Making the Transition to Business Writing

Clarifying the Differences for Students

IMITATION: Provide students with a model business letter that contracts for an expectation, e.g. client to service provider. Ask students at the start of semester or at midterm to write a similar letter, stating what they expect to learn by the end of your course.

GENRE DESCRIPTION: Identify a specific genre of business writing (e.g. product analysis, abstract, executive summary, financial report). Ask students to bring a sample to class, suggesting sources where they can find such a sample. Ask them to write a careful description of the features they notice about the sample. Get the class to share what they’ve described, so you can add any feature they’ve missed. This description can be most effective preceding an assignment requiring students to write in such a genre.

DIFFERING GENRES/AUDIENCES: Tell students to write an email to a close friend who works for and can describe a company the student might someday want to work for. At the same time, tell them to write a formal letter of inquiry, requesting employment information from the same firm. As part of the assignment, students must reflect on the differences between the two pieces they write, heeding rhetorical choices and conventions especially.

TYPES OF READING: Get students to bring the financial section of a newspaper or other business publication. Have them write down what makes the reading task unique in terms of vocabulary, information, style, reader expectations. Transition from one kind of writing to another requires guidance.

Give it a Try: Workshop & Interaction

TO BEGIN: Please take 5 minutes to list 3 differences and 3 similarities you think are most important between what students learn in composition classes and what they must learn about business writing. Then list 2 ways these differences or similarities might affect your approach to assigning business writing.

TO APPLY: Take another 5 minutes to imagine a written activity that you could do within the next 2 weeks, based on the above suggestions, or on an idea of your own. How do you hope this activity would help students make the transition to business writing? What specific concern would it address?