

Bear Day Presentation

Hi, my name is Katelyn Corbett. I am a junior at Mercer University, an equal parts lover of literature and an aspiring educator. Long before starting college though, I was a timid second grader sitting at a desk in what is now considered the “Old Science and Engineering” building. It was my first day of Mercer’s College for Kids for Creative Writers. Since that day, my love for the written word has broadened. Nearly thirteen years later, Mercer continues to be the place that inspires me as a writer of fiction, yes, but also as a writer of nonfiction, poetry, and traditional academic essay. My admiration for writing led me to pursue training as a Writing Preceptor Scholar at Mercer. Through the program, I have learned to appreciate the value of academic writing as an equal counterpart to creative writing. Because of teachers I’ve had throughout my life, I plan to share my love for language with my own students who, much like that timid second-grader, feel uneasy about the process and function of writing in their lives. My Honors Project, titled *Writing in the Reader*, is the truest representation of my life at Mercer. It has taken the student, the preceptor, and the educator in me to complete the task I set out to accomplish a year ago. I am honored to share my work with the Mercer community.

Writing in the Reader is an experiential learning project that targets a dual audience: instructors and students of the Integrated Studies Program (INT) at Mercer University. With a focus on integrative content and writing instruction, the INT program provides students with an educational experience that prepares them for diverse and challenging experiences as citizens and professionals of the “real world.” Two of the ways the program approaches these tasks is by using the *Mercer Reader* and the Mercer Writing Core. The *Mercer Reader* is a collection of texts designed to facilitate the teaching of integrative content. This anthology includes short stories, academic essays, and interviews with astounding citizens of the Middle Georgia area. Instructors of the INT sequence are encouraged to use the *Mercer Reader* as an educational resource in the classroom, as it models the

importance of integrative learning. Despite its exclusive contribution to the program's focus on integrative content, the *Mercer Reader* only accomplishes one of the program's primary goals. The other major contributor to the program, Mercer's Writing Core, was created and implemented by Dr. Deneen Senasi, an Associate Professor of English and the Writing Program Director at Mercer University. Made up of ten modules that focus on a selection of essential writing skills for undergraduates, the Writing Core is the most useful resource for teaching writing in the INT classroom.

Although instructors may intend for integrative content and writing instruction to be taught simultaneously, the unfortunate truth is that one is often considered superior to the other. Students often leave the program with insufficient knowledge and abilities in one of the program's main focuses. To prevent this curricular gap from continuing, I created an educational resource that aids in the simultaneous teaching of integrative content and writing instruction. *Writing in the Reader* acts as the intermediary between the *Mercer Reader* and the Writing Core by providing educational resources for both instructors and students of the INT program.

The goal of the project is to facilitate knowledge transfer for students in the program. The INT sequence is challenging to teach both because of its central role in general education and the number of student learning outcomes it includes. My project addresses these challenges by synthesizing writing instruction with integrative content to produce maximum educational opportunity and promote knowledge transfer. The effectiveness of *Writing in the Reader* comes from its usability across each of the INT course sequences. The *Mercer Reader* texts that were selected for the project are included in sections for INT 101, 201, and 301; therefore, the use of *Writing in the Reader* is not limited to only one course within the INT sequence. Furthermore, students can transfer their integrative knowledge and writing skills into their major courses of study. As aforementioned, the goal of the INT program is to prepare students for real world challenges. *Writing in the Reader*

enhances this goal by making the connection between integrative content and writing instruction stronger, enabling students to use their knowledge and skill after graduation.

Writing in the Reader consists of ten modules. Each module is numbered to match the Writing Core concept that it is based off of. Each module focuses on one selected text from the *Mercer Reader* and one Writing Core concept. These two components are interdependent; they work together to effectively teach how the selected text from the *Mercer Reader* could be used to model the writing concept. As you will remember, the Mercer Writing Core is composed of ten skills with a corresponding module for each. The *Mercer Reader* features selections designed to introduce students to integrative practices and ideas. To illustrate this interconnected relationship, I will use *Writing in the Reader* Module 8, titled “Clarity, Concision, and Context using ‘Ithaka.’” The selected text, “Ithaka,” written by poet Constantine Cavafy, is a good match for the Writing Core concept because of its specific use of context. “Ithaka” draws on allusions to Homer’s epic poem “The Odyssey,” in which Odysseus embarks on a ten-year return home from Troy. Throughout the poem, Odysseus encounters challenges that prolong his journey. These challenges represent the various obstacles that we must overcome in our individual journeys through life. The *Writing in the Reader* module details how Cavafy’s poem can be used to model clarity, concision, and context. Like all the modules in *Writing in the Reader*, Module 8 is made up of three components: Instructional Support Modules (ISMs), Student Learning Modules (SLMs), and How-to-Handouts (HHs).

Instructional Support Modules are resources that aid in the teaching of integrative content and writing instruction. ISMs are composed of four sections: *Reader Connections*, *Matching Module*, *Writing in the Reader*, and *Try This*. The *Reader Connections* section provides the instructor with a detailed summary and analysis of the selected text. Instructors can then use this information as talking points to guide discussion and/or student writing. An example paragraph from Module 8 is provided to further demonstrate this point:

The poet continues by addressing the battles that all are bound to face; however, he does not suggest that bad times are inevitable. Conversely, he states that “you won’t encounter them / unless you bring them along inside of your soul” (11-12). Contrary to what most assume about life, Cavafy declares that hardship is perspectival. We are only doomed to experience hardship if we allow ourselves to perceive life in that way.

As illustrated in this excerpt, instructors can use important lines and passages to further inform students about the text and get them thinking about the topic as it relates to their individual lives.

The Matching Module section summarizes the most important concepts from the selected Writing Core module. The Matching Module section for Module 8 explains the necessity for clarity, concision, and context; however, for this example, I have chosen to focus on context, as it is most relevant to Cavafy’s poem. In this example, instructors are provided with a rationale for emphasizing context. To further explain this idea, Module 8 reads:

The context surrounding a piece of evidence is important to understanding a text. Without context, readers are often left unsure of where the argument stemmed from and why it should matter to them. To establish context, encourage students to consider their purpose, exigence, and genre (see Student How-to-Handout 8 for more information). Students should also consider their rhetorical situation, which consists of the text/issue, the writer, and the audience.

As illustrated in this passage, instructors are provided with a brief summary of the Writing Core concept. The Matching Module section is composed of definition and functions for the writing concepts; additionally, it provides tips for getting students thinking about themselves as writers.

The Writing in the *Reader* section demonstrates how the author's stylistic choices model the writing concept. This section focuses on bridging the gap between integrative content and writing instruction, which are detailed more explicitly in the sections that precede it. Module 8 focuses on how Cavafy's poem models clarity, concision, and context, but most specifically context. As an example is provided to illustrate this point:

An intriguing aspect of Cavafy's poem is its references to Homer's Greek epic poem "The Odyssey." To understand Cavafy's poem in its entirety, it is necessary that the reader also understands this mythological story from 8th-century BCE. "The Odyssey," like Cavafy's poem, is a story about journeying; however, in Homer's version, the journey is real, and it is taken by the story's hero, Odysseus.

As demonstrated in the excerpt, the Writing in the *Reader* section links the text to the writing concept, modeling how the author's choices can be used in student writing.

Finally, the Try This section provides instructors with a discussion topic or writing prompt for students to complete. The goal of this section is to get students thinking about the integrative content and writing in a more individualized way. For example, the Try This section for Module 8 reads:

The home that Cavafy imagines is not necessarily a physical house, but a place where we return to. For some, this may be a childhood home; for others, it may be a special location that holds many memories, or even a person with whom those memories are shared.

Have students make a list of characteristics of their home. An example list may be: peace, acceptance for who I truly am, the sound of the ocean, warmth, unconditional love.

Once students have compiled their lists, have them discuss the following questions as a class:

Where is your Ithaka? What would your journey look like to get there? What Poseidon's and cyclops would you have to overcome along the way?

This example demonstrates how the Try This section can be used to generate thoughtful discussion among the class. The prompts and discussion questions can be easily modified to fit various class structures and/or assignments.

The second modular component of *Writing in the Reader* is the Student Learning Module. SLMs translate information from ISMs to provide “news students can use” about integrative content and writing concepts. Although intended for student use, this module has the additional benefit of providing INT instructors with resources they can supply to students on the fly. SLMs are made up of three of the four components of their instructor counterpart: *Reader Connections*, *Matching Module*, and *Writing in the Reader*. Each section serves the same purpose; however, the information is presented in a more student-friendly manner. Written by a student for students, SLMs are condensed and easy to understand. To show this, I have included a paragraph from Module 8's SLM. It reads:

The poem opens with Cavafy wishing goodwill on the reader as the voyager. Addressing hardships, he suggests that bad times only come if we allow them into our lives. Contrary to reader expectations, Cavafy insinuates that bad times are based on perspective.

This paragraph conveys the same information from the *Reader Connections* section of the ISM; however, it is more readily digestible for a student audience.

The final modular component of *Writing in the Reader* is the How-to-Handout. This resource provides instructors with discussion questions and talking points related to the selected text and writing concept. HHs are designed as in-class resources that support the delivery of writing instruction and integrative content in real time. HHs are made up of two parts: *Reader Connections* and *Writing in the Reader*. The *Reader Connections* section focuses on discussion solely about the selected text. This discussion should get students thinking about integrative content and how the self is influenced by others, the community, and/or the world. An example from Module 8 is:

Talking Point: The poem locates monsters and trouble within; they aren't part of the journey, they are part of the traveler. The speaker's solution to the dangers of the journey is perspectival, it depends upon individual perspective. He argues that you won't encounter these dangers unless you allow your soul to project them onto your path.

Discussion Question: This claim could be controversial. Do you think that hardship is perspectival? Is evil and tragedy embedded within us? How or how not?

As seen in this example, this section encourages students to think about the text as a means of self-reflecting. The *Reader Connections* section of HHs models how the selected text can be used and thought of in a “real world” setting.

The *Writing in the Reader* section of HHs aims to get students thinking about themselves as writers. The questions and topics posed ask students to locate where and how the author does a specific task; additionally, students should think about how they could employ similar strategies in their own writing. For example:

Talking Point: For the poet, the form of poetry requires clarity and concision from stanza to stanza. For the reader, however, the form is allusive and figurative.

Discussion Question: Identify parts of the poem that are harder to understand. If it were an academic paper, how would you rewrite those parts to be more explicit?

This excerpt demonstrates how an author’s stylistic choices can be discussed, and then applied to students writing. This section also generates writing strategies and topics that students can use later in the course.

Writing in the Reader is intended to be used in varying degrees per the instructor’s discretion; however, based on my experience as a Preceptor Scholar and in the twelve months spent developing this project, I recommend the “All In” approach or the “A La Carte” approach as strategies for instructors who wish to use *Writing in the Reader* in their courses. The “All In” approach would ask instructors to use *Writing in the Reader* as the main method of delivery in their INT class. Using this approach, the professor would use ISMs and HHs to build conversation and present materials. Additionally, professors would supply students with SLMs as an additional resource. On the opposite end of the spectrum, the “A La Carte” approach would ask instructors to use *Writing in the*

Reader modules as occasional supplements to their own teaching. Using this approach, professors would select which resources benefit their class the most. Although these two methods are drastically different, they both support knowledge transfer; therefore, neither approach is superior to the other.

As a future teacher, this project has helped me think strategically about how to bring together the components of a course to facilitate knowledge transfer. Since beginning this project, I have learned the importance of integrating the two components of the program. I realize that while integrative content and writing instruction can be taught independently of each other, they are strongest when taught in congruence. To effectively accomplish the goal of the INT program—effective communication in the face of real world challenges—students must be able to think about integrative content and writing instruction as two parts to one whole. It is my hope that *Writing in the Reader* achieves its goal of making the integration of INT content and writing instruction more digestible. Furthermore, I hope that these resources enable students to become more effective writers who understand the importance of integrative content in addressing diverse situations they face following graduation.

Writing in the Reader has not yet been implemented in a classroom; however, the project will be piloted in the Fall of 2020. An official pilot team has not been designed, but I plan for the team to be composed of an inclusive set of INT faculty. Ideally, the team would include both adjunct and full time professors of INT 101, 201, and 301. Additionally, the team would include members who have experience teaching writing and members who do not have such experience. Having an inclusive pilot team ensures that *Writing in the Reader* will be tested in as many classroom structures as possible. An iteration of the project has been presented to INT faculty and is endorsed by the INT program.

