

## **Sequence of Peer Responses for Historicizing a Community of Practice**

In what follows, we offer a sequence of activities that may stretch over a semester or a matter of weeks. Thus, while we mark each with the word “day” we do not mean to imply that these would necessarily follow a strict day-by-day timeline. The sequence might occur over eleven consecutive class meetings, but teachers may wish to elongate the series for larger projects. Further, while the series maximizes student interaction throughout the process of composing a history, teachers may decide to eliminate or combine some of the following peer activities.

### **Day One**

After completing a series of heuristic prompts designed to help the writer identify possible personal, professional, academic, public or social communities to research, the writer brings to class a list of several possible topics to historicize. (These might include, for instance, origin of a practice such as tattooing, origin of a cultural object such as a piece of clothing, history of a place such as a national park or a mall, history of the first woman police officer in one’s hometown, and so on.) In small groups, peers ask questions and/or offer comments of the following kinds:

1. What kind of investment do you have in each of these communities?
2. What degree of investment do you have in each of these communities?
3. What do you want to learn about each of these communities?
4. What do you already know about each of these communities?
5. What kinds of sources will you need to explore as you work with each of these communities?
6. What views do you hold about each of these communities?
7. What makes each of these communities suitable for historicizing?

*Goal:* To help the writer see challenges and opportunities in writing about some aspect of each potential community.

### **Day Two**

Having chosen a community to historicize, the writer brings to class elaborated written responses to the questions from Day One. In small groups, peers offer the following questions/comments:

1. Why did you choose this community for your history?
2. What has brought you to your current views about this community?
3. How do you plan to focus your history of this community?
4. What kinds of research do you need to do to effectively historicize an aspect of this community?

5. What do you need to do to strengthen your ethos as you historicize this community?

*Goal:* To help the writer better understand his or her perspective on the community and to identify the kinds of research needed to address the topic.

### Day Three

After conducting background reading on the chosen community (guided by a series of heuristic prompts), the writer brings to the session a list of questions to guide the research necessary to historicize some aspect of the community effectively. Peers pose and help respond to the following kinds of questions:

1. What more would you like to know about this community?
2. What might others want to know about this community?
3. What kinds of books might inform your history?
4. What kinds of articles might inform your history?
5. What kinds of Web sites might inform your history?
6. What kinds of archival sources might inform your history?
7. What oral histories might be available? Who might you interview to do an oral history?
8. How will you systematically search for any of the aforementioned materials?

*Goal:* To help the writer understand the kinds of research that she or he will need to do to write the history.

### Day Four

The writer brings to class at least three sources selected from the possibilities discussed on Day Three—books, articles, Web sites, archival sources, oral histories. During the session, peers pose the following kinds of questions:

1. How credible is each of these sources? How do you know that?
2. How closely aligned is each of these sources to the focus for your history?
3. What additional sources might you need to write your history?

*Goal:* To help the writer evaluate the usefulness of sources.

### Day Five

After engaging in a series of heuristic prompts designed to help writers analyze the research notes and data, the writer brings to class some notes on each of the sources that he or she has studied.

During the session, peers pose the following kinds of questions:

1. What have you learned from each of these sources?
2. What is the subject position of the person(s) who wrote each of these sources?
3. What can you use from each of these sources as you write your history?
4. What quotations might you use from any of these sources as you write your history?

*Goal:* To help the writer understand how to analyze and use source material in the history.

### Day Six

The writer brings to class some written invention work in which she or he has focused on the rhetorical situation for the history in keeping with the fourth tenet of contextual design. Peers not only pose but also help to respond to the following kinds of questions:

1. What are the possible audiences for your history of this community?
2. How might their interests in this community coincide with yours?
3. What possible purposes do you have for writing a history for any of these audiences?
4. What are the possible contexts in which any of these audiences might read your history?

### Day Seven

The writer brings to class a partial or full draft of the history. Peers pose the following kinds of questions:

1. How have you thus far fulfilled your purposes for writing this history?
2. How have you met the needs of the potential audiences for this history?
3. How have you established your ethos in the history?

*Goal:* To help the writer see any gaps. Conversely, to help the writer learn to read critically as a writer.

### Day Eight

The writer brings to class a full draft of the history. In small groups, peers engage in a peer response activity.

*Goal:* To help the writer see any further gaps, and develop a rhetorical eye for reading.

## Day Nine

The writer brings to class a revised version of the full paper. In small groups, peers focus on the ways in which the writer has quoted and documented sources. As peers examine documentation, they also focus on MLA or APA format.

*Goal:* To help the writer quote and document sources carefully.

## Day Ten

The writer brings to class a revised version in which he or she has attended to the use of sources. In small groups, peers do round-robin editing of the writer's revised history.

*Goal:* To help the writer attend to the table manners of writing the history.

## Day Eleven

The writer brings the polished version of the position paper to submit to the teacher. At the beginning of class, students exchange papers to subject them to proofreading. The writer then reflects on the process of researching and writing the history. This written reflection could serve as invention material for the portfolio that each student is developing throughout the course. It may also serve to make the transition to the next paper.

*Goal:* To help the writer develop proofreading skills, and to help the writer reflect on the process of conducting and writing history in line with our fifth tenet of transformed practice. Self-reflexivity on the processes help students begin to understand how they can draw on rhetorical strategies they already have, and those they are developing, to aid them in participating in new rhetorical situations.