Hybrid Writing Assignments

What is Hybrid Writing?

Hybrid writing fuses genres and styles, and its forms are unlimited. For the purposes of higher education, let's define it this way: Hybrid writing fuses subjective and objective, the creative and the critical, the personal and the public. A hybrid writing assignment might combine any elements of the following:

1. An analytical inquiry/argument that responds to a text and/or draws on multiple outside (often scholarly) sources. Might include a complex thesis advanced by main ideas in academic format. Might use third person in places.

2. A personal narrative or anecdote(s), disclosure of "insider status" in an argument, first person point of view/voice, colloquial language, poetic license, non academic structure.

Why assign hybrid writing?

Departing from standard forms of writing can support a number of learning objectives:

• Provide a space for students to personally reflect on scholarly materials. Support inquiry/reflection as a part of argumentation.

• Explore intersections among the theoretical and "the real."

• Invite students to wrestle with audience and writing forms in new ways. Encourage creative engagement with writing process.

• Respond to diverse learning styles and diverse academic backgrounds (homeschoolers, learning differences, cultural differences, etc.)

Possible hybrid "forms":

• Informal response paper that describes/analyzes personal response/connection to text
• Apply theory to personal experience or material object
• Short narrative essay that discusses ideas, information, observations in first person
• Research paper that is self-reflexive, that situates its discussion in the writer's experience/motive; that uses ethnography.
• Synthesis essay that incudes personal experience as one source among a range of sources (similar to research paper but could be a position paper in response to course readings)
• Narrative criticism that analyses an aspect or section of a text through the lens of personal experience (based on reader response theory)
• Blog posts, poems, journal entries, digital stories, political journalism, testimonios, photojournalism, etc. (these are all huge topics/genres in themselves, I am not listing them quickly to diminish their importance)

Things to consider in incorporating new assignments into your class:

• Have criteria for assessment—build criteria as a class or specify written criteria in your assignment sheet
• Start small when trying something new: assign two short informal hybrid pieces, for example, rather than a large formal paper
• Don’t isolate the hybrid approach; discuss elements of hybridity in assigned texts; give small groups a collaborative hybrid exercise (meaning they bring in first person experience); build up to a formal hybrid paper with informal assignments (use a check, check minus, check plus for evaluation) so that they have time to practice.

Terms for assessing hybrid work:

• Typical academic criteria for critical work such as clarity, complexity, idea development, integration/range of sources, can all be preserved/applied.
• Other criteria might include strength of narrator persona, voice, vivid detail, use of well-chosen verbs vs. over-use of adjectives, and shape/order of narrative. Assigning the introductory chapter of Vivian Gornick’s *The Situation and the Story* will help students learn about “narrative persona,” and “texture,” and “distance.” Distance is important to talk about or else you’ll have inflated language and emotion that will work against the critical components of the text. Gornick talks about distance.

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