Tell Me More, Tell Me More: Getting Writing Teachers Excited About the Framework

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Can I let you in on a little secret? I love the ACRL Framework. Love it. I think it's gutsy, ambitious, thoughtful, and highly relevant in today's information landscape. It's especially applicable to college students as they confront their ideas, practices, and habits related to information usage whether it be for personal use or for scholastic study. And though it's a bit hard to really get at such lofty concepts in one-shot sessions, I think that if we effectively communicate the framework's main tenants to the faculty members who do spend extended amounts of time with these students, the framework just might creep up in other class contexts that can connect information literacy skills to mainstream curriculum in a stronger way.

Why do I think this? Having taught as a full-time English faculty member for three years prior to being hired into my current library position, I have noticed that most of the writing/English faculty I've discussed the framework with really like it too. In my experience the frames are particularly attractive to graduates of the humanities who enjoy talking about issues of power, production, and structure in critical ways. And it's more than just finding them attractive—it's full on "Hey! I want to talk about these in my class!" or "Wow! I've never thought about it that way before!" or "Cool! I had no idea that library studies could be so provocative!" (Yeah, someone actually said that.)

What I'll discuss here is not necessarily a marketing plan, but more a way of interpreting the ACRL frames from within the point of view of the humanities, highlighting the parts of the framework that might naturally find its way into university and college writing curriculum. To do that I'll go through each one of the frames and discuss what an English, writing, or rhetoric instructor might find intriguing about it. Though not all of my experience is completely transferable to every potential reader, there may be some value in thinking about the framework from this other perspective to better convey its importance to those with whom you work.

Authority Is Constructed and Contextual

Without so much as a blink, any composition teacher would nod and agree with this statement: authority is constructed and contextual. Yep. First of all, "authority" is a notion widely discussed in most first-year composition courses, and most, if not all, English teachers have had to pay their dues teaching these classes. Second, the idea that something like authority can be "constructed" is

so mouth-wateringly post-modern that the instructor may get dreamy-eyed thinking of folks like Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes—those daring theorists who unpack post-structuralism in all of its glory. The idea of "context" is also salient in discussions of rhetoric when instructors are used to teaching about things like audience awareness, genre, and discourse communities.

To go back to the central notion of authority so often discussed in first-year composition courses is to revisit the inception of rhetoric itself, and one of the main tenants of argumentation is *ethos*—the Greek term for "character" which is now interpreted as an aspect of "authority." In preparing this article I revisited my textbook for the first composition and pedagogy class I took as an English graduate student where we studied rhetorical principles in depth. In *Introduction to Rhetorical Theory* (2002), the chapter on authority is telling as the author, Gerard Hauser, systematically unpacks the ways in which authority is both contextual and constructed.

Hauser complicates limited notions of authority when he says that "ethos has a reality for us as a *result of our discourse* about it—rather than a quality or an attribute that a person possesses, such as weight or height" (p. 147, my emphasis). This means that the way we talk about authority constructs its reality—a reality that is situationally dependent. Relating this idea to "source credibility," Hauser explains, can be confusing as it is easy to see authority simply as a convincing attribute an audience believes a speaker to have. This still misses something important about authority, though: "*Ethos* is not a thing or a quality but *an interpretation that is the product of a speaker-audience interaction*" (p. 147, emphasis in original).

Maybe this is why when I first encountered the Framework it seemed so familiar to me. It was using language and ideas that I had been grappling with for some time and applying them to a new setting that I found exciting and interesting. In fact, even within freshman writing courses we would talk about authority as being dependent on a variety of factors—not just one. This is stuff that composition teachers and unexperienced writers can both get and appreciate. These are conversations worth having.

Information Creation as a Process

I'll admit that this frame is less obviously connected to the work I did as an English faculty member, but upon

examination there are some subtle ways to connect the work done in writing classrooms with the work we can do in the library. The frame is written in such a way that it invites the reader to focus on what goes into making information—and this is also the main point of composition classes which focus on writing as a process unto itself.

Consider some terms we throw around in writing classes: prewriting, brainstorming, invention, cloud mapping, outlining, drafting, peer review, rewriting, revision, editing. All of these concepts are process-based, meaning that they uncover potential habits that one employs while writing. Now consider this knowledge practice from the framework which states that informational literate learners will "articulate the capabilities and constraints of information developed through various creation processes" ("Framework," 2.KP.1, 2015). Drawing attention to their writing process and comparing those to the processes that different sources go through in order to be produced can help students in their meta-cognitive reflection on their own writing as well as help them understand, in a sophisticated way, how information comes to be.

Information Has Value

Oh how I like this frame. I like it because it speaks to my inner-most activist: the part of me rearing for social justice and political change. And at its core "Information Has Value" has its fingers in all of these pies. It is about who gets to have information and who doesn't. It is about how one's information decisions affect those around them. It requires personal and societal reflection to flesh out its deepest implications of authorship and ownership. It is a frame that has the ability to shake the world of those who truly look at it straight in the face.

Much of the contemporary theories in the humanities have to do with issues of capital "P" politics—not the incessant squabbling between political parties, but instead the overwhelming power dynamics which affect individual and collective identities. We spent whole units discussing power structures, identity politics, privilege and authorship in a "Fundamentals of Literary Interpretation" course I taught for some years.

Even in a basic composition course the idea of ethically engaging with one's audience is key—and ethics has a crucial role in any discussion of power and influence. In other words, when framing discussions on citations (that most boring of boring subjects for students) one can seriously spruce it up by discussing issues of access, legality, and representation—and even the problems of such in today's information landscape. Perhaps it would be helpful to bring those capital "P" discussions into the library classroom where students have to critically think about how they are using information and the socioeconomic factors that go into its dissemination. And if you can get at some of these issues of social justice and ethics while involving the composition teacher in these discussions, you might be surprised at what excitement such an invitation will illicit.

Research as Inquiry

As I was recently reading through the recently published book edited by Deborah Coxwell-Teague & Roanld F. Lunsford entitled *First-Year Composition: From Theory to Practice* I was surprised at how often the idea of inquiry popped up both in the theoretical introductions of courses and in the sample syllabi collected in the volume. Inquiry-based papers and projects and the process of inquisitive investigation itself are not foreign to writing teachers, and, in fact, might be one of the easiest connections you can make with them.

But "research as inquiry" is more than just forming a research question (though this is certainly part of it). It is about the attitude one takes when approaching a project. For a freshman audience this means shifting from the attitude of "I want to find the right answer" to "I want to explore the possibilities." That is not an easy shift to make, and it hinges on key ideas from the framework's depositions which suggest that a learner see research as "open-ended" by appreciating complexity and open mindedness. Such a learner, the framework suggests, values "persistence, adaptability, and flexibility and *recognize[s] that ambiguity* can benefit the research process" ("Framework," 2015, my emphasis). These traits are central to the humanities, as humanist studies explore the grey spaces where so much of the human condition resides. They are also key to writing studies which shies away from polarizing rhetoric and instead promotes civil discourse which avoids binary thinking. In this sense, discussions on ambiguity and intellectual humility might be helpful ones to have as you help students approach the confusing processes of research and argumentation.

Scholarship as Conversation

Ever heard of Kenneth Burke? If not, never fear, I'll clue you in. If you have heard of him, you probably realize that any student of rhetoric and composition hallows his name as a brilliant rhetorical theorist. Scholarship as conversation is, one might say, his baby. His "parlor chat" or "unending conversation" metaphor from his book *The Philosophy of Literary Form* is widely used as a way of understanding that scholarship is a type of conversation. His illustration is this: You enter a parlor where a robust discussion is going on—the discussion has been going on for some time and will continue to go on after you leave. First, you listen to the conversation to

gather your bearings, then you decide to throw in your two cents. When you leave, the parlor is still bustling and the conversation lasts long into the night (pp. 110-111).

This is likened unto what happens in academia where good academics realize scholarly debates are long, and require one to understand the context before adding their voices. This metaphor also perfectly describes the kind of work the "scholarship as conversation" frame is trying to engage students in as they enter academic conversations themselves. Getting students to see themselves as burgeoning experts is both helpful in their own intellectual maturity and in their understanding of how academic conversations work. Seeing scholarship as a type of conversation can help with that, and I'm sure you'll find that other faculty members will agree with you. Deliberately dropping Burke's name probably won't hurt either.

Searching as Strategic Exploration

I think this is very related to the "research as inquiry" frame already discussed. The open-endedness, ambiguity, and open-mindedness needed to see searching as strategic exploration is important. Perhaps what I will emphasize here, though, is the idea of messiness. Most writing teachers I know try to underline the importance of embracing the messiness of writing—of dirtying up a page so that you have something to work with. They emphasize the rewriting and revising processes. I think that this same principle bears discussion with "searching as strategic exploration" especially in the disposition to "exhibit mental flexibility and creativity" ("Framework," 2015).

Such flexibility and creativity is also a part of the writing process, and if we underline that in the library, we can also help relate such a process to the messiness that students have experienced while drafting. They won't be thrilled that the process isn't just 1, 2, 3, easy and done, but they will at least recognize the similarities in thinking. Teachers will appreciate such tie-ins as well. The strength of the framework is the way it can create such connections across disciplines. It can relate the research process to many processes in life which are neither linear nor rigid. Instead, the research process (like the writing process) requires patience, and flexibility. And hey, life does too.

Conclusion and Application

The ACRL Framework can be super attractive—nay, *sexy*—if presented in the right way to the right audience. And I dare say it isn't all that hard to present it to an audience that is already predisposed to like it as some of the faculty members with which you surely work: English professors, rhetoric and composition instructors, and writing teachers among others. Let me give you a few examples about where to broach the topic from my experience:

1. In one-on-one conversations with instructors: A graduate instructor for whom I teach library instruction sessions recently asked that I add more reflective time at the end of the class for the students to consider how the skills they learned in the library work on a grander level. It was the perfect place for me to discuss with him the "searching as strategic exploration" frame and consider ways that the messiness of researching reflects the messiness of writing, which in turn reflects the messiness of life itself.

2. In the classroom: In our freshmen composition courses we've created a curriculum that speaks to a very specific research need, and we tie frames in where they organically fit. For instance, recently while teaching about source evaluation and discussing authority, the students and I engaged in a detailed discussion about what exactly makes authority "contextual" and "constructed." We discussed that if the students are writing to an academic audience, scholarship has been constructed on certain notions, and peer-review is one of them. It would make sense, then, that students would cite these type of sources given the students' contextual, academic audience.

3. In program-level discussions: Our first-year writing program recently adopted a new textbook. While discussing OER with the Writing Program Coordinator I was able to talk about the value of information and how & why students are paying so much for college textbooks. That discussion led into other nuanced conversations: What is a research paper, anyway? What counts as research? Is there a way to make it more applicable for the students? These are all big questions that have their root in issues of money, power, and influence: indeed, information has value. The way we frame students' research writing process helps uncover these wider issues of access and information consumption/production.

Overall, though you may not be able to make *every* frame applicable in *every* instance, it is nice to know that there is so much carry over between thinking about information literacy, and the work that goes on in studying textual production. As the Framework provides stronger implications and a wider reach for information literacy understanding, librarians must up their game at extending such a reach in new and innovative ways. And I have full faith that they will.