

POST-OBSERVATION FOLLOW-UP

Conversation and Comments

PMC Member Observing: Anna Merz	Observation Date: Tues. 10/28/2025
Instructor: Paul Blom New East, Room 201, 11:00am-12:15pm	Course Number: ENGL 105, Section 066 Writing at the Research University (20 students)

Part I: Strengths

Notable Strengths: List several areas in which the instructor excelled.

Today was the students' first day for [Unit 3: Writing in the Humanities](#).

Students are responsive and enthusiastic; they are engaged and a fun group to work with. Paul clearly creates a dynamic, supportive classroom atmosphere that fosters student learning, comfort with new material, and rigorous engagement with rhetoric and writing.

The course is running especially smoothly. Compared to prior semesters in which he's taught this class, Paul has slightly reduced assignments so that students are not turning in extra work but ensuring that they are maintaining the goals of each unit project. Paul is also working hard to make the course useful and accessible to all students.

This class was really engaged and involved during my observation! Students were prepared and excited. They had done their reading and were ready to participate.

Today's lesson was beautifully planned. His structure for using a series of new questions to prompt student groups to contribute lesson content was excellent. Students clearly knew what to do and what to expect; they were engaged with the materials and knew where to go for resources. Paul's materials were very well-considered. He uses student knowledge to help build suggestions for models for each unit, and the dropbox structure for adding student examples is one I'd like to steal.

It's a difficult thing to do to make a dynamic, engaged, fun lesson out of an "intro to unit" class. Paul absolutely did that and gave students the chance to demonstrate how much they knew and had learned about the humanities in this lesson. His contributions were meaningful and kept the class on track. Time was very well-managed; the class was excellent.

Part II: Goals

Goals: Set a few goals or list a few areas for improvement. For each item, list a step the instructor will take in order to achieve that goal or address that area.

Paul's goals involve:

- Reducing grading time, possibly by setting student expectations for grading (number and types of comments on each part of a unit project—for example, deciding which assignments will get significant feedback in-text and in summative form, deciding which feeders will get only summative feedback, and which ones will have minimal comments and feedback)
- Supporting one international student's engagement with the course, possibly by emphasizing the resources at the Writing Center to assist him with his English language skills.
- Streamlining time spent on teaching by turning to resources like the Writing Center for student support when appropriate and reducing time grading/prepping for the course
- Preparing to teach Intro to Business Writing for the first time in the spring semester; preparing new materials and a new course

Part III: Additional Comments (Optional)

Please list any additional comments about the observation, class, or instructor not captured in the boxes above that you would like added to this form.

Paul's course was especially fun to observe! He had his materials ready well in advance, his class was comfortable and interesting, and the environment in his room was relaxed without being disengaged. Paul's students were on-task during the class with only one student obviously "disconnected" during part of the lesson—this is a huge feat considering that all students were referring to their laptops during the entire class period (using them to look at the lesson plan or other relevant course materials and not being distracted)! Students were engaged in their groups and were excited about starting a new unit. Paul is clearly an excellent instructor with students who trust him.

Course website: <https://engl105fa2025.wordpress.com/>

The day's lesson plan: [Link](#)

Part IV: Observation Log

Time	Observation	Comments
10:50am	Paul arrives well in advance of the start of class.	
10:53am	Paul helps students prepare for the class ahead: He projects the day's lesson plan on the screen at the front of the room and instructs students to sit with new working groups, different from the groups they	Paul is starting new groups for Unit 3! He lets students know that they have several minutes before class starts but encourages students to move around, reintroduce themselves to new group members, and

	had during Unit 2. Paul also plays some quiet instrumental pop music through the classroom speakers and begins a Zoom recording of the class session (to share with students after class).	find their new peer groups. Paul is comfortable and congenial and reassuring. Students quickly follow his instructions and seem very comfortable in class. They greet each other and know their peers. Paul encourages students to pull up Canvas and be ready with today's lesson plan on their own devices. He takes attendance as students come in and keeps students on track with reminders. Paul also checks with students' comfort level on the light in the room.
11:00am	Class begins: Paul gathers everyone's attention and greets the class. He reminds students to have resources ready for class (open Canvas and the day's lesson plan on their own devices) and begins with announcements.	Paul draws students' attention to the lesson plan and updates them. There is a clear sense of trajectory in the lesson: reminders about student presentations from the previous class session (the end of Unit 2), lots of emphasis on students' success with presentations. Students publish each of their final unit projects to the class website. Paul encourages students to look at each other's published works on the site. He reminds them about a study abroad opportunity in South Africa next summer (a course he's co-teaching). Students have the opportunity to ask questions before they begin the class session. He reminds the students of concepts discussed earlier in the term, which will help them begin Unit 3. Good scaffolding here.
11:05am	Paul grounds students in a reflection before students begin their final unit of the semester.	Paul shows students a discussion post for reflecting on Unit 2; they'll get a chance to complete it at the end of class, but they may need to complete it for homework if there's not enough time in class today.
11:07am	Transition to group activity on writing in the humanities: Students greet each other in their new groups, and the class rearranges to begin their work in Unit 3.	Students reorganize with new groups and take a few minutes to chat and get to know new members. They select group names and then work together to answer the questions posted to their groups in the lesson plan (questions on writing in the humanities). Students immediately begin

		working and are engaged in the activity. The activity is directly linked to the <i>Tar Heel Writing Guide</i> reading they did for homework and reflects on the ideas they have already encountered. It's a great method for helping students be successful at the start of class and the start of a new unit! Paul has music selected and playing through the classroom speakers throughout this activity. Students in each group seem engaged and active throughout the activity. Paul checks in at 11:13am for a 6-7 minute warning. He reminds students to help each other out as they complete their responses and asks students to choose a "reporter" to speak to the class about their group's answers. Students are comfortable and ask questions during the activity. At 11:16am, Paul observes that contributions to the class Google doc are slowing down with most questions answered, so he revises the time call to 1-2 minutes before ending the group work time.
11:17am	Class discussion on group answers: Paul brings students back into a whole-group setting to ground students in the humanities as a discipline: the values and priorities of the discipline and how those will translate into conventions for writing in that discipline.	Each student group responds to the questions Paul posed in the lesson plan. Each group has different sets of questions which fluidly allow Paul to expand on student findings. Paul's activity allows for a dynamic, conversational tone in the class; he is enthusiastic, which helps students stay engaged and involved. This assignment takes the class through a comparison between the Humanities and the Natural/Social sciences, builds a foundation for thinking about the values and priorities in the Humanities, and places it on a spectrum of "objectivity" to "subjectivity" for humanities artists and scholars. The class names examples of humanities texts. The class considers examples of

		humanities research methodologies and knowledge production. Paul's contributions remind students of the ways they've considered humanities ideas over the course of the class—reminders about the way that each unit is building on each other—great sense of trajectory and real engagement with material throughout. During students' contributions to class discussion, Paul follows along with each contribution and highlights student responses in the projected lesson plan. At 11:35am Paul pauses for an opportunity to ask questions and transitions into the next phase of class with some reassurance: "It can be uncomfortable to go into a field where there is no one right answer. Hopefully there is fun in the possibility."
11:36am	Transitions to discussing the specific assignment for this unit: Paul discusses the Unit 3 assignment prompt.	Paul begins by going over the rhetorical chart for the Unit 3 project, emphasizing students' roles and expectations for how students will engage in their project, which is a multimedia literary analysis (video essay). Paul reminds students consistently that they need Adobe Premier Pro and consistently reminds them where to find resources for accessing this for free. (The students have had this information since the beginning of the semester, but Paul follows up with reminders in case they still have not downloaded and installed the program.) Paul takes students through the steps of their Unit 3 Project via various checkpoints. Paul emphasizes that this new project will shift from secondary research into primary research and demonstrates the way that this (final) unit will act as a culmination of all of their ENGL 105 work (secondary and primary research, original claims and evidence, argumentation, multimedia considerations). He provides students with tips for success on their

		project and then moves into the specifics for their first feeder (the first major step of the project). He walks through each of the questions students will respond to for their feeder 3.1, a worksheet on the short story they choose as the focus of their project. Paul is really aware of the tenor of the room; he lets students know he can tell they're feeling a little tense because of the quick turn-around on their feeder 3.1, but he's very reassuring.
11:43am	Students choose their story for Unit Project 3: Paul transitions into the next phase of the class: time to work on a discussion post to help them begin work on their feeder 3.1.	Paul provides students with a great grounding for success in their first feeder. The discussion post asks students to choose a short story for their Unit 3 Project, discuss their ideas with their group, and commit to one story by the end of the class. Paul reminds students that they should post their ideas to a discussion board before leaving class, so he can provide feedback on their selections later this evening. Students immediately begin working and speaking with group members, and some students have questions for Paul as he circulates through the classroom. Many ask for advice choosing a short story for analysis. Paul circles the class and helps students make decisions about their chosen texts. He reminds them that if they finish their posts, they should complete their reflection on Unit 2 or begin their work on Feeder 3.1. He's supportive, knowledgeable, and interested in student ideas throughout! Paul also uses his lesson plan to visually cue students and remind them about what is coming up/what is coming next after today's class. At 12:05pm Paul lets students know that they have 5 more minutes to work before they will go over homework and next steps for the final five minutes of class.

12:10pm	Class wrap-up and homework reminders: Paul instructs students to finalize and submit their posts (their chosen stories). Paul helps students move into the next phase of class. The homework reminders and further next steps are listed at the end of the lesson plan. Paul walks the students through these.	Paul sets aside the final five minutes of every class session to walk through homework and next steps. Paul reminds students he will be providing feedback on students' posts this evening, and then he goes over the next steps for preparing for Thursday's class. He mentions the next phases of class and semester work before dismissing the class just a few minutes early. Paul stays after class to answer individual student questions. Many students thank him and talk with him after class.
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