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THE RESUMÉ AS GENRE

A Rhetorical Foundation for First-Year Composition

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In the last fifteen years, questions about the role of genre in the development of writing have increasingly informed both theory and practice in the composition classroom. David Jolliffe (1996) has observed, for example, that the most frequent genre that we ask students to compose is the “genre” of the school essay, noting that too often that genre doesn’t connect to the genres of life or workplace. Anne Beaufort (1999) put a face on such a claim in her landmark study, *Writing in the Real World: Making the Transition from School to Work*, which demonstrates how the genres of school don’t in fact “transfer” to those of the workplace very well. At the same time, however, some genres *do* seem to operate as an interface between multiple cultures: for instance, the resumé, that document where writers represent themselves to others, in the context of carrying forward what we are now, in one site, to a new site where we may become anew. Put differently, the resumé functions, in part, to assist a writer in securing a job, and as such it is itself a site of transition, a new discursive space where writers represent their past in the context of aspirations, the future. And for students perhaps especially, the appeal of the resumé—with its seemingly obvious format, with its templates, with its slots that we only need to fill in and out—is that it seems to be such an “easy” document or writing, one grounded in rules and thus simple to author. Naturally enough, human beings tend to like rules. Rules are explicit; they signal us as to what’s right and wrong; and on the basis of rules, we can create clear expectations, so we can predict what will happen to us—which is pretty comforting in a postmodern, fragmented world. Rules, in other words, can seem to make life—and writing situations—easier to navigate.

By definition, however, writing isn’t rule bound, but rather convention governed, rhetorical, even (perhaps particularly) when it comes to writing a resumé. Thus, the resumé, precisely because of the common misperceptions surrounding it, provides an interesting rhetorical site for composition instruction. Students often think that if we just give them

the slots, they can fill them in—and as an emblem of writing, if we allow such misperceptions to continue, the picture of writing that students create will likewise be fundamentally flawed. In English classes, it's all *just rhetorical* (with the negative baggage that expression entails), but in the real world—the world where writing gets something done!—it's by the rulebook, after all. If, on the other hand, we introduced the resumé as a genre—with Shane teaching the class and Kathleen participating as an external reviewer—we thought we could articulate some of these misperceptions and address them. In such an approach, we also thought that we could address some of the identity issues that accompany any practice in genre. As Freedman and Medway point out (1994, 14–16), discursive practices position certain forms of identity that can be at odds with the identity of the student, and in the case of the resumé, there is the tension between the still-in-formation student and the fully formed professional. As a genre, the resumé would allow us to speak to that tension in helpful ways. Not least, we hoped that the attention to rhetorical situation that we would build in would provide a central concept that would lead to and frame the rest of the course. Including the resumé, then, seemed to offer considerable promise: as a task, as a site for identity construction, as a way of understanding.

How we might go about such instruction and with what result: these are the questions we address in the following chapter.

THE RESUMÉ AS GENRE: WHY AND HOW

Like other genres, resumé are a means of social action, as Carolyn Miller (1984) suggested twenty years ago. And as Joe Comprone (1993) explains, any genre is itself the place where writers balance two sets of needs at least: on the one hand, the needs of a writer to express an intent; on the other, the needs of one or more audiences. Somehow, Comprone says, we must balance these competing needs.¹ To illustrate this argument, he briefly outlines the resumé as a genre of social action, arguing that the key is to balance the impulse for personal expression with the needs of a socially constructed world. “It is useful to think of writing not as entirely socially or individually motivated, but as a mode of discourse particularly suited to learning how to manage information, ideas, conventions, and intentions. Only with effective management techniques can individuals use writing to find and place their voices in the ongoing conversations that are generated by rhetorical situations; only with effective management techniques can individuals use writing to change the direction of these conversations.

The concept of genre can be an effective means of approaching the strategies for directing this management process” (106).

Comprone further suggests that the resumé is an ideal genre to teach: through the concept and the practice of genre, writers complete a writing task and understand more generally about the art and practice of composing itself. He suggests, in other words, that the resumé, precisely because it is an overlooked and untheorized genre, provides a particularly interesting introduction to both the construct and the processes of writing. That was our hope as well, as we used an approach founded on genre as a means of introducing writing, rhetoric, and genre to a class of English 102 students.

Clemson’s English 102 course is very like other English 102 classes around the country: it asks students to read carefully; to interpret and evaluate research of various kinds; and to write to and from that research, often within the genre of the academic argument. Our new unit on the resumé as genre, then, needed to “fit” with these general outcomes, which it would do, we thought, if we used it explicitly and early on to introduce both the idea and practice of genre. In fact, we thought as a writing task, the resumé would provide an excellent introduction to the course. Specifically, it could locate our vocabulary of writing—writing, processes, practice, genre, rhetorical situation, and so on—and it could highlight in particular the rhetorical situation and how every writing, even the apparently formulaic resumé, is situated within and informed by it. This last point merits some explanation. Because they appear so formulaic, much like the ubiquitous five-paragraph “theme,” resúmes are understood as mechanical texts; give me the slots, students say, and we’ll fill them in. Interestingly, seen this way, not only are they not Carolyn Miller’s genre as social action, but they are also not rhetorical in the simplest terms. Intended to secure a job, they aren’t written *in the context of* any rhetorical situation. The person who might read the resumé and the need of the employing institution (be it school, lab, government, or firm) for certain kinds of employees: these are absent for most students. In other words, writing the resumé, for many, is a fundamentally *arhetorical* activity.

To help students rewrite that (mis)understanding, to help them see that resúmes are rhetorical, we adapted two concepts borrowed from Gunther Kress (1999a, 86–88): critique and design. In terms of critique, we focused on analysis, asking students to gather resúmes, read them, and review them together, in part to make the point (experientially) that resúmes do vary. No template will suffice. And because students

themselves gathered the materials of the exercise and conducted the work, the insights likewise belonged to them. And as a principle of design, we built in a reiteration: we asked students to recategorize the resumé, looking at them from another vantage point: what does the reiteration teach us about resumé-as-genre? In other words, though this iterative analysis, students “invented” their own genre of resumé as well as some of the more general conceptual understandings of genre. With this foundation created, students then “designed” their own resumé. Such was the logic of our curriculum, or, in another language, the “delivered” curriculum.² Within the framework of the syllabus, the resumé was the first formal assignment, and it counted, as did the other formal assignments, for 15 percent of the final grade. Students also created a culminating digital portfolio, worth 20 percent of the grade. From their work samples, their portfolios, and their reflections, we have learned about the “experienced” curriculum: what, after all, did students learn in this approach?

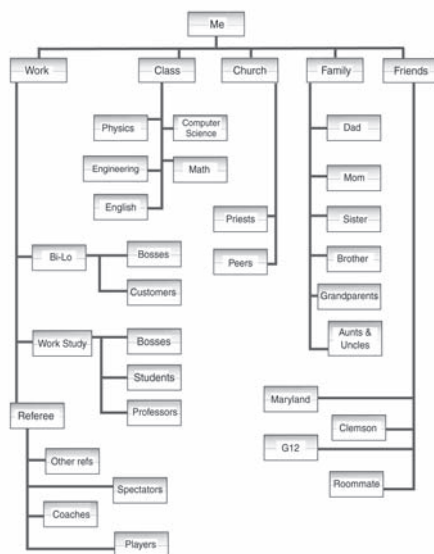
TEACHING THE RESUMÉ AS A GENRE: THE CLASSROOM CONTEXT

The term began with an introduction to rhetoric; thus, before beginning with the resumé, Shane maintained a dual focus. On one hand, he introduced his class to the basic concepts of classical rhetoric, using Aristotle as a touchstone for his teaching. The students engaged in discussion, classroom activities, and homework assignments related to ethos, pathos, logos, as well as the concepts behind the rhetorical triangle, and as is the case with most of Shane’s students, many commented that this was their first exposure to such ideas about communication.

To introduce students to genre, Shane used several classroom and homework assignments where students examined persuasion in the context of different “types” of writing such as newspaper editorials, Web pages, poems, and academic papers. This allowed him to introduce the basic idea of genre as well as the ways writers use different genres to communicate both in school and outside of it. At the end of week two, Shane also used a class period to discuss the formal concept of genre, pointing out that the previous week’s assignments called for the students to explore a variety of genres with which they were already familiar. This familiarity with “real-world” genres invited students to contrast their new understanding of genre with their previous experiences with the concept—which often involved associating it with static literary tropes instead of with active, rhetorical endeavors.

In the midst of this discussion, a clear pattern emerged: most students were using the discussion of genre as a means of disparaging their experiences in high school English courses. Many felt that a central problem with their past English instruction was that they were either asked to study passively a specific genre, such as the sonnet, so as to “fix” it, or they were asked to mimic a genre and create a work consistent with the “rules” governing the genre. Not surprisingly, students associated this discussion of genre with their own struggles in conforming to other generic “rules” such as those governing the five-paragraph essay. In examining their past experiences, the students realized that most of their work had been constructed as a result of a prescriptive definition of genre. This, then, was the remembered curriculum of genre that students brought with them into class. Asking students to articulate it allowed Shane to use that context as he pointed out the differences between the students’ experience with genre and the more rhetorical one that would inform this writing class.

My three most interesting communities are Work, Family, and Friends. I navigate within my Work community differently in each of the jobs I have had. When I was a soccer referee, I had to talk a specific way to each of the different kinds of people I encountered. This included other refs I was working with, team coaches, players, and spectators. In my Family community, I give a certain kind of respect and love to different members. Sometimes, I can talk to my brother and sister in a different way than I can anyone else, and they understand things about me better. Some things are easy to discuss with my parents, and some are not. I understand some of their knowledge and what I must know when talking to them. My friends group is split into people from Clemson (that I more recently met) and older friends from Maryland (where I moved from). I spend more time with my Clemson friends, but my Maryland friends know a lot more about me and we go farther back. I have known and trust them longer, and these reasons mean I can tell them certain things and talk in a way with them that only we might understand. I know them more, and I therefore can tailor my discourse with them specific to this.



Another key lesson involved helping students understand discourse communities. Again, to draw on the students’ own experiences, Shane asked them to create two representations of their discourse communities:

a verbal explanation and a visual map. As the example above suggests, when asked, students are quite articulate—both visually and verbally—in locating the social spaces of their communicative lives. What’s also interesting is how students understand the relationship between and among the many factors in rhetorical situations: audience, broken down into *the different kinds of people*; what the audience knows—*their knowledge*; attitude, here of *love and respect*; familiarity, as with some family members like a *brother* and *sister*; and *ease* of topic.

With these kinds of activities and discussions as a backdrop, we began the resumé.

RESUMÉ ASSIGNMENT: THE CRITIQUE AND DESIGN OF THE DELIVERED CURRICULUM

The analytical part of the resumé assignment was divided into three parts. First, students were asked to locate five resumé from within their field of study. These ranged from engineering to nursing to art, and the resumé could be found online or obtained from mentors or advisors at the university or in the private sector. The students were then randomly placed in groups of five, with each group asked to coauthor a single review of all of the combined resumé. More specifically, students were asked to begin by reading all of the resumé from the group, looking for textual features that were of interest, either unique to certain resumé or consistent across all resumé, “textual features” referring here to anything on the page the students found relevant, from style to format to specific content or punctuation. As the students read, they were asked to compile their own list of salient features from each resumé. As the students finished with their own reviews, they were asked then to discuss their “findings” with the group, compiling a collaborative section where they consolidated their analysis.

The second part of the analysis assignment asked students to reorganize the resumé and place them in new categories of their own choosing. The students could invent their own categories here, based on the individual’s major, college, interest, or potential job. In some cases, the students chose to organize the resumé based on layout and design. Other students chose to divide the resumé along stylistic lines. Yet other students chose to examine the stylistic choices made by individuals from certain colleges on campus. Most of the students in this particular class were from engineering or the sciences, and thus we wanted to resist the impulse for students to say “all engineering resumé are the same.” Rather, students were asked to look beyond the discipline associated with

the particular resumé to examine the way that resumé functioned rhetorically. Here we provided some basic questions such as: In what ways is each of your categories different? In what ways are these categories similar? What do the resúmes in each category tell us about the field they are associated with?

The culminating part of the analysis assignment asked students to make the connect between resumé and rhetorical situation: how, students were asked, do the textual features you identified in the first part of the analysis work within a rhetorical situation between a writer and audience? How is meaning made in this situation? What do these textual features tell us about the culture of the job market? In composing this collaborative class exercise, our hope was that students would acquire knowledge and critical distance that they would bring to the construction of their own resúmes.

Which—in the context of a writing classroom—is where it actually matters, in the design phase of the curriculum. To help students with the design task, we created a specific protocol.

- First, students were to locate an actual job listing.
- Second, they were asked to construct their own resúmes based on the job listing.
- Third, the students were then asked to review their own resúmes as well as the resúmes from their peers in the class.
- And last, they were asked to revise their work and submit it.

In many ways, this process mirrors what we often do in writing courses, whether they be business or first-year composition. Two features of the assignment, however, seem unusual, at least in our experience and in that of our students, if their accounts are accurate. First, we required students to locate a real job that represented in some way their own professional aspirations; this of course provided a rhetorical situation for the resumé. (The class is, of course, the principal rhetorical situation, but the resumé isn't targeted to the class but to the job and the person doing the hiring.) Second, we used Kathleen as an expert external reviewer. She visited in order to give a “reading” of the students' work, based in part on her experience as a member of several diverse hiring committees—in the academy but outside it as well, involving faculty, Web designers, engineers, lead administrators, architects, and executive directors. She visited on the day the first drafts were due, and she read the resúmes of three student volunteers, using a reflective reading practice not unlike a read-aloud protocol.

With the resumé projected on the screen, she reviewed each of the three resumé, commenting on what she understood from each, verbalizing the inferences and interpretations she was making as she read them, and explaining why she was drawing these conclusions. Our intent was that this “live” review by an expert of sorts would dramatize how resúmes are rhetorical, enacting a social role and purpose.

With this modeling and with a fairly conventional peer review, students revised their resúmes and submitted both copies with a reflection that asked students to respond to seven questions:

- What did you learn about the resumé?
- What did you learn about genre?
- Was that what you expected to learn? Explain.
- What was the hardest part about this unit?
- What was most interesting?
- How will your writing change because of what you’ve learned?
- Anything else?

THE RESUMÉ AS GENRE: THE EXPERIENCED CURRICULUM

When we review the resúmes and the reflections from this class of twenty students, we learn as much as they. Specifically, students’ observations fall into three categories:

- how surprising they found this approach, based on their earlier experiences
- how they used this approach in creating their own resúmes and what they learned from it
- how difficult and yet useful they found the concepts and language associated with this approach

As explained earlier, teaching the resumé as a genre allowed students to revisit concepts they believed they already knew; this theme appeared in several student reflections. Several students, for instance, remarked that they found their earlier conception of genre too limited, but that they liked the “new” concept of genre and found it useful as a theoretical frame. And the earlier conceptions of genre included references both in and out of school: while often they were out of school—several students, for instance, thought of genre as a way to categorize types of movies—most of the observations were squarely located in school practices, and of those, most were reading rather than writing practices. For example,

one student remarked, “I have learned about genre since fourth grade, but this put it in an entirely different perspective. All I used to be taught was what the word ‘genre’ means and different types of genre (like short story, essay, novel, etc.)” (Vanzo). Similarly, another made the connection to classical literature, and in particular to the language appropriate there: “I had always been told that genre referred to poetry and other classical literature. I was unaware of the fact that resumés could be a genre in themselves. [In this class] I also learned that every genre can have its own particular language style. Previously I was only exposed to flowery, Shakespearian language from my AP English teacher, and that was what I thought that everything you wrote in an English class should sound like, no matter what it was actually for” (Haynes).

What it was actually for, of course, is another way to talk about the rhetorical situation. For many students, using genre to talk about writing was a good thing: it brought to the use of language a kind of flexibility and rhetoricity that students sometimes had already intuited and that most of them appreciated.

The resumé itself was also located in familiar experience, and as in the case of genre as a concept, this was not altogether good news. Many students had written resumés in English classes previously, and for all of our students with this experience, it was an exercise in formula. The following comment summarizes nicely that common experience: “I took a course in high school that taught us how to write a resumé, and they made it seem like every resumé had the exact same elements in the exact same order. In this class we also addressed what the layout and word choice in your resumé says about you, and I had never been told about those things as part of the process of making a good resumé” (Haynes).

In general, what seemed to be missing, from the students’ accounts of their previous experience, at least, was a *process* of making a good resumé. Or, they believed, if there is a process, it is completely formatted and mechanical: “I had done units on resumés before in high school but my teachers never took this approach to them. In high school the teachers mostly took a rubric approach where I was taught that this, this and this, need to be [on] a resumé and it was not a good resumé unless you had them” (Bingham).

School isn’t the sole culprit, however, and it’s equally possible that teachers presented guidelines and conventions, and students interpreted those as rules.³ Even when school isn’t invoked, however, the mechanistic nature of writing, and of the resumé particularly, is the unspoken context of writing:

I honestly expected that there was one and only one way to write a resumé, and that we would learn this correct way and the lesson would be finished; however, I learned that the structure and content of a resumé is more based on yourself, your accomplishments, and the job you are trying to obtain. Before, I never really thought of the resumé as such an important and persuasive document. I thought that if your experience and credentials were significant enough that it would not matter how you ordered or styled them. I now know that this is not true. I now realized that the structure and design of a resumé is an argument in itself. (Adams)

A NEW PROCESS

Since their earlier experiences were not a good index to the current composing situation, students needed to develop a new process. Not surprisingly, the process involved both analysis and design. For instance, several students talked about the role of the resumé analysis assignment in shaping their sense of what is possible in a resumé: “The hardest part of this unit was probably having to find the resúmes and go through and critic [*sic*] them individually. I had a difficult time finding resúmes to begin with, and then once I did find them I was not really sure what I was looking for. I also knew that my resumé was not set up anything like any of the ones that I saw, and they looked a lot better and more professional to me than mine did” (Haynes).

Another moment that over half the students found valuable was the external review: “The most interesting thing was when Dr. Yancey came to speak. She was very informative, and she was telling us things that will be helpful to us for a long time. No one else had ever pointed out to me that you could tailor your resumé for the particular job you were applying for, and she helped me to see the sense in that and how helpful it can be to your chances of getting a job” (Haynes).

The student here, like many, found valuable both the how—*you could tailor your resumé for the particular job you were applying for*—and the why—*she helped me to see the sense in that*. Without this how and why, it’s easy to understand why students see resúmes—and writing more generally—as they do: in part, because genre itself is presented as a static entity rather than as a participant in a recurring social situation, in part because they never actually see or hear anyone reading *their* work. Without an audience whose reading they have seen or heard and thus might be able to project, without a genre that permits tailoring, it’s all

too easy to think of writing as a message not to be constructed, but only to be delivered.

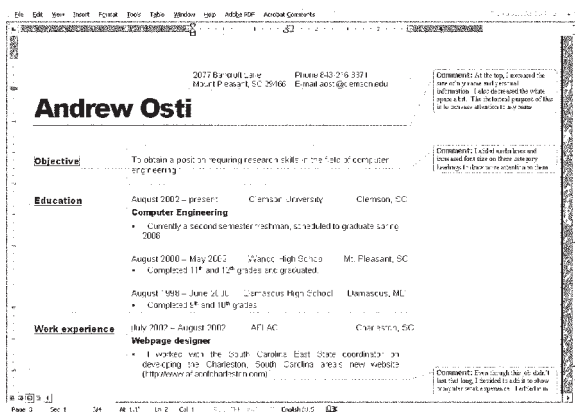
In drafting, all students were to take peer response and use it to improve their original drafts. Likewise, all students were required to submit two copies of the resumé, the before and

after version. And most students, because we are a laptop campus, submitted a revised version that was annotated. The changes that they made included every dimension of the resumé, from amount of information and arrangement to font size and style and use of white space. As interesting is what they learned—about process, resumé, and genre—and why they made the changes they did.

In some cases, students created a new composing process for themselves, one requiring invention, and the invention itself is focused on both self and audience. “I have discovered that the resumé is not just a boring document that can be slapped together in a few minutes. It requires a good deal of effort and critical thinking. I learned that in order to make a resumé, you need to do invention to come up with a detailed list of all activities or discourse communities that you belong to. Then, you must determine which of those are relevant to your resumé. I also learned the importance of textual features in a resumé. Textual features play a huge role in the effectiveness and persuasiveness of a resumé” (Coonce).

Many valued what they had learned about themselves relative to the world represented by professional resúmes: they found that the inventional process used to create a resumé was a useful heuristic for understanding the self: “From the past few weeks of lessons, I have not only learned a lot about resúmes but also about myself. I have deeply considered my attributes and achievements, and how I could best present these to a potential employer to obtain a certain job” (Adams).

And in some cases, such an analysis helps students project into the future:



The hardest part about this unit was writing my own resumé. Since I am young and have very little job experience it was hard to find qualifications to put on the resumé. During my high school days I mostly concentrated on school work and had little time or need to get a job until late in my junior year and it, of course, had nothing to do with the field I plan on going into after college. I hope to get an internship or coop while at Clemson in order to gain some experience before I get out into the work force. I know if I do not get some sort of internship it will be very difficult to get a job with no experience. (Bingham)

And of course for other students, this projection can be ambiguous, uncertain, and anxiety producing: “Another difficult part was choosing a job to apply for. We were told to pick a job in our major or our area of interest. Well, this is a subject that is currently up in the air for me. I have no idea what I want to do for the rest of my life, and I am currently feeling a lot of pressure to decide as I approach my second year at Clemson” (Lee).

That’s hard, of course, but it can also be a means of thinking about the future, a chance to rehearse a role.

More generally, another value of this assignment is that it crosses boundaries—from *high school days* to *Clemson* to an *internship* to the *workforce*—while it teaches central concepts and practices. And, as important, the resumé can function as a vehicle for professional self-analysis, and as a school document, it can function to represent and shape that out-of-school future: “Thinking back to the beginning of the semester I’m not sure what I was expecting to learn. One thing I know, I wasn’t expecting to learn about resumé and writing resumé. I thought that this was much farther in the future [and I didn’t need] to be thinking about it now. I realized that I need to start getting my resumé together because a resumé is something that is going to build over time and although now it may not be very impressive in a few years it probably will be” (Pohlman).

And, as hoped, many students claim that what they learned from this assignment has transferred to their writing more generally. “My construction of a resumé has changed greatly as seen by the alterations I made since Dr. Yancey’s lecture. My writing in general has also changed due to our original discussion of ethos, pathos, logos, and discourse communities. The idea of sitting down and thinking about who your audience is and what they respond to before writing will now become a necessary part of my writing process” (Lee).

Some students cited specific examples of this transfer. One commented on rewriting a letter requesting an audition for a position as a placekicker on Clemson's football team and on keying to the audience specifically. And in some cases students make the connection between many different kinds of audiences in talking about the role of audience generally:

Probably the biggest aspect I came to change (and improve) in my writing is the realization and understanding of the audience. I never used to pay attention to the audience I was writing to. I would just write my argument, pretty much ignoring everything else. In this class, we were taught to use invention to persuade. In order to use invention, all available means of persuasion for any given situation have to be understood. Our audience is a very important aspect to understand when persuading or arguing. For example, you wouldn't want to use slang or talk the same way you do to your friends if you are writing a letter to the president of a company or organization (this also relates back to the Discourse Communities assignment). You can see in Project 2 and Project 3 how I wrote in letter format. This is because they were each directed to a politician. I didn't want to write to a general public (ex. "All highway drivers" or "All American people") because these people can't do anything about the problem. I wrote specifically to politicians who can propose/pass a bill or vote to make a change. Considering my audience has brought another aspect to all of my papers, in and out of English class. In this lab report, written this semester for my Engineering 120 class, I noticed myself constantly thinking about my audience. I would say to myself things like, "Would my professor want me to say this?" or "Would this wording be appropriate here?" I took into account the way supporting graphs, as instructed by the professor, should go near the text that refer to them. The headers and most of the wording are also good examples of this. I wouldn't talk to most of my friends using the same words I did in this report. (Osti)

THE ROLE OF GENRE

Genre, as used in this approach, means both practice and concept. But over and over again, what students told us was that the concepts were new, were difficult, and were worthwhile.

Early on, students understood that genre has a wider definition than they'd understood: "I learned that genre does not just refer to types of books. Genre can be anything that is reoccurring in our composition. Before this class the thought of a resumé being a genre had never really occurred to me." And they were able to use this concept to ground other

genres and to see them as social action as well: “This English 102 class has helped me to realize that a letter is not just a letter; it is a way of conveying your ideas to someone and getting them to act on those ideas” (Haynes).⁴ And students were able, as well, to see in genre the flexibility that is rhetorical: “I learned that a genre describes a certain style of writing. It gives a broad definition of what format or tone should be used. However, it does not provide a template for you to just fill in. It is still vague and open to a variety of interpretations” (Coonce).

To be accurate, not all students found writing a resumé interesting or engaging: “To be honest, I found the actual discussion of resumé quite boring because it dealt with things that could be understood easily through common sense.” But, according to the same student, the ideas matter: “The ideas underneath the surface that you were trying to teach us through the use of the resumé genre were the interesting ones.” They were also, for some students, both unfamiliar and difficult: “The hardest part about this unit was the terminology. Learning new terms and ideas and being able to recall these terms in order to describe writing was difficult. Although it may have been difficult, I enjoyed learning about these things, being able to better express myself, and using them to more fully understand writing” (Coonce).

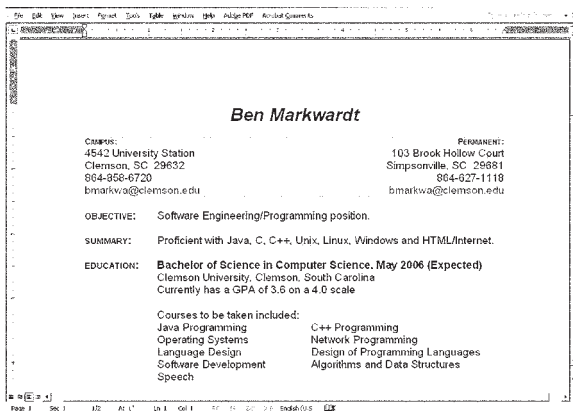
Synthesized neatly by one student, there was a lot to be learned:

What did I learn about genre? For all intensive purposes [*sic*] I have come up with a definition of genre in the case of our resumé building. I now think of genre as a rhetorical way of presenting information and/or facts such that it will have the effect planned or hoped. This is exactly what we did with the resúmes (or were supposed to do). I learned that organization of information can be a key factor with different jobs, and that can also serve as the dividing boundary between information provided in a vacuum, and information provided that makes a person stand out.

Was this what I expected to learn? With respect to resúmes, yes. I fully understand that one of the goals of this class is to change my method of thinking (if even in the slightest degree), and this assignment facilitated that process. With respect to English 102, this is not what I expected. I do not see my friends in their respective engl 102 classes working on resúmes, which is bad for them. I view this class now as more of an application of English in the real world (i.e. resúmes). (Krenson)

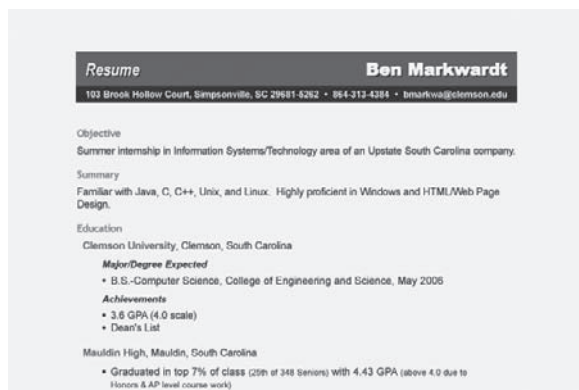
One test of whether this approach is useful, of course, is whether students can use these resúmes in an intended rhetorical context; two

students mentioned that they were doing just that, and one of them raised a technological issue that we will address in the future. As he narrates, “the first resumé is pretty plain looking. It lists my on campus address which probably isn’t a good idea because that is going to change relatively quickly. Additionally, it spills over to a second page, making it look somewhat unprofessional and cheap. Being in Microsoft Word format is also probably not a very good thing, since it could be incompatible with some systems and word is notorious for carrying viruses so it my deter some people from even opening it. Also, I neglected to list some of my better achievements and awards.”



The second version, he says, required him to return and rethink, using what he had learned in the first draft.

In this class I was able to formalize and sharpen both my understanding and use of these concepts. By this I mean that I learned not only the official terms but gained experience applying them to different situations. For example, the resumé project was interesting in forcing me to apply rhetorical skills to something that I don’t enjoy. Unlike web sites and papers on topics I enjoy writing about, I found writing my resumé to be dreadfully boring and uninteresting. Consequently, I can honestly say that I just threw my paper together without



much thought. However, later in the year I found myself having to assemble a real resumé for several internship opportunities. I went back to the resumé I created for the first paper and realized that, rhetorically speaking, it was not suited for the position I was looking for. So I went back to it and re-designed it, this

time using my enhanced understanding of rhetoric to make a better argument. As you can see, this version of my resumé is far more visually appealing and better organized. To an employer looking for interns, this resumé not only fits the job description better but the added visuals dramatically increase my ethos and hints at other talents in addition to programming.

CONCLUSION

In *Collision Course* (1999), Russel Durst tracks the competing agendas of students and faculty in first-year composition studies classrooms. Durst's composition students want practical help; Durst's colleagues—along with many in the profession—want theory and critique as well. It's another version of the theory/practice divide, with faculty on one side, students on another, finding in first-year composition a site for a conflict between two impulses: on the one hand, students' "instrumentalism," and on the other, faculty theorizing. Durst's curricular reply to this tension is what he calls "reflective instrumentalism," which, he says, "preserves the intellectual rigor and social analysis of current pedagogies without rejecting the pragmatism of most . . . students. Instead, the approach accepts students' pragmatic goals, offers to help them achieve their goals, but adds a reflective dimension that, while itself useful in the work world, also helps students place their individual aspirations in the larger context necessary for critical analysis" (178).

In some ways, we have used an analogous approach. Appreciating students' interest in writing beyond the academy, we at the same time resist an instrumental approach that, we believe, is at odds with student growth and development as well as with what we know about writing. The addition of "reflective" to such instrumentalism, in our case, means that writing is useful, that it is conceptual and theoretical, that it allows both faculty and students to learn through reflection and in the exercise of writing.

In our resumé-as-genre approach, we focused on the concept and practice of genre within a rhetorical situation. Instead of looking to explain genres by talking about them in abstraction or by reference only to literary texts, or even only to texts in popular culture, we talked with students about genres operating in specific social situations and as rhetorical actions. We provided a definition of genre that functions as a strategy for responding to a reader in a specific context. And we asked: What happens when we start to think about a resumé in this fashion?

We moved away from the prescriptive notion of genre, so common to students, one where a genre is a document whose slots need only to

be filled, primarily because it is not dynamic but static, and where the author is merely someone who inputs information. Rather, the resumé, as a genre, invites the author to make conscious, rhetorical choices, to question the nature of the genre, and to become an active participant in the social construction of the document.

For us, this was a novel exercise, and we have learned much: how what students bring with them influences what they can and will learn; about the value of building a curriculum that includes analysis and design woven together; about letting students hear and see a real reader outside of the teacher who is reading for that rhetorical purpose; about asking students to review, generalize from, and comment on what they are learning; about the power of the concept of genre as well as the practice. For most students, likewise, this was a novel exercise: the resumé, which had been merely a form, became a text with multiple dimensions—audience and genre, of course, along with typography and arrangement and information and tone. For most students, it provided a window into the curriculum of writing: the language and practices of inventing and representing the self for an audience.

And for some of them, it has already moved beyond this first classroom iteration as it connects rhetorically to other worlds: “I have already used this outside of English class. I applied for a summer job with this resumé, and feel my chances of getting the job are increased due to the rhetorical decisions I made” (Osti).

NOTES

1. This balance between representing self and attending to the needs of others is a common refrain for first-year students: see Yancey 1998, *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*.
2. For a thorough discussion of three curricula—the lived, the delivered, and the experienced—see Yancey 2004, *Teaching Literature as Reflective Practice*.
3. See Harris 1979 for a still-useful description of the kinds of conventions students “translate” into rules.
4. And, as our editors remind us, a letter is not a letter is not a letter: that Melissa Haynes here identifies *letter* as a genre is the good news, that she does not disambiguate letter types the less good. Such an observation suggests the value of a discussion about the role that genre might play as the central unifying concept in English studies today.