but also to work against it by showing students practices that push them past the FPT into a place where stronger and more effective writing – and active reading – actually occurs.

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<sup>107</sup> See E.D. Hirsch, Jr.'s *The Philosophy of Composition*; he writes, for example, "To sum up, the absence of actual persons, speaking in actual contexts, requires the creation of implied persons speaking in implied contexts" (31).

## CHAPTER 5.

### CONCLUSION

A wide potential audience exists for the *x, y* thesis and Argument Guide heuristics introduced in this dissertation. Will academics housed in education departments, in particular the teachers of teachers in these buildings, examine these invention models as viable alternatives? Will other academics housed in English departments, in particular those who have contact with first year writing programs and its students, explore these heuristics as bridges between the current explorative writing theories and current-traditional practices that pervade in many classrooms? Elsewhere in the community, will middle and high school teachers who certainly have opinions about the Five-Paragraph Theme (FPT) and the Jane Schaffer Method (JSM), especially those privy to the recent moves made by organizations like College Board, look to see how these models could transition students from formulaic writings into more rhetorically responsive modes? I hope the answers to all of these questions are yeses.

#### **The *x, y* Thesis and Argument Guide Models as Alternatives to Explorative Pedagogies**

The first chapter explored the pros and cons of formulaic writings like the FPT and JSM; yet, at the other end of the spectrum some controversial issues also prevail. The movement towards a focus on explorative process writing has been a worthwhile journey, but it has also left some students in the lurch. Consider the following discussion by W. Ross Winterowd and Jack Blum in *A Teacher's Introduction to Composition in the Rhetorical Tradition*. In this “teach the teacher” text they discuss the movements in 1963 towards a New Rhetoric in textbooks like *The St. Martin's Guide to Writing* and use Janet Emig's 1971 *The Composing Processes of Twelfth*



*Graders* as an example of this transition:

A shibboleth of the New Rhetoric is “Process, not product!” That is composition should be more concerned with helping students create texts than with the flaws in the finished texts; teachers are to be coaches, not proofreaders. (Winterowd and Blum 47)

The problem with this role as “coaches” is that students were still playing a game where they were left essentially on their own: they felt slighted as they attempted to write an academic essay but no one had explained to them the rules. Therefore, there is a current disconnect between what many teachers attempt to teach and what many students desire to learn. Additional options, especially those that relate to invention, are needed that target the broadest cross section of students in ways agreeable to both the students and the teachers.

My concerns about letting students loose with explorative writing are also personal. I vividly recall courses I took in the mid-1990s in which I studied G. Lynn Nelson’s creative and meditative penchants in *Writing and Being: Taking back our lives through the power of language* and Peter Elbow’s *Writing Without Teachers*. In retrospect, these types of texts work better for students who are vested in writing as English majors or minors, certainly a minority group when one considers the large numbers of students who take freshman composition or high school courses to fulfill requisites. Most of these students would have hard time embracing these Romantic writing philosophies as skills that would extend beyond the courses themselves, save maybe their personal journal writings. These books and the courses taught by dedicated Romantic compositionists certainly helped me find my own writing voice; however, I would be most hesitant to incorporate these philosophies into a high school or first-year composition course, one geared towards more general academic course.

The Argument Guide provides a place for these explorative pedagogies to occur in a clearer context because there is a clearer focus on invention. In a synopsis of writing instruction, Winterowd and Blum identify this disparity that some explorative pedagogies have created:

Students enroll in composition not to learn to make meaning, but to learn to write, and not to inscribe meditations or be surprised at what they have created during a session of free-writing; they legitimately want to master the sorts of writing that they will need in the academic world and outside the academy in their careers.

(Winterowd and Blum 43)

In other words, the ways in which these students are taught how to write better do transfer easily across writing tasks. The Argument Guide and *x, y* thesis models allow for such transfer. Instructors design assignments that encourage students to put something at stake in their writings. With the help of these models, these assignments encourage students to invent what they want to say and to write in way to say something meaningful about it.

### **The *x, y* Thesis and Argument Guide Models as Alternatives for Differentiated Classrooms**

The part to whole construction and whole to part construction encouraged by the *x, y* thesis and Argument Guide models present to students and teachers new tools to help teach thesis-driven composition. This idea of ‘new tools’ fits nicely into what is likely the most important current pedagogical trend, differentiation of instruction, which according to Carol Ann Tomlinson asks teachers to modify five “classroom elements” (i.e., “content,” “process,” “product,” “affects,” and “learning environments”) based upon three variant “student characteristics” (i.e., “readiness,” “interest,” and “learning profile”) (6). For instance, I recently reviewed a number of 2010 high school textbooks, many of which highlighted new subsets that

address differentiated instruction and assessment. As well, Georgia's gifted certification courses spend much time discussing Tomlinson's theories and sample lesson plans by which classrooms and assignments may be differentiated. Many of these strategies coincide with the two connected models that I offer and the pedagogy that surrounds them. Although difficult to design pedagogies that address multiple facets of differentiated content, processes, and products, the strengths of well-designed differentiated instruction come from the implementation of instructional alternatives that promote choice and maintain rigor. The alternatives that I offer to the FPT and other formulaic structures meet these expectations of differentiated instruction by offering to writing teachers additional instructional choices. They also exceed such expectations by encouraging as well a flexible way to view composition that begs for a highly cognizant and continuous reflection. With such practice, when students write for the academy, they learn to analyze actively the pieces and processes of this model. From these alternatives, they respond more effectively to the varied writing situations that they will face as they continue their academic paths.

Part of Tomlinson's differentiation theory is what she calls a student's "learning profile" (9). This idea of a learning profile extends (and simplifies) Howard Gardner's theories of multiple intelligences, which he offered first in his 1983 *Frames of Mind*. Gardner specifically offers a list of seven intelligences, all of which may be used as a framework for differentiated content and instruction: bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, logical-mathematical, musical, spatial, and verbal-linguistic. Of course, as Tomlinson and Strickland consent, not every assignment or unit will address all of these intelligences at once. The alternatives that I offer to the five-paragraph theme (FPT) do utilize spatial or visual intelligence in a manner similar to Sheridan Baker's series of five inverted and traditional funnels (triangles). However,

these alternatives hinge, unlike the FPT, on logical-mathematical intelligence. And quick looks at Tomlinson's thoughts about differentiation using learning profiles and Gardner's multiple intelligence theories emphasize an important but absent pedagogical framework in the composition field: a need for writing models that offer both visual and spatial thinkers something visceral and flexible.

For many years, the pedagogical vogue looked at spatial intelligence. Consequently, graphic organizers became a means by which students could visualize the information presented to them or that they wished to present. These graphic organizers helped students simplify what could be an overwhelming amount of information by separating it into manageable chunks. For example, one common graphic organizer that was implemented widely was the Venn Diagram, which allowed students to visualize how ideas compared and contrasted. This push for visual products had much support from theories like Gardner's and Tomlinson's. However, in English classrooms students often had trouble moving from graphic organizers into real writing or into more complex thinking. In many cases students identify complex relations via models like a Venn Diagram. However, they frequently do not know how to write about these relations in clear ways. Students' visuals of what the thinking have done (i.e. Venn Diagram) or what they plan to do (i.e. formal outline or mapping) does not mean that they are still engaged in the thinking about that material. In contrast to these graphic organizers that did not direct students to hypothetical places to experiment with identifying the relationships or arranging the thoughts in their essays to extend these relations, the *x, y* thesis and Argument Guide models offer visual spaces that correlate with eventual recursive compositions that continue the invention and overall thinking processes. And unlike graphic organizers, they extend an established mathematical model to bolster the writing confidence students, especially those with logical-mathematical and

visual intelligences. Students use these alternative visual models to analyze metacognitively their own essays as writers or others' essays as readers throughout the writing or the reading processes. With such efforts, students come to realize that writing and reading are not always formative instructive acts, but they understand that language responds directly to each ensuing rhetorical situation and often the accompanying academic performance task.

Using the *x, y* thesis and Argument Guide invention models, instructors will be able to respond to various stages of the writing process more easily. In parts or as a whole, the Argument Guide, for instance, might be incorporated into either formative or summative assessment strategies. With growing student rosters many writing instructors struggle to assess numerous process essays during one semester. The models also enable the students to become pseudo-instructors. During peer reviews students have common terms from which they discuss revision strategies and provide feedback about the effectiveness of the overall composition.

### **Implications for Further Study**

While the *x, y* thesis and Argument Guide models of invention may contribute to the academy in terms of theory and practice, this dissertation still leaves doors open for future studies and for further contributions.

One such possibility is a further exploration of these models as “visual networks.” This research could look at networks as means of viewing relations, especially the asynchronous and recursive overlaps that occur in particular between the Argument Guide and electronic discourse. I believe that there is a connection between the seemingly hierarchical order of web design and of the Argument Guide that could be explored in terms of student readiness for nonlinear movements. In web design and in composition projects students simultaneously juggle and

renegotiate space and ideas and the connections between the two. Therefore, I feel that looking at the ways in which these composition models and web design philosophies overlap will help test for a hyper-readiness for modern students to process and to negotiate bits and pieces of a related whole as a unified image.

I am also interested to see if these ideas transfer to a business writing course. Do the current trends that discuss electronic writing and presentations in the workplace challenge or support these theories? With the proliferation of electronic communications, in particular in the workplace where a business day no longer has a clear beginning or end, has a new type of discourse developed that is terse, authoritative, and clear? I hypothesize that this same continued business discourse must be rhetorically aware in order to be most effective and make its audience most responsive.

The effectiveness of these models could also be tested further with examinations of student-generated examples. In such extensions of dissertation, a researcher could examine the progression of students who were introduced to these invention models. For example, early, mid, and late semester (or academic year) samples would evaluate how representative students responded to this instruction to improve their writing or their reading skills. If these models were used experimentally in a freshman writing program, latitudinal and longitudinal studies, as quantitative or qualitative studies, could also occur.

Such extensions of dissertation would help prove how these heuristic models do work well with a broad range of students. Although I have discussed this issue throughout, teachers and students who experiment with these models in practice or theory, need to see them as guiding and potential patterns of successful academic essays. They are not formulas but flexible visuals to help students reconsider rhetoric, specifically how form and content respond to their

ideas. They are not formulaic replacements for the present oversimplified forms that plague students' efforts. Instead, they are composition models that increase rhetorical awareness and improve the students' understandings of not only their own outputs that they have composed in response to varied academic situations but also when inverted their inputs as rhetorical readers.

### **Closing Thoughts**

While these invention models significantly contribute to the short list of writing models of invention, especially those that do not oversimplify composition efforts, I have already conceded that they work best for argumentative structures. I want to end by reasserting rather frankly that people usually speak if they think that have something to say; their audience, in turn, usually listens when they believe they have a stake in this discourse or when they feel there is some exigency for them to respond. This look at all academic discourse as argumentative makes much sense to me and to scores of other academics and teachers who, for example, have bought into multiple editions of successful textbooks like Lunsford's *Everything's an Argument*. Other scholars, however, like Aviva Freedman in "Genres of Argument and Arguments as Genres," have tried to explain that some differences exist among argumentative discourse that occurs in composition courses and that which occurs in other disciplines:

The difference – between writing arguments for the disciplines and writing arguments in the composition class – is worth remembering, both when we assess student writing abilities as well as when we set curricular goals for the composition class. (112)

'Content specific courses' will certainly set forth their own set of writing expectations and create their own sub-genres in which students will mostly write.

The demand for not only alternative and flexible models but for more models altogether can be met, at least in part, with the introduction of the *x, y* thesis and Argument Guide as pedagogical options in order to expand the ways in which writing, in particular invention, may be taught. Because students respond differently, the best things we do as instructors is to help them understand the ways in which these models came into being and to help them understand the strengths and weaknesses in these options, whether they gravitate towards a particular theory or choose none. Right now, however, they do not have a full range of choices because there is an absence of models in this aforementioned middle ground between formulaic and explorative theories. Therefore, expanding a writer's choices by adding offering them multiple models cannot be injurious. While some critics may say that models lead students to halt their thinking, I feel that offering models inspires just the opposite. It helps students understand how their content dictates the form because they no longer see the form as something that always looks the same. Such methods of inventing and of inventing do not stop when students leave their composition courses; instead, these models should alter student thinking across subject areas, which should in turn positively impact the ways in which they write across the curriculum.

What I foresee is that the *x, y* thesis and Argument Guide heuristics will make these moves between students' English courses easier by moving writers further away from unnecessary, formulaic, oversimplified responses. These invention models help the student negotiate these specific academic discourses, and they help them understand not only the means by which they are expected to communicate but also understand why the rhetorical choices they have made make sense.



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