

Improving team projects through collaborative writing exercises

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Focus of the presentation

Collaborative writing in BA program in Portuguese and Brazilian Studies

Our “situation”, objectives and goals

Obstacles to good teamwork and collaborative writing

A new way of working in 2015

How different is what we do?



Our situation, objectives and goal

Situation

Problem-based learning focus in "content" courses
No dedicated writing course in BA program

Objectives

Training designed over several semesters
Systematic progression built into training

Goal

Prepare students for future team collaboration at a professional level



- **Problem-based learning integrated with “content” courses**

Students prepare for team projects in several semesters:

- 1st Introduction to area studies
 Introduction to the Portuguese-speaking world
- 2nd Debates and voices in Brazilian society
- 3rd Debates and voices in Portuguese society
- 4th Problem-based team project



- **Progression of research & writing skills**

General *modus operandi*:

- 1) REVERSE ENGINEERING of the genre / skill
- 2) Practice the component parts
- 3) Provide writing practice - individually, then collaboratively



- Progression of research & writing skills**

Semester 1: 3 critical response papers, joint written exam

skimming / scanning for information

Paragraph, Section or Page	Lexical (What words clue you to the importance of the concept, theory or argument?)	Sequence of arguments (What is the sequence of arguments and what difference does the sequencing mean?)	Tables / Footnotes (Is there any crucial evidence provided in the footnotes or graphic information, such as tables?)	Need for clarification outside the text (What must be clarified outside the text: e.g., dictionary?)

	TOPIC (What issue does the author refer to?)	ARGUMENT (What does the author argue about the issue?)	CONTEXT (What is the larger context of the issue, if given?)	REFERENCE (Does the author mention other authors or thinkers?)	SCIENTIFIC TERMS (What terms are used, if any? Are they defined by the author?)
Paragraph, Section or Page					



- **Progression of research & writing skills**

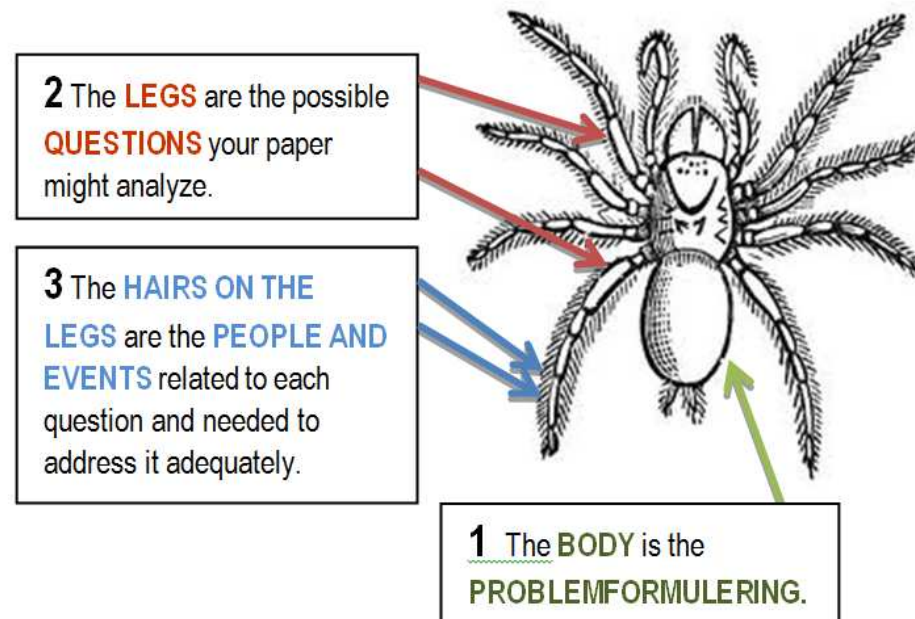
Semester 2 – Team projects + individual logs

spider (body + legs) as analogy for main and sub-topics
reflexivity

regular meetings among team members

individual logs (2 chapters: registry, reflections)

3 class presentations of team projects during semester



Reported and observed challenges for teams

Uneven ability (research, analysis, writing)

Uneven commitment to course (and final grade)

Incompatible working styles

Difficulty in finding compatible meeting times

Unsure of what to discuss in team meetings

Dominance of some members / silence of others



Approach in 2015

Semester 3 – Team projects + logs + oral exam

2 presentations of team projects during semester

Goal: improve collaboration in writing (and final product)

- Focus on research paper as a series of **genres**

(in combination with)

- Collaborative process more clearly **structured**



Sample research paper structures

traditional

- INTRODUCTION, INCLUDING FORMULATION OF THE PROBLEM
- (CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE PROBLEM - CAN BE A PART OF THE INTRODUCTION)
- CONCEPTS AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES
- METHODOLOGY (TYPE OF DATA)
- ANALYSIS
- DISCUSSION
- CONCLUSIONS
- (BIBLIOGRAPHY AND ATTACHMENTS)

sample alternative

- INTRODUCTION, INCLUDING CONTEXTUALIZATION AND FORMULATION OF THE PROBLEM
- CONCEPTS, THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY
- CASE 1 (“LOCAL” ANALYSIS IN EACH CASE)
- CASE 2 (CASE 3, 4 ...)
- ANALYSIS (OVERALL ANALYSIS)
- CONCLUSIONS
- (BIBLIOGRAPHY AND ATTACHMENTS)



Procedures / Guidelines

In class (3 hours teaching + 1 hour project work)

- Discussion of characteristics of each genre (document them)
- Set regular deadlines during the semester for reporting on progress

In group meetings

- Meet regularly (in person, via skype)
- Take meeting minutes
- **Agree on content** of each section **before** writing, using “genre characteristics” lists as a starting point for discussion
- Negotiate deadlines, working processes



Comparisons to the work of others

Most common practices

Teacher-defined and planned projects

Collaborative writing projects in the FL class

Use of online tools/programs (e.g., Google Docs)

Lunsford & Arraez (2001)

Speck (2002)

Rattleff (2015)



Sample References

Chisholm, Richard M. 1990. Coping with the problems of collaborative writing. *Writing Across the Curriculum II (August)*.

Lundsford, Andrea & Arraez, Corinne. 2001. Working together: Collaborative research and writing in Higher Education. *Profession*: 7-15.

Rattleff, Pernille. 2015. TEACH seminar. September. Copenhagen.

Speck, Bruce W. 2002. *Facilitating Students' Collaborative Writing*. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report 28(6). San Francisco, CA: Wiley.

