

Writing and Critical Thinking: Writing for Learning Across the Disciplines

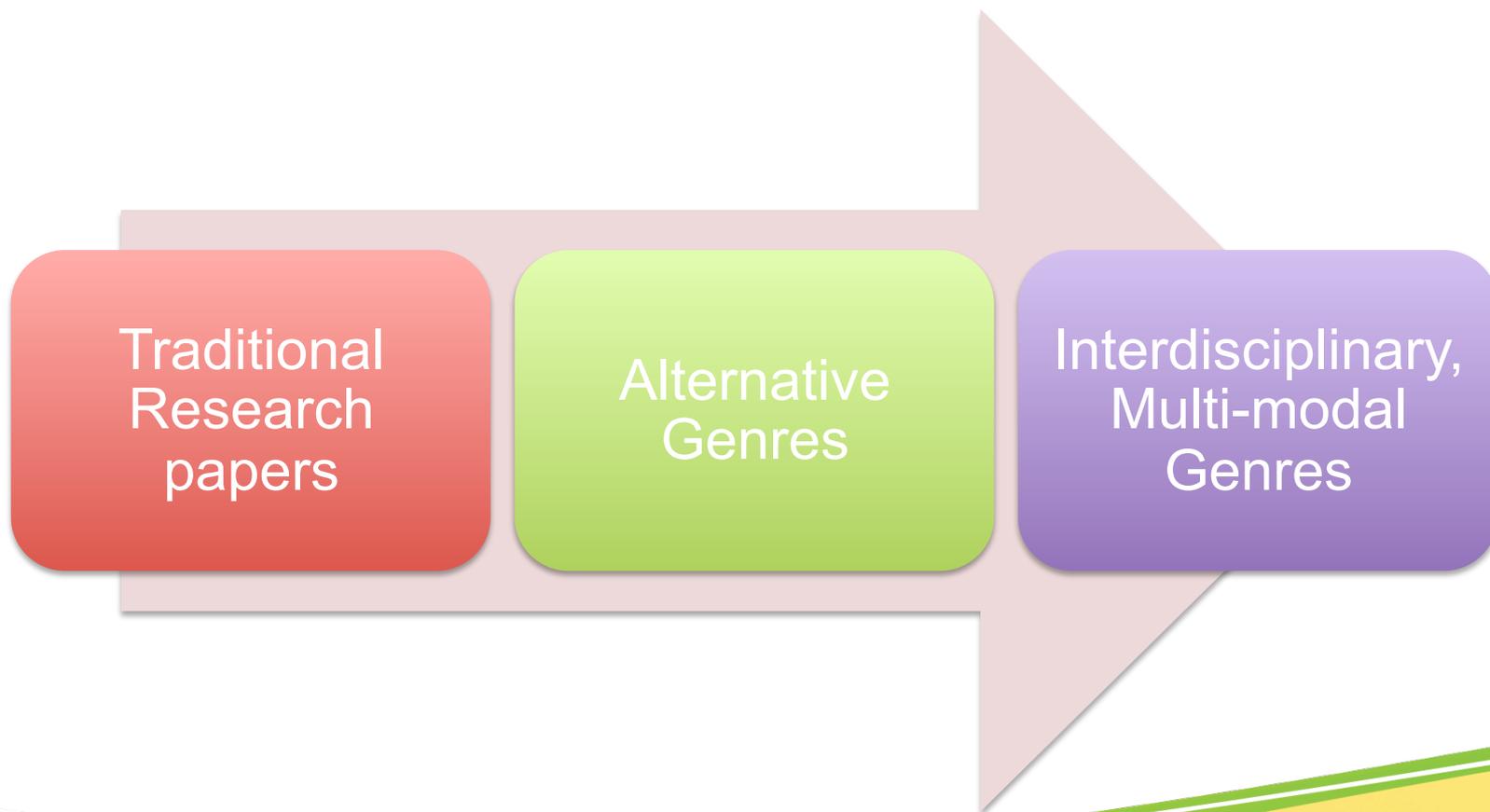
Roger Graves, Director—Writing Across the Curriculum

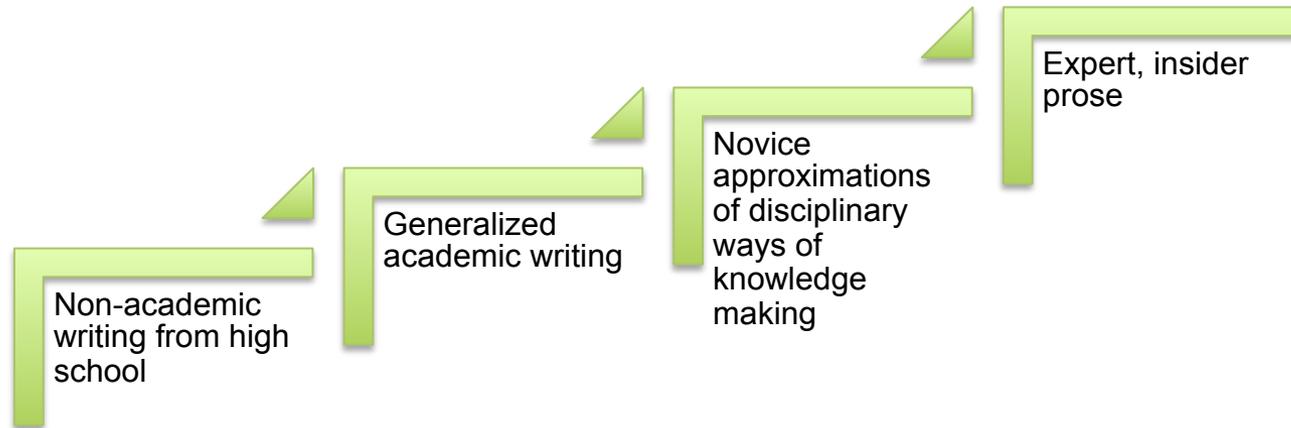


This workshop focuses on using

- **informal in-class writing activities and**
- **formal problem-based writing assignments**

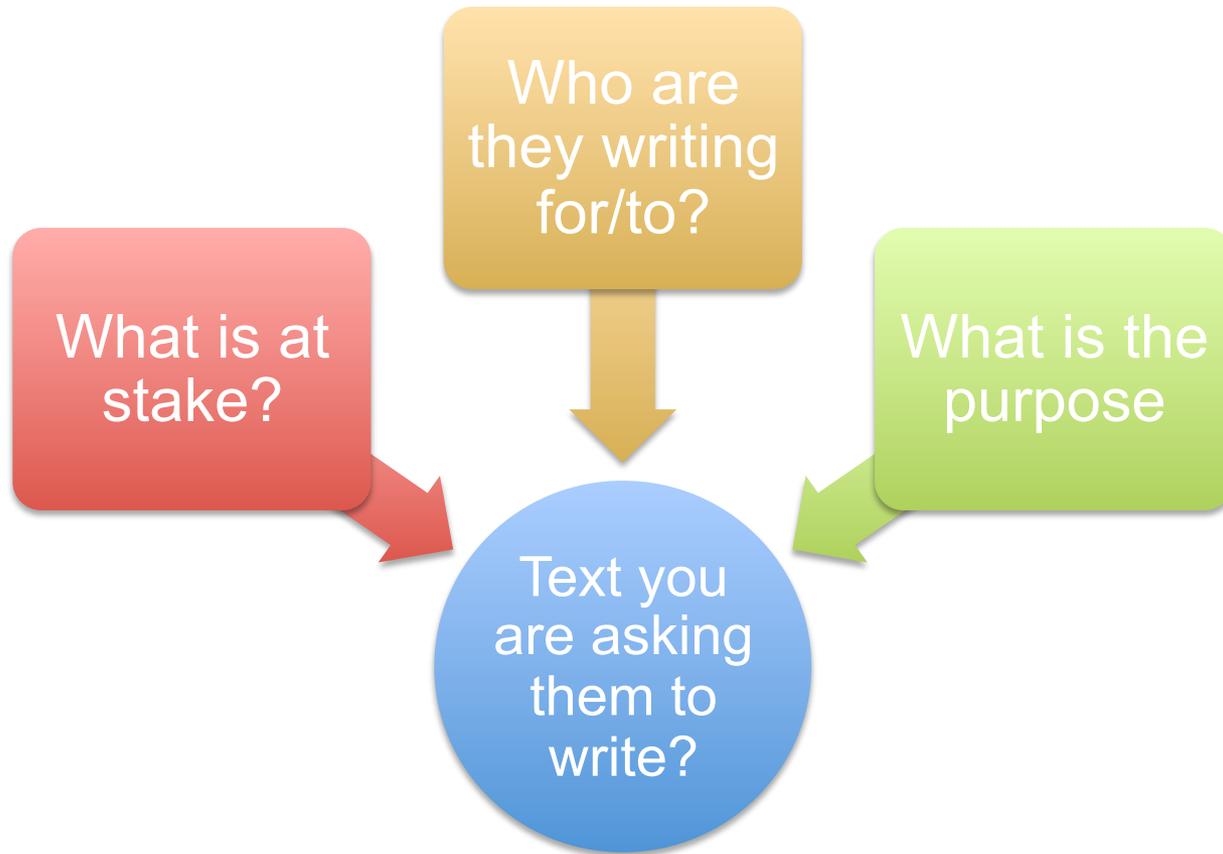
to enhance students' critical engagement with and understanding of course material across the disciplines





MacDonald, S. P. (2004). Professional and Academic Writing in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.







Writing Initiatives
University of Alberta



Writing Across the Curriculum

Develop a Topic Into a Thesis

This tool is meant for students who are working on developing a topic for an essay or research paper. The three screens guide students from a statement of a topic, to asking questions about that topic, and then to framing the answer to those questions as a claim they might make about that topic—a thesis statement.

[click here to
view/hide
example](#)

1. What is your topic?

2. What questions will you ask about the topic?

3. What is a possible answer to your question?

Try to phrase your answer in this format in order to make clear the claim you are arguing:

I believe [something is true] because of [these reasons].

What is your topic?

Writing in chemical engineering

What questions will you ask about the topic?

What do graduate students need to know to write well in their field?

What is a possible answer to your question?

I believe that graduate students need to have five kinds of knowledge to write well: genre knowledge, discourse community knowledge, rhetorical knowledge, subject matter knowledge, and writing process knowledge.¹

The answer (above) is your working thesis statement.

1/3

On an index card, write a question about some aspect or area of a course you are teaching now or next year.

If possible, focus on an area about which there is disagreement or where there are alternative positions held by people in the field.

Time: You have 5 minutes.

What is your topic?

What is the controversy?

What genre of document do you want students to write in their response to the assignment?

- **Traditional— “fossilized”**
- **Pale reflection of the research process in academic fields**
- **In some contexts, now a pastiche of itself**
- **Revived in part now through undergraduate involvement in research**

2/3

Create an alternative assignment (alternative to the research paper) that you could assign to students.

Use one of the larger index cards to describe it.

Work with one or two other people if you want to.

Time: You have 10 minutes.

Moving from a traditional forensic debate

To

**Hospital rounds + Cash Cab
bonus questions**



Model new assignments on research methods that are new or becoming more dominant in your field:

- **Participant action research**
- **Predictive statistical modeling**
- **Teacher research**
- **Evidenced-based practice**
- **Multi-disciplinary science (biochemistry)**
- **Bioethics, bioethnography**

3/3

In groups, create an assignment for one of your topics modeled on an interdisciplinary approach to research.

Time: You have the rest of your careers to do this.

- **Extend the range of assignments you consider giving to students**
- **Consider scaffolding assignments so that the term begins with shorter, less complex assignments and ends with larger, extended work**

If the term paper emerged from the “new” research university of the 1870s, what new genres should emerge now that grow out of new interdisciplinary and emerging fields of inquiry and new research paradigms?