

ENG 7980

History and Theories of Composition



Theory of Composition Studies



Everyone in composition studies has tacit theories of composition: how it should be taught, how it should be researched, and who we are as a field. The Theory of Composition Studies project is designed

not only to get students to start making those tacit theories concrete but also to encourage students to justify their positions on those issues. The Theory is not intended to be the final say on your ideas about composition, however. Instead, it's designed to get you thinking about these issues so that you can continue to build and change your theories over your career. In particular, the Theory should work through the following questions:

- How do you define “composition”?
- What is the relationship between composition studies and English studies?
- How should composition be taught?
- What are the goals of first-year composition? Other composition courses? How can these goals be met?
- What are the central focuses of composition research?
- What are the goals of composition research? Why?
- What research methodologies best support these research goals? Why?
- What ties together composition studies as a discipline?
- What are the central “threshold concepts” of composition studies?
- How do these concepts inform your teaching and research?

To answer these questions, you will write a report that is well grounded in the theories of the field. You will showcase your Theory of Composition Studies in a presentation during the final week of class.

Objectives

- To make your theories of composition explicit and grounded in theory.
- To think through problems facing composition studies.
- To connect your theories to practice, both in teaching and research.

Requirements

- Reports must be a minimum of 5000 words or the multimodal equivalent.
- Presentations should be between 7 and 10 minutes.
- Presentations should be prepared in advance, practiced, and supported with supplements.

Due Dates

- Presentations will be given on Monday, April 18th and Wednesday, April 20th.
- Reports are due on Monday, April 25th

Supplements

Regardless of the form of your Theory of Composition Studies, you are encouraged to include supplemental material as part of your report. This includes anything that may help to illuminate your ideas with clear and concrete examples. Supplements may include (but are not limited to): excerpts from syllabi, assignment sheets, classroom handouts, explanations of classroom activities, samples of your writing, documentation from your research, and so on. Like the rest of the report, the supplements should be written by you: you are *not* permitted to use materials created by someone else; citation from experts should be used to support your points, not in place of your points. Supplements count toward the word count but should be used mindfully: including a whole syllabus is not acceptable if you only are referring to one segment of it, for example.

Presentations

It's not possible to cover all of the material in your Theory of Composition Studies during the time you have available for your presentation. Please curate information carefully: Choose a few topics that are important to your Theory to cover well instead of trying to cover everything quickly. Less is definitely more here. You do *not* need to answer all of the questions in your presentation, just those important to you.

Please check the time of your presentation in advance. Under no circumstances can you go over the 10-minute time limit.

Additional Requirements and Tips

- Your Theory of Composition Studies is not a list. While I intend for you to answer all of the questions above, you should do so in the process of explaining your ideas—they should not be used as an organizing mechanism. As you may see, the answers to those questions will have a significant amount of overlap. Depending on your own theories of composition, certain questions may be answered at the same time or answers may be spread throughout the document. Organize mindfully based on your own theories.
- Your theories should be well grounded in the theories of the field. This means you are likely to cite readings from the class, including your supplemental readings from the Expansion Project and Gap Project, and readings from other classes.
- Written reports should be submitted in Google Drive as a Google Doc (not as a Word doc or PDF). Multimodal projects can be submitted as a file in Google Drive or as a link in a Google Doc. Please name your document with your name, the class, and the specific assignment: e.g. “Malcolm Reynolds ENG 7980 Theory of Composition Studies.”

Grading for Presentations

The following criteria will be used to determine grades for the Theory of Composition Studies Presentations:

Expectations	Exceptional	Met	Not Met
Curation	You have selected a small number of topics to focus on that reflect important parts of your Theory. These are explained clearly.	You have selected a small number of topics to focus on.	Too many topics are covered, or the topics covered are not relevant to the overall Theory.
Explanation	Your main points are clear and easy to follow. They tie into one another and get at a larger Theory.	You have explained the main points covered clearly.	Main ideas are unclear and/or disjointed from one another.
Examples	You have provided clear examples that help your classmates better understand the main points of your Theory.	You have provided examples to illustrate your main points.	Examples are absent or do not help your classmates understand your Theory.
Preparation	Your presentation is very well practiced and complete. Supplemental materials are used to further enhance understanding of the material.	You have prepared your presentation in advance. Some supplemental material is provided	The presentation was not prepared in advance and/or no supplemental material is used.

Your grade for the Theory of Composition Studies Presentation will be determined by how well you meet the above criteria. One “not met” cancels out one “exceptional.”

	#	Exceptional	#	Met	#	Not Met
A	100	4	0	0		
A-	92.5	3	1	0		
B+	87.5	2	2	0		
B	83	1	3	0		
B-	80	0	4	0		

Grading for Written Report

The following criteria will be used to determine grades for the written report for the Theory of Composition Studies:

Expectations	Exceptional	Met	Not Met
Response to Questions	You directly and clearly answer all of the questions.	You directly or indirectly answer all of the questions.	Some questions are not answered.
Explanation of Theories	Your theories are explained clearly and completely. It is easy for readers to understand your positions and why you have them.	Your theories are explained clearly and support for theories is given.	Theories are unclear, poorly explained, and/or unsupported.
Examples	You have provided clear examples that further help to demonstrate your theories in action.	You have provided examples for your theories.	Examples are not provided or are unclear.
Supplemental Materials	Supplemental materials help make theories clearer and provide direct connections between theories and teaching or research.	Supplemental materials are used to enhance meaning.	Supplemental materials are absent or do not enhance meaning.
Connections to Class	You directly cite at least 10 readings from class and cite them appropriately.	You directly cite at least 5 readings from class.	Connections to class are unclear, and/or fewer than 5 readings from class are cited.
Reflection	Theories are thoughtfully placed into contexts beyond the class. Direct application to future research and teaching is made.	Theories are placed into contexts beyond the class.	Theories are not placed in contexts beyond the class.
Organization	You have answered the questions in a way that makes meaning easier to follow. The organization enhances the theories.	You have answered the questions in a reasonable way. The organization is easy to follow.	Questions are simply answered in the order given and/or organization is hard to follow.
Form	Multiple multimodal elements are used to enhance the reader understanding.	Multimodal elements are included as part of the project.	No multimodal elements are included as part of the project.

Grading for Written Report (Continued)

Your grade for the written report for Theory of Composition Studies will be determined by how well you meet the above criteria. One “not met” cancels out one “exceptional.”

		# Exceptional	# Met	# Not Met
A	100	8	0	0
	95	7	1	0
A-	92.5	6	2	0
	90	5	3	0
B+	88.5	4	4	0
	87	3	5	0
B	85	2	6	0
	83	1	7	0
B-	80	0	8	0