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The Translingual College Classroom: Repurposing Essays for Inclusivity and Practicality

by

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Abstract

This article adapts Peter Elbow's framework for the teacherless writing classroom laid out in *Writing Without Teachers* for two purposes: first, to create a standardized means of measurement along new axes for use in writing rubrics and, second, to be more accommodating to nonformal English dialects. As writing pedagogy makes moves to be more understanding of the breadth of voices, typical rubric guidelines display an outdated understanding of the essay as a format. Elbow's depiction of scholarly writing as an exploration of the self allows for a new grading paradigm to surface, one that reinforces academic English as a standard while giving permission for students to interact with, and rebel against, that standard.

Introduction

It has never been more complicated to employ a nonstandard form of English in your writing as a student at an American university. Though the idea of standard English being the only acceptable form of writing in academia is rife with issues and controversy, it is a simple and actionable approach to assessment. Professors may mark with red pen any work which they deem abnormal or inappropriate for the piece, and students must use language and argumentative structures that align with that vision; wrong though this is, everyone involved agrees upon what they can expect when an assignment gets turned in. Now that educators have mostly, and correctly, moved past that stage of the discourse, we find ourselves in the throes of its antithesis—that standard English isn't the right way to approach writing because there is no such thing as a right way to approach writing—and the consequences that have followed.

Yet attempts to remove standard English from the classroom have paradoxically reinforced its worst qualities. Those who aren't actively defending the integrity of “proper” grammar and traditional writing are silently upholding the status quo by either assigning the same writing rubrics that have been in use for twenty years or abandoning the notion of a rubric altogether, leaving students to operate only on those antiquated assumptions which stuck with them through their prior schooling. For the native English writer, this turns out not to be much of a problem; while there is no longer an authority on what counts as being *right*, the standard English they've grown familiar with is never going to be *wrong*. But for everyone else, the language of academia is growing less and less accessible due to its obscurity. Somehow, those professors who are most cognizant of the colonizing effect that standard English can have on dialect Englishes are the ones hurting students' learning capacities the most, giving them

assignments with no indication of what makes for a good or bad paper and no path towards improving their use of language.

I am making the strong claim that in spite of the theoretical progress that has been made in the field of writing pedagogy, the lack of study done on practical implementation of that theory has made the writing classroom an even more hostile space for writers than it was before. The American essay writing framework is one that rhetorically emphasizes its desire to have students accurately represent themselves while providing them with no tangible opportunities to do so along the way. Instead, the essay is a performative assignment that requires students to conform to the stylistic and syntactical formulas of standard English while punishing them for constructing arguments that are not “clear” or “novel”. Standard English is an exceptionally powerful and useful tool when utilized correctly, serving as a means of bringing information to as universal an audience as possible. But we do not use it correctly, limiting ourselves to pretending either that it is the only tool, and robbing students of their capacity to communicate in genuine, humanizing, ethical ways, or that it is a useless tool, undermining nonstandard students’ ability to put themselves into conversation with the academic discourse and society at large.

This article will serve as both a defense of this belief and an attempt at solving the issue it represents, bringing in Peter Elbow’s *Writing Without Teachers* as the foundation for a new way to conceptualize essays. Ultimately, I aim to create a series of writing metrics that accomplishes two different goals: (1) giving students and teachers clear ways of measuring the effectiveness of student writing work, and (2) allowing students the grace to employ the style of language they feel is simultaneously most appropriate for their audience and most representative of the stance their work is attempting to embody. Where strict preservation of standard Englishes has always done an effective job of (1), it has utterly failed in (2); as college classrooms have become more

cognizant of the importance of (2), they are simultaneously undercutting the benefits of (1) and risking putting (2) even further out of reach for nonnative students.

Background

Racism is a problem in English studies at American institutions. This section will attempt to give a brief but thorough account of why dialect Englishes and other languages should be invited to the table, as well as why efforts to decolonize and destigmatize the college writing classroom are worth pursuing. As of now, there is little research concerning whether or not racism is operating at the level of the writing rubric—the analysis given throughout this article will be largely speculative based on issues raised in more general academic contexts. Though it is unclear to what extent the rubric itself represents a problem in college writing, the following truths have led me to the conclusion that each and every aspect of the modern, white supremacy-ridden classroom must be turned out and reevaluated in an inclusive and antiracist light. This background is particularly grounded in Black Language (sometimes referred to as African American Vernacular English, Ebonics, or Black Dialect English, hereafter referred to as BL) discourse and generalized translingual studies, so as to raise a pair of particularly prominent issues as examples of stressors that the following framework hopes to alleviate.

BL has its historical roots in the time of the slave trade, maintaining certain Jamaican Creole and Caribbean speech patterns and syntactic structures depending on the variant (Frieson and Presiado 707-708; Varlack 152; Zucca 54). Its reputation has not improved much since then, unable to shake the “unintelligent” labels initially ascribed to it and the “comedic” label that came to be associated with BL in the Jim Crow era (Varlack 153). Though BL speakers are often dismissed as ignorant to standard English conventions and their proper usage, it has been proven

both that BL has its own wholly sophisticated and syntactically valid grammar (Hallet 521; Zucca 55-56) and that proper understanding of the individual and their cultures is pivotal to holistic writing creation (Moe 80-81; Brown).

English began as a vernacular language, a vulgar variant on proper Latin that took on its own cultural significance. For the impoverished Latin speakers of the time, working vulgar languages into one's writing and speech was a cultural demonstration of power over one's reality when other aspects of it felt overlooked or actively trampled upon—Dante's work, which frequently weaves vulgar Italian into its rhetoric, is perhaps the most prominent example (Zucca 53). Now, the use of proper English has become so expected of those looking to participate in society that it would be easier to define the standard by what isn't allowed rather than what is (Wolfram, Adger and Christian, cited in Elbow 379). By reincorporating translingual practices into the classroom, other languages may take on their own individual, positive definitions rather than have this negative definition hoisted upon them.

In an address written to open the 2019 College Composition and Communication Convention, Professor Asao B. Inoue asked his colleagues “to listen, to see, to know you as you are, to stop saying shit about injustice while doing jack shit about it.” Language education has developed, yes, but those lessons have not yet made it to those widely distributed handbooks created by councils of white educators (e.g. *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*) because they provide little in the way of actionable technique. A 2023 study conducted by Sedlacek, Hudley, and Mallinson shows that professors who explicitly self-identify as BL instructors continue to struggle with knowledge of the language, especially those who themselves are not black, comprising about 80% of the surveyed field; notably, the same study shows that white professors were often treated with more reverence when instructing on BL.

Previous attempts at addressing issues of language-based power disparities focus primarily on framing writing as a process through which ideas are generated rather than demonstrated (Arnold 78-79; Zucca 57-58). Additionally, rubrics have proven an important tenet of the English classroom for non-native learners looking to guide their own learning (Goodwin and Kirkpatrick 3-6; Mita and Shimoda 70-72). These are the two facts most central to the following attempt at changing how writing standards are understood.

Writing Without Teachers

I try for two things: 1) to help you actually generate words better— more freely, lucidly, and powerfully: not make judgments about words but generate them better; 2) to help you improve your ability to make your own judgments about which parts of your own writing to keep and which to throw away. (v-vi)

In 1973, Peter Elbow posed a fairly simple question with the release of his book *Writing Without Teachers*: What does a writing class look and feel like in a perfect world? His most prominent critics have called this pursuit overly utopian and zealous (Bartholomae 64; Hashimoto 78); Elbow himself believes it's hard not to see his work as “a young, naive, and fresh-faced book” (xii). Upon closer inspection, however, it's striking how grounded in method this seemingly immature depiction of reality ends up being. Elbow lays out detailed instructions on how we might reimagine our goals as writers, abandoning the rigid rules limiting students within his so-called “doubting game” that standard practice inspires, instead presuming the validity of language and perspective in the “believing game” (148).

When first encountering *Writing Without Teachers*, it's easy to expect an interesting but outdated perspective on what are now considered progressive approaches to writing. Though there are teachers who report having success with the model Elbow lays out (Karaali; Liebel), it has been largely left to antiquity. Whether this is because the shift Elbow recommends is too radical or the book came out slightly too early for his argument to have been taken seriously can only be speculated upon (though I believe it is closer to the former). In either case, certain aspects of his argument read as though they were written within the last decade. Take the following, for instance:

A functioning class exploits the differences between individuals to pry open more diversity within individuals. When everyone tries to have everyone else's perception and experience, richness is continually plowed back into the group. There is a constantly growing potential for diversity of experience. (115)

When observed through the lens of diversity and justice in language usage, *Writing Without Teachers* takes on an entirely new dimension of meaning. Suddenly, Elbow's desire to understand writing as faithful adaptation of thoughts onto paper (14) and pleas to put people into more frequent conversation with one another (49) sound less like the evangelical gestures towards an intangible "good" that they have been made out to be and more like beliefs underpinning a holistic renovation of the writing process that asks everyone to accept their peers' languages as they are. He has gone on to discuss at length the advantages of vernacular Englishes in the writing classroom, enough to constitute an entire book published almost 40 years after *Writing Without Teachers*, and hint at applications of his earlier work in this field. This article is an examination of those applications, seeking to take the framework laid out in *Writing Without Teachers* and adapt it in more explicit service of translanguaging pedagogy.

Course Structure

To attempt to incorporate Elbow's ideology into the classroom is to fundamentally redefine the way that writing is taught. This means reconstructing the writing rubric is necessary, but said reconstruction only represents half the battle. Fostering a diversity of voices begins with deliberate action regarding permission and accommodation. No student is going to feel comfortable exploring their ideas, their use of language, if that exploration isn't both permitted by the grading structure and reflected in how class time is spent.

Peer Feedback, Part 1

Perhaps the most important element of Elbow's teacherless writing classroom, the device that enables students the opportunity to tailor their work towards a nonstandard standard, is the peer feedback group. The way Elbow conceptualizes this is simple, if slightly incompatible with the nature of classes as they currently exist: between seven and twelve people commit to a weekly meeting in which everyone has an opportunity to present their writing for a round of focused, raw reactions from the rest of the group, which is then repeated over the course of two to three months (76-77). Though this may sound similar to the well-established tradition of peer feedback as it exists, it is the particularities of the reaction retelling process that make Elbow's framework so distinct. To understand this, it is important to keep in mind the goal he lays out for these sessions: "for the writer to come as close as possible to being able to see and experience his own words *through* seven or more people" (77).

Participants in the group are challenged not to give advice to the presenting writer, nor provide stylistic commentary. Instead, they will do everything that they can to give an accurate retelling of what happened in them while they consumed the piece (85). Rather than provide their

take on whether the piece was “good” or “bad” (which has likely been established for them by standard English), they are instead to recount what made them *feel* good or bad about the work. Is there a particular section that bored them to tears? Does a certain stanza remind them of a memory they shared with their parent, sibling, or partner? When all is said and done, an author should have a much better sense of the kinds of reactions their work inspires in people such that their future edits may do a more complete job of telling the story they are looking to tell (87-90). Rather than getting told what changes to their grammar may or may not abstractly “improve” their writing, an author is provided with a set of case studies from which they can choose for themselves an appropriate course of action to move forward with (124-126).

The biggest fundamental shift in structure that will need to be made in the adaptation to a college classroom is the frequency of these group meetings. Even if professors would be willing to give up one class every week to allow for writing groups to convene, few classes would ask students to generate enough writing to warrant such a substantial commitment. Instead, professors should look to set aside one class period to go over the process and lead an example session for their students, as well as one class period per substantial work of writing to facilitate group meetings, keeping each writing group’s members the same for the duration of the course. As will be explored later, the stakes of these writing groups are high enough that an opening tutorial is an important component even if these groups were to meet every week—because students aren’t necessarily going to have multiple tries to gradually improve at this, a tutorial becomes a vital piece of the puzzle. Keeping the writing group together is a function of the mutual respect required, such that each subsequent group meeting can become more comfortable for the members involved and subsequently more intimate feedback can be shared (112-114).

There is a tendency in the postsecondary space to allow students to conduct group meetings like this on their own time, so as to not take up class time or allow for a truly teacherless space. This is a mistake. “Teacherless” though this process may be, there is still a need for a facilitator to supervise the process, catching and correcting any mistakes that come up along the way. If the goal is asking students to feel comfortable opening up to one another with their most natural voice (and their most natural reaction to the voices they are presented with), they must know that there is someone in their corner should the worst case arise and intolerance is permitted in the group.

There are further unintuitive implications of this practice that require similar acknowledgment. Specifically, we need to turn our attention to the kinds of philosophical adjustments required in light of the mandatory nature of these classes. Though Elbow does his best to make the teacherless writing classroom a semi-holy commitment—something that participants must attend, write weekly for, and respect the vulnerability of—his model is still opt-in for those who are interested in taking on those responsibilities in the first place (77), a luxury which is only provided at the college level by virtue of one’s enrollment in their school. Where Elbow’s classroom is treated as a privilege that one takes on with the understanding that improper conduct can result in their removal from the space, this is not the case for a group of students who may need the class in order to graduate. Much like any other assignment, there is nothing to do about a writing assignment that doesn’t get turned in besides dropping the offender’s grade. There must, however, be strict guidelines students agree to follow when they enter the group space.

Students are trained to look for the errors in any piece of writing, whether that’s their own or their peers’. By instead focusing on what the words on the page are *doing*, good and bad start

to fade away, replaced by experiences which may or may not evoke the kinds of emotion you set out to evoke (104). In some cases, an author might be inclined to edit their writing to make it less likely someone reads their work the same way their peers picked up on; in others, the author may instead lean into a certain reading and build it more prominently into the piece. For students who don't regularly employ native English, this has the potential to be a major boon. Now, rather than merely having their work marked down for small writing "mistakes," someone choosing to write with BL will be able to see how that writing influences the way people perceive their words, allowing them more agency in choosing how and why they are bringing their culture, rebellion, and identity to the table.

Redefining the Essay

With all of that said, time spent in the classroom deliberating on approaches to an essay dwarfs the amount of time spent researching and writing said essay that will happen outside of the classroom. As such, and as influential as good writing peer groups can be for student learning, the impact of strong guidelines as established in a rubric is substantial. The two variables most in need of reconsideration are the frequency of evaluation and the metrics along which those evaluations are conducted, the latter so as to incentivize active learning and allow for the presence of a breadth of voices, the former so as to ensure effective utilization of the processes that further enable students to achieve those goals.

That is to say, the goal of reworking the traditional essay rubric is a bit of a misnomer, for ideally there are four unique checkpoints (one of which will occur twice per essay) throughout the writing process that each require their own rubric. There are already two "stages" we consider independently of one another for grading purposes that will be maintained and

reworked in this model, those being the first draft and the final draft. The third stage is, of course, the reformulated peer writing group. But I will begin with the fourth stage, a new contribution to the traditional format, as it informs the kinds of changes that will be made to each other stage.

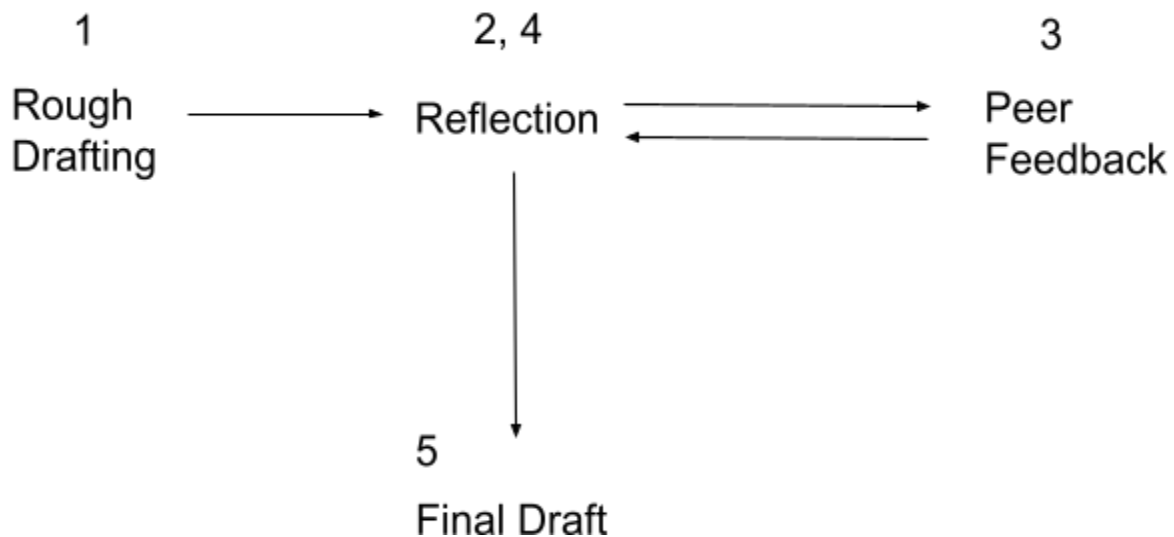


Fig. 1 - The Updated Writing Framework

Reflections

My proposal is this: once between the first draft and peer review, and once between the peer review and the final draft, writing professors should assign a reflection paper. The primary goal of these papers is to give professors as much access as possible to their students' intentions, processes, and goals. Secondly, it provides students the same chance to track their own development. If students are not going to receive credit by default for the decisions they make with their language because there exists a fear that they do not know what they are doing, then

they must be given the chance to explain their decisions rather than have their language dismissed altogether.

Consider, if you will, a writer who employs the habitual “be” (e.g. “I be studying every day”) in their work, a core tenet of particularly modern iterations of BL (Hallet 522). There is hardly a rubric to be found that wouldn’t take points off for this decision. This is because the student in question will be assumed to lack a proper command of the language, though in an age where autocorrect will automatically colonize your language for you it could also be considered a consequence of laziness. Now imagine that this writer is allowed an attachment to their paper in which they discuss their decision—perhaps they are writing to a particular audience, or the subject matter is one that demands a more personal or rebellious tone. The point is not for the teacher to evaluate whether or not the ends justify the means; rather, they can give the student credit for their engagement with the audience and tone of the assignment in the way they feel most representative of themselves.

The two papers that a student produces for each assignment will be handled differently, as they are written for different purposes. The kind of reflection paper outlined in the previous paragraph, one in which writers are expected to understand their argument and why/how they’re making it, aligns more closely with a reflection paper written after peer feedback has been received and a final product is imminent. For these reflections, a grade may be given based on the following criteria: (1) Does the writer deliberately acknowledge the audience in their target word choice, organization, or tone? (2) Has the writer accounted for the feedback they received from their peers? (3) Has the writer’s argument evolved since their rough draft? and (4) Are there particular strengths, weaknesses, or unusual aspects of their argument that the writer is accounting for? Again, note that (1) does not ask if writers *effectively* acknowledge the audience,

(2) if writers *effectively* account for feedback, and so on. That is not for the teacher to judge.

Instead, the goal is to reward students for taking their learning seriously and being confident in whatever language they choose to employ.

Reflections written between the first draft and peer review are a little more relaxed to account for the fact that students are still developing the particularities of their argument. The grade attributed to this reflection should be a simple complete/incomplete to allow students the chance to learn and explore their own thoughts as they see fit. Criteria (1)-(4) can instead be used to guide professorial feedback on the draft, ensuring that their students are exploring in such a way that will eventually lead them to answers for each question.

In both reflections, students must be allowed to write in whatever language they are most comfortable employing. This is their opportunity to locate themselves relative to their field; their professor is merely being allowed the opportunity to spectate that process such that they may better understand the student's work. Looking in, and providing scant guidance, is a privilege that must be handled with extreme caution—after all, this is an adaptation of *Writing Without Teachers*. It may be easy to say that professors should follow the same rules as their students, commenting only on the subjective experience they have while reading, so as to level the playing field between all parties. The concern is the same one that we encounter in most societal scenarios that involve equalizing parties: implicit power structures remain (105). A professor may have only the best intentions in giving their subjective view of a piece, yet this view will ultimately reign supreme over all others a student may receive (including their own), as there is ultimately only one person assigning the final grade and therefore only one voice that matters.

This is where most people, and, in fact, most scholars, call it quits on the inclusion thing. How can we still call this a writing class, this space in which the expert professor can't so much

as give their opinion on their student's writing? Clearly, we have lost the forest for the trees. Except we know there are lines along which a professor may leave commentary that have exceptionally little to do with the nature of their students' words. If a student were to lie in a paper, intentionally or otherwise, their professor would be able to intercept it in a reflection before it became a problem in a final (or dock points if it made it that far). This presents no threat to a student's language or interests; it increases their ability to speak in an informed manner. Similarly, plagiarism is a highly punishable offense in indisputable need of correction. Perhaps a student who comes to a novel insight in their writing could be evaluated more generously for their deep understanding of the content. These are some examples of the objective measures that may rightly persist in the editing process, giving students the security of knowing their professor is steering them in the right direction and the space to take those directions and employ them as they please.

Though reflections are themselves graded items, that is not their main purpose. Instead, reflections are most beneficial for their ability to inform the grades of each subsequent stage. I will explore the particular ramifications on each stage as they are fleshed out, but it is important for both students and professors to be cognizant of as a paper comes to fruition. Reflections ask us to hold one another to higher standards of deliberateness in our writing, the peculiar intersection of invincibility and vulnerability providing students a chance to accurately locate themselves without judgment. This is the beating heart that gives life to Elbow's ideal classroom, a commitment that we make to one another in an effort to try "not to find errors but truths" (149).

Rough Drafts

Rough drafts are quite the misnomer in and of themselves. Regardless of the level of quality students might feel comfortable turning in for a rough draft, there is an unspoken understanding that the best rough drafts will remain practically unchanged in their becoming a final draft, and that changes that are made will largely be in service of bringing the paper in closer alignment to the standard academic English framework. This means the rough draft represents a large majority of the research and argument development work, while final drafts become a game of attempting to suss out formally optimal organization, clear phrasing, and the like. If nonstandard Englishes are to be promoted, this conception of the final draft must be thrown away, as its reinforcement of standard English as an academic barrier to entry is completely incompatible with BL and DTW (Dialect & Translingual Writing). It follows, then, that the end goal students should ultimately be aiming for is something that resembles what we currently think of as an optimal rough draft: a complete argument written in the kind of language students feel deliberately compelled to use. Because we have co-opted the rough draft's purpose for final draft use, we must fulfill it with some new end.

Elbow makes the case that in order to create a complete and satisfactory argument, one must first put all of their thoughts and reservations on the page, then attempt to bring those thoughts into conversation with one another through further writing (50-53). A rough draft in this case becomes a series of small tangents in which students search for the argument that will underlie their final draft, using whatever kind of language they are most comfortable with. There is no need for coherence in this process—so long as the writer understands the purpose that their work is serving, it is hardly the teacher's business to evaluate the process with which the work gets done. Handled correctly, this will enable students to bring their own thoughts into

conversation with one another much the same way that peer groups bring those thoughts into conversation with those that other people generate (64-67). This demystifies the argument generation process and works to prevent writer's block down the line by making the flaws and strengths of their position more readily apparent.

I would propose that such an assignment be graded exclusively for completion, with instructor feedback given to guide students towards more effective use of the process for the future. I believe I have established the case for grading based on simple completion as a tool for students to examine and evaluate their own thoughts and habits in a judgment-free way, but the teacher can still play an important part in helping students who are off-track. Intervention is especially necessary when a student is constantly expressing that they don't know what they're doing, or that they are lost by the process. A student may be expressing this sentiment for a number of different reasons: perhaps they are overwhelmed by the amount of information they're trying to synthesize, or they are uncomfortable writing without any particular incentive, or they are nonnative and encountering the difficulty of work without guidelines that this project is trying to confront. In all of these cases, it's extremely important that we recognize that these aren't bad outcomes—they may not be desirable, per se, but it is extremely positive that students are given the chance to recognize this roadblock in themselves and come to their instructor for guidance. Because there aren't any wrong ways to write in this step, students are truly free to create sentences and ideas as they see fit. Asking these confused students what they think they might be saying in what they've written so far and illustrating for them a few examples of how those ideas may develop into a finished product are tremendous services in building a skillset that they will be able to take with them long after their time in school is over.

Another way students may be off-track is by simply covering the wrong subject matter. One of the handful of reasons this pedagogy is going to be most effective at the college level is that students are acquainted well enough with academia to have a rough sense of the kinds of approaches that can be taken to a prompt, but the sheer freedom that this process provides students also has the potential to get them going down a rabbit hole outside the scope of the particular assignment. Because this is a space in which students are promised such immense creative liberty, a teacher must conclude that they would not be able to give students an acceptable grade before stepping in to limit an otherwise safe space. That said, this is a fantastic guardrail to have available, particularly for students to know about ahead of time such that they can feel comfortable exploring at their leisure with the assurance that they will be stopped if that exploration is going to pose a risk to their grade.

Peer Feedback, Part 2

Extensive as the previous discussion of this step was, there is still a lot of nuance to how one goes about grading the peer feedback process that needs covering. This is typically done along complete/incomplete or similarly simple lines, but there are significant stakes to the feedback process in this schema, and as such an appropriately significant grade incentivizes students to give it the proper prioritization. Aside from the usual upside that clearer grading guidelines provide, a thorough rubric has two more purposes in this case: to establish peer feedback groups as a sacred space—something that should be handled with the proper ceremony whether you'd like to or not—and to tie the assignment more clearly as a bridge from first draft to final draft, from reflection one to reflection two.

Firstly, every participant must give a fair amount of feedback to each of their peer's work that they are asked to review. "Fair" does the work of simultaneously asking those who are unprepared to share any feedback (99-100) and those who tend to dominate the conversation (114-115) to either make the effort to correct that behavior or come back at a time when they will be able to do so. In the same way that these kinds of discussion groups will usually have an alternative option for anyone who is absent for whatever reason, a discussion group on an alternate day is a good way to be considerate of those students who are having the kind of day that may preclude them from fair participation. Time management can be handled fairly naturally by asking groups to give their feedback around in a circle, allowing for anyone who has short commentary to make in transition to do so. While facilitating these groups, keeping an eye out for an over-talker can prevent a group from getting choked out. Similarly, any group that seems to be moving more quickly than others may be encouraged to flesh out their feedback more completely.

Secondly, feedback may be critical only in the sense that students express their feelings towards the piece and not towards either the use of particular syntactical decisions or the author behind the piece (76-77). This is a slightly unintuitive line to toe, but is the single most important rule of the practice. By bringing students into close conversation with their subject matter, themselves, and one another, we are encouraging their use and evaluation of languages that they are *not* familiar with just as much as any encouragement we give them to employ those languages that they are comfortable with. This means that there is likely going to be work presented to students in these circles that they disagree with on a moral or craft-oriented level. The responsibility then falls squarely on their shoulders: they will be given the grace to express those complicated feelings to the author, yet tasked with the challenge of keeping said

expressions impersonal and nonjudgmental. Elbow lays out the kind of behavior he sees as emblematic of the peer writing group's strengths: "If you want to improve someone's perception or experience, you can't do it by arguing. The best you can do is to persuade him to share yours. The only way to do this, almost invariably, is to go over and share his." (111)

Thirdly, students must do whatever they can to keep from giving advice to their peers. Again, this is unintuitive. As it stands, the terms *feedback* and *advice* are practically synonymous in peer writing groups—yet synonyms they are not. Whereas *feedback* is a sharing of the experience someone is having while reading a piece (e.g. "I enjoyed it when...", "I related to...") *advice* is given as an actionable recommendation based on feedback (e.g. "I'd rephrase this stanza...", "Your use of passive voice hinders..."). The issue with advice is that we simply have no idea what the author's intention with the piece is. After all, authors must be forbidden from sharing their intention if they do not want the feedback they receive to be biased. If the stigma pertaining to unconventional standards is going to be challenged, students must be allowed to conduct their own experimentation with said standards rather than recommended an antiquated practice by someone without access to authorial intent. Elbow takes a softer stance on this issue than do I, allowing for advice to be given if no other means can be found of expressing one's feelings on a piece (95-96, 103). Though I agree with the notion that there is technically something to be gained by advice, that thing being a sense of an audience's expectations for an author, I also believe that the propensity for harm to be done to a writer's dialect or language usage is high enough to eschew it altogether. Recounting as accurately as possible what happened in one's head while reading a piece should not be so difficult as to warrant asserting authority over one's written speech.

These are the cardinal sins, to be avoided at all costs. Though there are other mistakes that can and will be made in forums like this, such mistakes are no longer in the teacher's domain. Where teacher intervention may once again come into play is in office hours and one-on-one conferences, during which students may be encouraged to talk through some of the feelings they've walked away from writing groups with. Additionally, as mentioned earlier, any extra time that happens to be left in a class period after all the groups have had a chance to talk can be spent reflecting as a larger group on the process (85). Ultimately, though, it is not the instructor's job to ruminate on whether or not the writing group is effective for their students, the same way that it's not their job to wonder whether or not an essay is going to get those students where they want to be.

Final Draft

The end that students will be striving for is a complete final draft that poignantly brings their thoughts and voice into conversation with one another and the course material. This is the stage of the process that will remain the most unchanged by virtue of the changes made earlier along the chain. Rather than completely reinvent the rubric for this stage, I will refer to existing rubrics, identify which criterion and terminology of the evaluation process are irrelevant to Elbow's schema, and posit new more pertinent categories to replace them with. Of the 16 rubrics I examined for this project, I will be primarily referring to a sample rubric from the University of Michigan (see Appendix A) as an example bearing the most representative criteria categorized in an approachable way.

As far as terms are concerned, those which are to be avoided most are those that are not well defined or may be considered grammatically descriptive rather than prescriptive. An

example of the former, seen in Michigan's "Sentence Craft & Style" criteria, is "style," which on its own doesn't tell a writer anything about what their instructor is looking for. "Variety" is an example of a descriptive grammatical term that makes clear what it wants students to do yet unnecessarily tramples on work that may be perfectly good. These terms have long been panned for their presence on the rubric, yet persist nevertheless (Hashimoto 66-67; Hashimoto 79). Other problematic terms in our example rubric include but aren't limited to: "engaging", "thought-provoking", "clear", "tone", and "smooth".

It follows, then, that criteria which rely heavily on these terms be reformed. Particularly the aforementioned "Sentence Craft & Style", along with "Organization" and "Title, Introduction and Conclusion", need an overhaul. This is not to say the idea of these categories is particularly concerning—the issue lies primarily in their execution. The other criterion I want to touch on is "Mechanics: (Grammar and spelling)"; though there aren't any terms to criticize, the very notion of "grammatical error" is inherently antithetical to the translingual project.

The second reflection paper that students write serves as an important basis upon which more specified criteria can be built. Building in a more personalized axis to the rubric ensures that a writer's fulfillment of their own goals becomes a much larger component of their grade than it is now. This also helps in the reinvention of our problematic categories. Take for example "Organization", and more particularly the requirement "clear topic sentences". This ask fails twofold, firstly in asking for topic sentences to be "clear" which has very little tangible meaning for a student already having trouble understanding the standards, and secondly in reinforcing a very narrow, standard idea of the topic sentence. To illustrate how these points interact a moment, imagine the kinds of questions an informed party might be asking themselves in writing or grading a clear topic sentence. Let's say that they would make sure it is one sentence, for one,

and they would see that it captures the claim they make later in the paragraph. It is not clear that either of these tactics are actually more useful than any number of other strategies that involve making the sentence longer or less steeped in the argument (or, God forbid, leaving out a topic sentence entirely). Nevertheless, the standard is reaffirmed as the singular correct way to write.

Now consider those same questions when there is a reflection involved. Suddenly, a writer no longer has to ask themselves what the rubric wants of them because they are more attuned to what their argument wants of them. They can think through the nature of their argument, their audience, and their position, and decide how they might want to go about constructing the paper as a result. If they decided that a topic sentence wasn't necessary, they could say so in their reflection. "I kept things fairly standard with my topic sentences, except to start my fourth paragraph, which I believe follows the third naturally enough to eschew entirely." And the beauty of it is, they don't have to be correct in making that assertion. What matters is that they worked their way from point A (the standard) to point B (their technique) after all those rough drafts and the round of peer feedback with careful consideration of the goals they wanted to satisfy. These are the lines along which a final draft should be evaluated.

I posit a revised version of the example rubric in Appendix B. Note that despite the number of problematic categories mentioned earlier, there is only one fewer category in the updated rubric. Aside from separating the introduction and conclusion from one another (both to align more closely with usual practice and to put more emphasis on sections of the essay that, as a writing tutor, I have empirically found challenging for students), this is because a good number of our categories remain intact in name only. Those categories no longer present (Sentence Craft & Style, Grammar & Spelling) are those which provide little to no instructional value.

The revised rubric attempts to stomp out imprecise verbiage from the process altogether. Where in the example rubric use of transitions must be “good” and connections between paragraphs “smooth”, the revised rubric asks writers to be “thoughtful”; where in the example rubric quotes must be “relevant”, the revised rubric asks writers to be “purposeful”. These changes seem on the surface to be insignificant, replacing one buzzword with another, but this is not so. If the reflection exists in part to inform the way that instructors grade the final product, we must take advantage and adjust our language from more subjective terms to more objective ones. Think of it this way: What is a student going to do differently knowing that their transitions must be “good”? How is a professor to judge “good” transitions? With the goal being “thoughtful[ness]”, suddenly the student is presented with the actionable goal of knowing why they are transitioning their paragraphs with the strategy that they’ve chosen. The professor, too, needs only to look at the reflection if what they’ve been presented with doesn’t look classically “good” to see whether or not the student provides a reason as to why that’s the case.

Note the final point of the revised “Mechanics” category: “Grammar of choice is applied consistently.” This is the most striking change included in the revision; there is literally no way to grade a student’s mechanics *without* their reflection. Though this is a stark departure from the traditional rubric, it is emblematic of the philosophy at this framework’s heart. In a vacuum, there is no such thing as good writing—why would students be treated as though they lived in such a vacuum?

With all of this in mind, one final, brief point on reflections. This revision further highlights the important difference between the pre- and post-peer feedback reflections. As previously mentioned, while the former serves primarily as a tool given to the writer such that they may guide their own writing a bit more effectively, the latter is a primarily demonstrative

piece that serves a critical role in how the student is graded down the line. While writers are given full permission to use their language of choice, they are not given full permission to be lazy. There is rigor in attempting to understand one's own position, though with practice this should still be a more accessible kind of rigor for all students (140-141).

Shortcomings

I'd like to end by briefly exploring two arguments against the practicality of this framework, one which Elbow himself identifies and that this application of his work further exacerbates, and one which concerns the philosophy of writing classrooms in a more general sense. The former of these arguments I believe holds little weight; the latter is more concerning and warrants further attention and research.

To address the more obvious observation first, this reimagining of the paper asks professors to assign their students two to three more pieces of homework than they would otherwise—wouldn't so much extra work disincentivize students from doing any work in the first place? No doubt, this system asks of its students more time dedicated to writing and of its instructors more time to grading. For students, at least, this should not be quite the concern it would appear to be. Fundamentally, the drafting and reflection process is designed to undermine what Elbow calls "meaning-into-language" writing (15), or the idea that writing is primarily a function of thinking and outlining before committing any ideas to the page. His claim is as follows: if a writer were to set aside, say, four hours to write a complete rough draft, they could spend two hours of that time planning it out, one and a half writing, and a half an hour editing. Or they could instead write with all four of those hours. What this does, in Elbow's terms, is take the weight of having to construct an argument out of disparate ideas and "create mechanical

advantage so that ‘trying’ means pushing against a weight you *can* move” by making those ideas tangible (19-20). Though I believe there is merit to the idea that the amount of work on paper is enough to turn anyone off, there is also enough reason to believe that students won’t feel the extra work, especially once they are used to the feeling of writing without distraction, that this alone shouldn’t deter one from taking advantage of the lingual upside this practice represents.

On top of that, the argumentative essay is currently a staple of the college classroom, and as such professors will include a couple in their syllabi without so much as a second thought. Yet, many times throughout this paper, I have discussed how sacred some of these practices are for students, how important it is that close attention is paid to the kinds of languages one uses to represent oneself relative to their ideas. Though it may be a smidge outside the scope of this project to examine this more closely, I suspect there’s something to be said for assigning papers more sparingly such that they may be given the proper time and respect, much the same way that traditional tests have recently become a controversial means of evaluation in the frequency of their usage.

What I perceive to be a more immediate issue is the lack of actively antiracist conversation that this framework provides the classroom. Other attempts to solve translanguaging issues in classroom writing have focused on the simultaneous deconstruction of standard English and illumination of those power structures which currently oppress anyone whose language is commonly associated with a minority group (Hallett 530-531; Frieson and Presiado 713). Research has made clear that this naming and shaming of institutions where racism is present helps students who as of now are simply left to shoulder the burden of racism for themselves without the proper means of thinking through that burden (Flores and Rosa 149-150). As it stands, it would be valid to assert that Elbow’s classroom actually lifts up and enshrines standard

English, working to make the standard useful rather than removing it. Similarly, an individual's identities aren't especially relevant to the teacherless writing classroom insofar as their language is theirs to experiment with—controversially, this means that everyone has the same equal access to BL as they do to standard English.

Allow me a slight tangent. Contrary to popular belief, spoken and written English are nearly identical to one another when it comes to the words people choose to use in either circumstance, as Biber and Vazquez find in a 2007 study which Elbow takes great care to highlight. There were, however, explicit differences to be found between spoken English and what they called “typical” English, or that English which is traditionally found in professional and academic writing. In the book that Elbow wrote 40 years after *Writing Without Teachers* that I briefly touched on earlier, *Vernacular English: What Speech Can Bring to Writing*, this idea informs his ultimate goal: “I’m preoccupied with vernacular literacy because it’s so undervalued; and I’m preoccupied with proper literacy because it’s so overvalued”. He believes there is a sense in which everyone is being linguistically oppressed in this transition from “genuine” spoken and written English to “typical” standard English, and that nonnative English speakers are oppressed more insofar as the departure between those Englishes is even more stark (Elbow, 2012).

This is the fundamental difference between Elbow’s perspective and the mainstream that puts them at odds with one another. He attempts to frame the writing problem as not one that starts with racial difference, but one that starts with a linguistic, and perhaps classist, difference that exacerbates racial issues already present in our society. How fair is such a claim? It’s certainly a bit countercultural, though it does align itself well with the translingual perspective. Those who believe that we are going to solve the racial gap in writing by merely providing more

classes that promote BL or some equivalent vernacular English have the right intentions, and, indeed, the importance of such things has been discussed. However, even if one could somehow manage to foster a world that teaches on proper usage of every vernacular English, every regional dialect, and every little grammatical tick, some of the most difficult problems remain. In what circumstances is it appropriate to turn your voice down, if any? How are those who employ Englishes atypical of their identity groups (say, a white woman who grew up on BL) going to be perceived differently by their audience? There is a case to be made that approaching the writing classroom one problem at a time is going to pay off long-term, but there is also a sense in which waiting to solve each problem further entrenches us within them. I make no claim to the right answer; merely to one I believe valuable enough to consider further.

Conclusion

There are a number of positive implications this framework provides to the world of writing by happy accident that could be catered to further (students turning in AI writing feels a little bit more difficult in a world where they have to justify their language, doesn't it?), but as it becomes more and more common to speak nonstandard Englishes, it becomes more and more vital that we center an approach that gives every writer a clear path forward. We must speak the unspoken standards to life such that those students with less access to them are given the same chance to find their voice as everyone else.

If you are still skeptical of this transformation, unsure that bucking tradition is something that should be taken so lightly, I recommend your next piece of reading be Winston Weathers' "Grammars of Style: New Options in Composition". I could attempt to argue for the limitless possibility that comes with opening the discourse to novel ways of thinking through grammars,

but it would not hold a candle to the way Weathers brings that principle to action, imploring us to consider what happens when we allow ourselves the opportunity to actually think about the meaning of the words on the page rather than their arrangement relative to one another.

To the teachers, I implore you: make more active decisions in the classroom. If you believe there to be structural issues with the ways in which students are asked to write, the worst thing you could do is continue to sit idly by while young people continue to be discouraged from ever writing again.

I will leave you with one last comment from Peter Elbow:

When people not only begin to improve their writing ability but also find themselves in a group where their words are heard and understood better than they usually are, they discover messages they want to send which they had forgotten were on their minds. They want to say things that are complex and difficult to express which they had previously learned to ignore because it had always been impossible to get them heard. (123)

Appendix A (Example University of Michigan Writing Rubric):

Essay Grading Rubric

	CRITERIA	EXCELLENT	ADEQUATE	NEEDS WORK
Organization	Title, Introduction, Conclusion	Title includes both subject and a hint about the thesis or point of view; engaging introduction that prepares the reader accurately for the body paragraphs; thought-provoking or interesting conclusion that ties everything back together and takes the thesis further	Most but not all of the qualities listed under "Excellent" - there may be roughness or confusion in the introduction or conclusion	No title; introduction and/or conclusion seem to have little to do with the body of the essay
	Thesis/Focus	Excels by responding to the assignment with a clear argumentative thesis in the first paragraph that continues to be the focus of the paper	Has a clearly stated argumentative thesis that the paper basically focuses on.	Thesis is implied or absent, or is stated, but the paper doesn't connect back to it
	Organization	one main idea per paragraph, good use of transitions, clear topic sentences, smooth connections between paragraphs, if an order is set in the introduction, it is followed	mostly one idea or point per paragraph, some transitions, mostly clear topic sentences, okay connections between paragraphs	many ideas per paragraph, missing topic sentences, abrupt transition, and/or missing or rough connections between paragraphs
Development	Development: Support	Uses specific, concrete, relevant details, examples, evidence and numerous references to source material to substantiate and explain thesis	uses support, but it may be insufficient in some areas, or connections between the evidence and ideas might not be clear	lacks sufficient details and examples to support ideas; has insufficient or irrelevant evidence
	Development: Analysis	explains the connections between evidence and main ideas thoughtfully and thoroughly, makes connections explicit, discusses implications, relevance or significance.	mostly explains connections between ideas and evidence, although explanation may be incomplete, or may be missing in some paragraphs. Little discussion of facts and info	does not clearly explain connections between evidence and ideas; does not elaborate beyond basic or obvious conclusions, and/or analysis is too general or brief to be convincing
Mechanics	Sentence Craft & Style	Demonstrates excellent use of language; precisely chosen words, complex and varied sentence structure; appropriate tone and style	adequate use of language, although some words may be vague or imprecise; sentence structure may be simple or awkward in spots, mostly appropriate tone and style	vague and abstract language; words misused; sentences may be monotonous or choppy tone or style may be inappropriate for the assignment
	Mechanics: (Grammar and spelling)	is almost entirely free of spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors (one per page or less)	contains a few errors which may distract the reader but not impede meaning (about 2-3 errors per page)	has frequent or extensive errors in diction grammar, punctuation, spelling (more than 4 errors per page)
	Mechanics: MLA	Has smoothly used signal phrases and parenthetical citation in-text; has a citation for every fact or quote; has correctly formatted Works Cited page with few or no errors	mostly cites in-text correctly, but doesn't introduce citations smoothly or uses signal phrases/parenthetical citation inaccurately; Works Cited page has more than a few errors	missing many in-text citations, missing Works Cited page, Works cited page contains only URLs or has other significant omissions or errors

Appendix B (Revised Writing Rubric):

CATEGORY	Excellent	Adequate	Needs Work
Thesis/Focus	Main argument(s) is (are) stated explicitly and early with the goal of helping guide readers through the remainder of the essay.	Main argument(s) is (are) stated explicitly and early.	Main argument(s) is (are) either not stated explicitly or too late in the paper for no apparent reason.
Introduction	Introduction uses audience-cognizant strategies to bring readers into the argument, highlighting the significance of the project in some way.	Introduction uses audience-cognizant strategies to bring readers into the argument.	Introduction does not attempt to bring readers into the argument.
Organization	Essay is arranged in service of audience, genre, and position on argument. Thoughtful ordering of paragraphs and transitions between them.	Essay is arranged in service of audience, genre, and/or position on argument. Thoughtful ordering of paragraphs and/or transitions between them.	Essay's arrangement accidental or seemingly random.
Development: Support	Appropriate number of sources are referenced to reinforce points that are not the author's own. Quotations & paraphrases are purposefully placed.	Sources are referenced to reinforce points that are not the author's own. Quotations & paraphrases are usually purposefully placed.	Few/no sources are referenced to reinforce points that are not the author's own.
Development: Analysis	Quotations & paraphrases connect to subject of the paragraph and are discussed at length.	Quotations & paraphrases connect to subject of the paragraph and are acknowledged.	Quotations & paraphrases do not connect to subject of the paragraph.
Conclusion	Conclusion uses audience-cognizant strategies to briefly summarize the argument before broadening the scope and emphasizing the significance of the project.	Conclusion summarizes the argument before broadening the scope or emphasizing the significance of the project.	Conclusion either does not summarize the argument or is merely a summary.
Mechanics	Quotes, paraphrases, & citations have been used/created appropriately for each source. Grammar of choice is applied consistently.	Quotes, paraphrases, & citations have been used/created appropriately for most sources. Grammar of choice is applied consistently.	Quotes, paraphrases, & citations are used in a way that could be considered plagiarism. Grammar of choice is applied inconsistently.

Appendix C: Honors Research Symposium Presentation

(Presented orally as part of the *Bridging the Gap: Deconstructing Academic*

Attitudes for Accessibility panel on May 18, 2024)

Howdy! Uh, I'd like to begin on a bit of a meta note if that's okay with all of you. You'll notice that my peers and I are reading off of these scripts for our presentations, and I'm sure you have thoughts on how that shapes your experience as a spectator. It's nice to know that things won't get off the rails too much, that none of us are going to ramble any more than our editors allowed us, but at the same time, we need to face the hard reality of scripted presentation: it has a high potential to be boring! We've all sat through rehearsed speeches that end up sounding... robotic? Disingenuous? And, yes, I'm referring to the people who speak in a monotone using words that are far too big, but, also, like, do you hear me right now? I've written this to try and emulate how I normally talk as closely as possible—everything, all the “uh”s, “um”s and “like”s included—and still something feels wrong about it.

I'm gonna argue that that's not my fault. Instead, I believe we can collectively blame you. Or your expectations, at least. See, there are three different levels of communication that we constantly flow in and out of, each of which operates slightly differently from the other despite how hesitant we are to acknowledge it. Our raw, unfiltered thoughts represent language at its most intimate, and paradoxically least thoughtful. Once we get the chance to screen those thoughts a little bit, we'll often speak them into existence. That's what I'll call our default means of communication. The third level, then, is writing. We take those things that we felt confident enough to say and sharpen them even further, tweaking them until our thoughts are about as fully refined as they can be. So, scripts exist in a kind of uncanny valley of language. The presenter

may be “speaking” in that their lips are flapping and their thoughts are coming out, but really they are more like a vessel of their written work. In the case of this presentation, I may be trying to give you a convincing impression of a speaking person, but my paper betrays me; you know my secret, that my words are puppeting me around, and you can’t help but notice that bit of manufactured *something* around the edges of my talk.

And, if it’s okay, I’ll help myself to one more assumption. I’m going to guess that our presentations, and any other presentations you’ve seen today, sound more similar to one another than any other string of sentences you have heard this week, or practically any other words that Carrie, Parker, and I have exchanged with one another. And that’s weird, right? We are talking about wildly different things, we are wildly different *people*, but here we are. Presenting to you all as though we share roughly the same vocabulary, the same life experiences. I hope that, by walking through my honors project with you today, you come to a similar conclusion to the one that I have landed on, that the lack of personality and cultural significance in the words we use in professional writing is both a significant threat to American diversity and just generally a shame.

Okay, into the meat of the thing. Black Language (Or BL, as it will be referred to hereon) is an increasingly common dialect English to encounter in day-to-day life. You may have heard it referred to by some other name in the past—African American Vernacular English, Black Dialect English, Ebonics—but hopefully you have some sense of what I mean when I use the term. It’s the kind of language that often ends up being on the butt end of caricatured stereotypes, the kind that we tend to associate with a lack of proper education. I know I was surprised to learn that, much like many dialect Englishes, BL has its own set of sophisticated grammatical and syntactical structures to abide by. These rules aren’t uniform across all BL users, but by-in-large they all follow a variant on the same ruleset. What you see on screen now is a selection of rules

highlighted in a 2020 study by Jill Hallet. These are rules that began developing as early as English came into being, during the 1600s, and picked up significantly at the height of the slave trade, as West African, Jamaican, Caribbean and pre-existing European dialects all continuously came together and disseminated (Zucca 54). It shouldn't shock you to learn that the negative impression white Americans have of BL comes from this era as well, with charges of idiocy leveled against slaves who employed its use, and its role in comedy and parody material originating during the Jim Crow era (Varlack 152-153). All this, despite the fact that English was itself a vulgar dialect of Latin that came to exist during a time of extreme poverty in Europe. Indeed, we can thank a group of citizens so poor that they could not afford to learn proper Latin for the existence of our language, yet still we continue the cycle of dialectical violence by keeping BL in the margins (Zucca 49-53).

And it's not just BL, either! That's just the most prominent example of an ever-increasing number of dialect Englishes that we have simply decided we do not have the time or attention to deal with. After all, different though these dialects may be, the cure for each of them is quite simple: learn how to use standard English. You're all intimately familiar with standard English—it's the kind of writing that we use in press releases, news coverage, office documents, and honors projects around the country, the kind that doesn't let you use contractions, refer to singular individuals as "they", or use digits to represent numbers beneath twenty. The mandated use of standard English in all academia chokes the life out of writing, rendering any dialect English that's too far out of line "incorrect" and any attempt to use novel argumentative structures "unclear".

Which leads us to our conclusion: standard English is the devil, and all we need to do to solve racism in the writing classroom is demolish that standard. Or, at least, that's where the

discourse sits, give or take some of the nuance. But then you look a little bit closer. You see that writing instructors, especially at the college level, decide to take up arms against the standard by throwing away their antiquated writing rubrics, allowing students to write however they see fit. Yet remember that before, we solved for the wide range of dialect-employing students by colonizing their language; the issue is, getting rid of standard English opens up a vacuum where professors no longer have any metric along which to measure their student's writing. And what tends to fill that vacuum? I'll tell you: it's the very same standard English but with extra steps. The unfortunate truth of the matter is that standard English has become synonymous with good writing in ways that can't be undone by removing the uninformed student populous's access to those standards.

Let me put it this way: if a student is looking to improve the writing they use in their essay, where are they going to find the help they need if not a rubric? They'll probably use autocorrect, which will make a crude attempt at standardizing your language anyway. Or perhaps they'll talk to a friend more fluent in standard English, who will standardize their language anyway. If you're a student who tends to use BL at the level of thought or speech, would you feel more comfortable turning in a paper written in your preferred dialect simply because you weren't given a rubric? No! More likely than not, your professor will perceive that choice as a mistake, or even laziness on the writer's part. Students do not have the linguistic privilege to make that call in most contexts. What's happened is that in an attempt to solve the problem of standard English, we have made academic and professional writing less accessible to dialect English speakers. It is arguably the greater of two evils: multiple studies have shown that the presence of writing rubrics helps non-native English speakers more than anyone else (Frieson and Presiado;

Goodwin and Kirkpatrick) for one perfectly intuitive reason: if you don't know how to use standard English, rubrics are an important guide to get you most of the way there.

Enter my project. If the current writing rubric works to colonize dialect Englishes, and the removal of that rubric only makes the problem worse, there seems to me to be only one way out: you make a better writing rubric. The goal of this update is twofold: first, to give students and teachers clear ways of measuring the effectiveness of student writing work, and, second, to allow students the grace to employ the style of language they feel is most appropriate for their audience and most representative of the stance their work is attempting to embody. Rather than grade students based on how close they come to meeting academic English standards, my aim is to grade students based on how close they come to achieving the goals that their professor has set out for them—and that they have set for themselves!—in a deliberate and representative way.

To reimagine the writing classroom, I needed to make two distinct moves. Step one is creating new stages for students to follow in drafting an essay; step two is redefining the ones that already exist. Here's a chart of my proposed framework; I want to talk through this sequence before we naturally arrive at the final draft rubric. My work from here is in large part adapted from Peter Elbow's book *Writing Without Teachers*; he provides a sketch of what ultimately becomes my reflections and peer feedback sessions, and I fill in the blanks both there and in our preexisting stages. If I had all the time in the world I would sing all of that book's praises but, alas, you'll just have to go home and read it for yourself.

I'll start with rough drafts, which as they exist now are probably the most underrated part of the writing process. We have this notion that the perfect rough draft is nearly identical to a good final draft, which... what? Shouldn't we want our ideas to continue to develop as much as possible between drafts? If we want to disrupt the need for quote-unquote "perfect grammar," the

rough draft must also lose most of its meaning; after all, most of the work that gets done between drafts is reorganizing and rephrasing to meet standard practice. So, new plan: rough drafts become *rough drafts*. I'm talking glorified notes and meaningful freewrites all slammed together in whatever way the student feels is appropriate. So long as the writer ends up with both a good plan for their final draft and some amount of work that they'd feel comfortable sharing with their peers, it can be considered more-or-less a success.

Now, you may ask, "How does one fairly gauge a student's preparedness for a final draft?" Stage two! A student will write for their professor a reflection on their rough draft process. They will talk about the language they are thinking about using in their final draft, their approach to the prompt of the assignment, the lingering questions that they need answers to—anything and everything that might give their professor insight into their writing process. By sharing all of this information with their professor, there are no longer any questions about how informed they are in employing their language. If a student wants to use BL, all they'd have to do is say so, and why they're so compelled. It isn't the professor's job to judge their reasoning, merely to observe that their student is making a deliberate choice by diverging from the standards.

Peer feedback comes next. Groups of 7ish students get together for the length of one class period and read a selection of their rough draft aloud to their group before receiving a round of commentary. This is the most extensive part of my written project because it needs a lot of rules to run in a safe and productive manner, but for the sake of time I'll just talk about the most important difference between standard peer feedback and this version, namely that giving advice is not allowed. That sounds ridiculous, I know, but hear me out. Feedback and advice are two distinct things: when we give someone feedback, we are trying to echo the sentiment that they

gave us back at them, including our reactions and reservations, to paint as clear a picture as possible. To give advice, meanwhile, is to tell someone what they should do as a result of those reactions. So, to say “I felt engaged by the way you used that semicolon” is fair game, but saying “You should use semicolons more often” is a no-go. After all, how do you know that a semicolon would help any of the other sentences? Maybe the author doesn’t want to draw so much attention to the sentence you pointed out and now they plan to go home and get rid of that semicolon! At risk of sounding too repetitive, putting the author’s intentions first is the single most important thing we can do to take standard English from being a terrible threat to being a helpful guide one uses to locate their argument more effectively.

One more reflection. This one is going to be more important for the professor than the first one was, but the principle is largely the same: a student will bring together their rough draft and their peer feedback to create a final draft whose goals and practices are laid out in the second reflection.

Before, finally, we get to the final draft, and, drumroll please, a rubric! This is the stage that changes least in my revised framework; you’re going to be looking at the biggest philosophical shifts between the current system and mine. I evaluated sixteen college writing rubrics, selected the rubric most representative of the common criteria among those rubrics, and edited it to fit my translingual model (which, by the way, I know I somehow I haven’t used that word yet—translingualism is the idea that all language should be welcomed into the classroom with open arms). What you’ll hopefully notice is that I take some of the strange, vague language from this rubric, which comes from the University of Michigan, and turn it into strange, vague language of a different sort. There are two different categories of problematic ideas that I’ve removed from the old rubric: terms that don’t actually mean anything (Like, if you could tell me

how one can take tangible steps to improve their “style” or make their writing more “smooth,” I don’t know, be my guest) and terms that mean something that may actively harm a student’s writing capacity (So, for example, you’ll often hear that “variety” is a noble goal, but why? Right, what is inherently better about that?). Other terms I’ve identified as being particularly problematic are “engaging,” “thought-provoking,” “clear,” “interesting,” and a couple others.

Instead I present terms that embody an idea called “objective subjectivity.” It is ultimately up to the writer to decide for themselves how they would like to, say, be cognizant of their audience, but between their final product and the reflection they wrote about it, a professor can measure exactly how cognizant of their audience the student has been. When the ordering of paragraphs becomes less about being “clear” or “smooth” and more about being “thoughtful,” we implore the writer to make sure that they know what they’re doing by choosing to sequence out their argument the way that they have. And, despite it all, grading along grammatical lines is still well and truly on the table. This is not just a rubric that reflects the pleas of a lazy student; if you are going to use dialect Englishes in your writing both in and out of college, it is still the university’s job to ensure you are doing so with as much poise as is possible.

And, that’s it! That’s my take on how the writing classroom, and truly society at large, can come a little bit closer to accepting more unique voices in professional settings. But, truly, it is just one take, and if this project has taught me anything, it’s that there are many, *many* different ways that we could go about reimagining the space that have yet to be explored. And that’s our fault. We are quick to point out the injustices present in academia, go back and forth about traumas we’ve picked up along the way and theories about how someone could undo them, yet especially in the writing discourse we do next to nothing to actually correct those injustices. In an address written to open the 2019 College Composition and Communication Convention,

Professor Asao B. Inoue asked those in the audience, quote, “to listen, to see, to know you as you are, to stop saying shit about injustice while doing jack shit about it.” He calls out his white colleagues for standing idly by while their students’ languages are trampled on, and the erasure of their voices becomes increasingly normalized. And he’s right. If we want students, *people*, to be free to pursue knowledge in a way that’s true to themselves—if we want to regain control over our scripts—it starts with professors who are willing to risk a little bit of creativity in their coursework.

Thank you for your time.

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