

WHAT FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION COURSES TEACH

- ❖ All writing occurs within contexts that involve the rhetorical elements of *purpose*, *audience*, *ethos* (that is, the credibility and personality of a text), *subject matter*, and *a process of textual production* that involves *planning*, *drafting* (that is, textual organization and sentence generation), and *revising*, even in situations that do not allow for lengthy, structured sessions of each.
- ❖ All discourse exists at various levels: those of *ideas*, overall *organization* of a text, organization of smaller sections of text, *paragraphs*, *sentences*, and *words*. See the handout **Levels of Discourse**.
- ❖ Lower levels of discourse – often referred to as the “mechanics” of discourse (i.e., sentences, clauses, phrases, spelling, punctuation, minor word choice) are important but not intrinsically so. Grammar, punctuation, and spelling are important only as reflections of the writer’s *ethos*, which is often dictated by conventions of the discourse community to which and within which the writer is writing. The formality or informality of that *ethos* dictates the importance of correct mechanics. An error in a letter to a client is much more devastating than an error in a letter to friend. Moreover, some mechanical errors are perceived as more important than other mechanical errors (see the handouts **Not All Errors Are Created Equal** and **The Top 20 Errors that Students Make**).
- ❖ The process of composing involves *recursive* movement among a variety of cognitive activities:
 - ⇒ **INVENTION**: the development of ideas/content
 - ⇒ **DRAFTING**: the generating of textual material
 - ⇒ **REVISING**: changing ideas and text at all levels of discourse
 - ⇒ **EDITING**: making changes in grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
- ❖ Successful, experienced writers move freely between *metacognitive awareness*, or a heightened consciousness of composing decisions, and *automaticity* – that is, being able to produce text without self-conscious thought.
- ❖ Most, if not all, writing involves a social interaction. Communication exists within ongoing “conversations” or deliberations within discourse communities. Thus, knowledge inquiry and research are inherent components of the writer’s engagement with the subject matter of the writing.