

## Transitioning to College Writing Script

This workshop has been designed for a 50-minute class, and should last no more than 45 minutes if run as efficiently as possible. In longer classes, this leaves extra time, which can be used either for other (non-Writing-Studio-assisted) class activities or for extending the time allotted for the activities below.

**Note to Consultant:** While this script is full of content, it should not be seen as strict or constraining; rather, it is designed to provide guidelines upon which you can rely but from which you can also depart. Your role in facilitating a workshop is to generate and guide conversation, so do what works for the class. Also keep in mind that if you have a way of talking with clients about, for instance, thesis statements that you find more useful or that better suits your own style, then please feel free to make use of that, or even to rewrite any portion of the script for yourself—this can help to make you a more comfortable and effective facilitator. However, if you are nervous about being in front of a class and not knowing what to say, this script should provide a useful resource to which you can turn at any point.

### Materials Required

**From Writing Studio:** Index cards for minute paper  
Handouts & Worksheets: [“They say/I say”](#), [“Academic Voice”](#), & [“Understanding Your Assignment”](#), [“Examples of Academic Arguments”](#)

**From the Instructor:** Paper Prompt

### Objectives

- Students will learn that academic writing involves articulating an argument and entering into a disciplinary conversation.
- Students will learn about the three main moves used to set up arguments: stasis, destabilization, and resolution.
- Students will develop tools to understand a prompt or writing assignment.
- Students will reflect on various writing processes, including their own.

### Plan

I. Concentrated Writing Studio Presentation (5 minutes)

II. Introduce workshop (1 min.)

The goal of this workshop is to introduce you to some of the basic elements that distinguish college writing from what you have done in the past. What is perhaps most important to know about college writing is that you will be expected to make an argument. If you were already crafting arguments in your high-school writing, it’s likely that the arguments you’ll need to make at the college level will be more advanced. Your professors will expect you to enter the academic conversation in their field of study, which will mean engaging with the ideas of others while at the same time developing your own thoughts. Most academic writing requires that you distinguish your argument against arguments commonly accepted in a field and perhaps also against arguments advanced by individual experts in that field. Your challenge as college writers is to reflect on and develop your own voice inside this conversation.

### III. What is “College Writing”? (5 minutes)

Distribute the *They Say/I Say* *handout*: Here is a handout that will help you learn how to set up your own thoughts in relation to others’. In their book, *They Say/I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*, Gerald Graff and Kathy Birkenstein describe college writing like this (*read aloud from “They Say/I Say” handout*): “Academic writing in particular calls upon writers not simply to express their own ideas, but to do so as a response to what others have said” (ix).

- *Ask the instructor*: How well does this account match your sense of academic writing? Do you want to refine this description at all?

Understand that these are not perfect sentences guaranteed to work in every paper if you only copy them and fill in the blanks. These models should help you think about what it means to say that academic writing is a conversation between the author, other academics, and the audience, as well as to think about academic writing as an argument in defense of an interpretation of a text or in response to a controversial question.

- *Ask the instructor*: What kinds of arguments will you be asking your students to make in this course this semester?

### IV. The Three Main Argumentative Moves (15 minutes)

I’m now going to pass around a few short examples of academic writing, some of which provide positive models for argumentation and some of which leave considerable room for improvement. (Distribute the writing samples and ask a student to read the first aloud. Ask the following questions and invite student input in response.)

Who or what is Beckert arguing against? How do you know?

What is he postulating instead? How do you know?

Why does he think his own view is important for the reader to consider? How do you know?

(Give the students a few minutes to do a think/pair/share in response these questions and then guide the conversation toward a discussion of stasis/destabilization/resolution.)

What we have just described are the three main moves that most successful academic writers use to lay out their arguments. At the Writing Studio, we term those three moves: stasis, destabilization, and resolution. A **stasis** might be a commonly held assumption in a field or a persuasive position argued by one or more experts in the field; it provides the backdrop against which the writer will situate his or her own argument. The **destabilization**, often signaled by a “however” or a “but,” is the moment when the writer initially distinguishes his or her position against the stasis. The **resolution** articulates why the destabilization matters: What are its broader implications? How does it offer a new and important outlook that scholars within the field need to take into account?

Most of you are probably familiar with the term thesis statement. In that a thesis statement is an articulation of your central argument, it should always contain a destabilization and might include a

resolution as well. The stasis serves to set up the thesis statement.

Beckert provides a great example of a clear stasis, destabilization, and resolution. If you'll look at the Beckert excerpt again, you'll see that the first two sentences contain all three of the moves. (Paraphrase the first two sentences so that the stasis, destabilization, and resolution become even more evident.) "Most historians have only discussed the American Civil War in its national context, *but* the war affected worldwide cotton production hugely, which is important to discuss because the transformation of the cotton industry in turn influenced the development of global capitalism." The rest of Beckert's introductory paragraph serves to clarify and elaborate upon the stasis, destabilization, and resolution established so efficiently in his opening two sentences.

Let's look at another example together and see if we can identify the moves again. (Have a student read through the next passage by H. Frankfurt and ask students to label the stasis and destabilization.) You'll notice that the Frankfurt excerpt doesn't really contain a resolution, but, if we were to continue reading, we would see that he waits to discuss it at a later point in his argument. The stasis and destabilization should almost always be established in the introductory paragraphs, but there is a more flexibility with the resolution. Sometimes it is essential to articulate the resolution early, but it can also be developed over the course of the paper or be addressed in the conclusion.

Now let's look at the last example. (Have a student read through the short excerpt from a student paper.) This example does contain a clear stasis and destabilization—the writer wants to push back against the assumption that religions are all about gentleness and love. But what might be some of the weaknesses of this argument as it is currently stated? (Steer the conversation to make the point that stases and destabilizations need to be focused enough to be plausible and defensible.)

#### V. Reading the Prompt (15 minutes)

Now that you have a firmer understanding of what we mean when we say college writing, let's take some time to reflect about how you can begin crafting sophisticated arguments in your writing for this class and others. I'd like everyone to get out the prompt for your upcoming paper (or sample prompt, depending on what the professor provided) so we can brainstorm together about what kind of argument it is asking you to make. (Have a student read the prompt aloud. Ask the students to review the prompt considering the questions below.)

*They could do a think-pair-share first before opening up the discussion. Be sure to keep the instructor engaged, helping to answer questions. But also make sure the discussion is about how to read prompts in general and not just tiny questions about this assignment.*

- Are there key words worth noting?
  - maybe write on the board key words they note, especially the active verbs like "analyze" "discuss" "argue" "compare"
- What is being asked? What must you do? What should you not do?
- What sorts of evidence will you need?
  - Course materials? Outside research? Personal experience? Hypothetical situations? Statistical data?
- Who is your audience?
  - Encourage them to think not just of their professor but anyone in the field, or even their intelligent friends, or anyone familiar with the materials

- Are you being asked to use a certain style?
  - Being formal does not have to be stiff. Model yourself after course materials. But also use words you know (even while simultaneously working to expand your vocabulary).  
*Distribute the “Academic Voice” and “Understanding Your Assignment” handouts as take-aways*

With all this information in mind, take a few minutes to brainstorm individually about how you might begin to set up an argument in response to this prompt. How might you draw upon your course materials to generate a stasis? In what way is the prompt asking you to destabilize?

Hopefully you all now have a place from which to launch your papers, though you will likely need to refine your stasis and destabilization as your ideas continue to develop during the writing process.

## VI. Getting to know your writing process (5 min.)

Finally, let’s talk about your individual writing process. Part of making the transition into college writing is getting to know one’s writing process.

**GUSHERS:** Some of us gush when we write – we write out whatever is in our heads and write and write until it’s all out. Gushers tend to learn about their topics as they write about them; equally much, they discover what they want to say only after starting to write. Gushers have to go back through what they’ve written and give it form and structure, find and develop a thesis, make argumentative moves clear to a reader. Gushers usually need to spend quite a bit of time revising papers.

**EEKERS:** Some of us eek when we write – we typically have a difficult time with free-writing exercises and prefer to do quite a bit of thinking and outlining/mapping, talking, etc. before ever sitting down to write. Eekers spend a lot of time thinking through each paragraph and even each sentence before moving onto the next. Eekers usually need to spend a lot more time brainstorming and drafting their papers.

How many of you think you’re gushers? How many of you think you’re eekers? How many of you fall somewhere in between? It can be helpful to know what kind of writer you tend to be, even as it is also important to remain flexible enough to adapt and evolve.

We have thought only a little bit about our writing process. There are many more components (time of day, location, picking favorite quotes or summarizing texts, on paper or a computer, etc) that you can consider on your own, or even discuss with friends or a writing consultant.

## VII. Final Wrap Up (1-2 minutes)

Writing in college is bound to present you with new challenges and new opportunities to develop your writing habits and style. Stay open to these challenges and don’t be afraid to ask your instructors for help clarifying the requirements of a specific course or even a specific assignment within a course.

And remember that talking with a Writing Consultant at the Writing Studio can help you along the way.

## VIII. Minute Paper

Distribute the index cards and ask the students to answer (anonymously) one question on each side.

Question 1: What is the most important thing you've learned about college writing today? Question 2: What questions or concerns do you still have regarding college writing?

Collect these responses. If time permits, it might be worthwhile to read some or all, especially of Question 1, aloud. And possibly also to invite brief answers to the concerns raised in Question 2, if you decide to read any of those.

