Project 3: Discourse Community Analysis

Students will explore what counts as “good” writing or “successful” communication in a community of their choice (e.g., related to a particular major, career, or hobby they are interested in) through primary source research (conducting an interview and a genre analysis) and secondary source research (using UofL library databases and making connections to course readings). This project should, therefore, reflect what students have learned throughout the semester.

## Part 1: Choose a discourse community and collect primary source data

1. Choose a discourse community to study and **contact someone to interview** in this particular community, career, academic major, or line of work. The focus of the interview will be on the person’s writing and communication practices. (See the [Archive of Workplace Writing Experiences](https://www.workplace-writing.org/) for examples of interviews like this.) Your interviewee does not need to have “writer” in their title, since writing happens everywhere!

* You might ask questions like: How long have you been here? How did you get involved and why? What are your primary roles/responsibilities? What kinds of writing do you do, or what different ways do you communicate with other people (e.g., on your team, at your restaurant)? How did you learn to write or communicate in those ways? What processes do you follow or strategies do you use? (See also Sean Branick’s interview questions (pp. 634-5 of *WAW*) for an example of interview questions for coaches about their literacy practices.)

1. **Collect texts** from the person you interview or materials that others in the community read or write. If your participant cannot share materials they’ve composed–such as medical notes–then gather other examples, such as pamphlets, textbook excerpts, or email communication, etc.
2. **Observe the discourse community** (*optional)* while they are engaged with other members in a shared activity—make sure to take detailed notes.

* You might ask questions like: What are they doing? What kinds of things do they say? What do they write? How do you know who is “in” and who is “out”?

## Part 2: Collect secondary source data

1. Brainstorm who might be writing about your community, where, and what kinds of information you would like to find out from secondary sources.
2. Complete the ENGL 101 [information literacy module](https://louisville.libwizard.com/f/english101) on using UofL library databases to find sources. Then, use those strategies to search for your own sources.
3. Based on what you’ve found, how might you use it in your project? Could you discuss the information in your introduction, to set up a key issue or concern the community is involved with? Or would it be useful to discuss as you write about your primary source data, to shed additional light on what you’ve found?

## Part 3: Analyze your data

First, try analyzing the interview and textual data you collect using the characteristics of a discourse community found in Swales (p. 544). This will give you an overall picture of the community. Then, focus on what you’re interested in about this community’s discourse. You might ask:

* What goals and characteristics do members of this group share? Are there conflicts within the community? If so, what are they? Why do they occur? Do texts mediate these conflicts or make them worse in some way?
* What qualifies this group as a discourse community? In other words, why do you think/how do you know this group is a discourse community?
* Who has authority here? How is that authority demonstrated in written and oral language? Where does the authority come from? Who has less authority? Do they have difficulty speaking and/or writing there? Why?
* Which modes of communication are popular among the community? And, which of these modes might be considered a genre? Are any genres especially effective in helping the community work toward its goals–or keeping the community from working toward its goals? Why?
* Does the community have any sort of specialized language practice(s)?

In addition, consider how your primary source data and your secondary source data “speak to” each other. What connections can you make?

# *Part 4: Planning and Drafting*

As you develop answers to some of the above questions, start setting some priorities. Given all you have learned, is there something interesting regarding *how* the writing or communication practices help the community achieve its goals? Are there conflicts in the community, and are those reflected in how the group communicates? Do you see oral or written evidence of how people gain authority in the community?

At this point, you should stop and write a refined research question for yourself that you’d like to address in the project. (Consult any of the examples for how you might do this.)

Your final text will have the following parts:

* Introduce your community
* Begin with a brief literature review–that is, a review of the existing literature (published research) on the topic: “We know X about discourse communities” *(optional)*
* Name a niche (“But we don’t know Y” or “No one has looked at X”) *(optional)*
* Explain how you will occupy the niche *(optional)*
* Describe your research methods
* Discuss your findings in detail–make claims and back them up with quotes from your interview; excerpts from the texts you analyzed; summaries, paraphrases, and quotations from secondary sources and course readings
* Include a works cited page

# What Makes It Good?

* Appx. 5-8 double-spaced pages, or digital equivalent
* Demonstrates a clear understanding of the unit’s threshold concepts and the characteristics of a discourse community
* Analyzes the features of good writing or successful communication in the community, *but also* goes beyond listing to explore a particularly interesting aspect in depth.
* Includes an interview you conduct and examples of writings or communication from the community.
* Makes connections to secondary sources about the community and to course readings.
* Paraphrases, quotes, and cites sources appropriately.
* Is thoughtfully organized.
* Is thoughtfully edited depending on the conventions of the language varieties you are using in your project.
* Includes a Works Cited/References page.

# Timeline

* Primary Source
  + Contact interviewee and schedule interview (Due Nov 3)
  + Draft interview questions (Due Nov 3)
  + Conduct, record, transcribe interview (if synchronous/in-person) (flexible, but as soon as possible)
  + Collect examples of interviewee’s or community’s writing or communication practices *(optional)*
* Secondary Source
  + Complete ENGL 101 information literacy module to find secondary sources (Due Nov 10)
* Writing Process
  + Outline (Due Nov 15)
  + A draft of either primary or secondary source analysis (at least 1.5 pages) (Due Nov 17)
  + Rough drafts (around 4 pages) (Due Nov 29)
  + Revision + reflective cover letter (Due Dec 6)