

UofM First-Year Writing Program

CAPster



Katherine Fredlund, Ph.D – Director
Lindsay Helms, Ph.D – Assistant Director
Jennifer Byrd – Graduate Assistant Director



@uofmenglish



memphis.edu/english

In This Issue:

- Happenings & Accomplishments
- ReCAP: Recognizing How Your Mind Works
- Teaching Hack: Student Self-Evaluations
- TA Spotlight: First-Year TAs
- CAP Calendar

Happenings & Accomplishments

*Keep up to date with the going-ons of the English department by visiting the [News and Events](#) page!

English Honors Colloquium

The English Honors Colloquium is a series that began in 2024 and invites faculty, staff, graduate students, undergraduate majors and minors, and anyone interested in English Studies to gather in fellowship to hear about and discuss the cutting-edge work being done by our faculty.

- On April 13th, Dr. Eric Schlich will discuss “Titanic 2.0, A Novel in Progress” at 4pm in PT 456.

The Pinch Presents: francine harris

This spring, The Pinch Presents welcomes poet francine harris on **April 16th** at the UC Shelby Room for a poetry reading at **5pm**. Join us the next day for a craft interview in **Patterson Hall 456** beginning at **12pm**.

Deb Talbot Roundtable & Graduate Student Conference

Each year, the University of Memphis English Department hosts a Graduate Student Conference in conjunction with the UofM English Graduate Organization (UMEGO). This year's theme is Multiliteracies, Multimodality, and Genre, hosted by Dr. J. Elliott Casal.

Roundtable: Thursday, April 23rd at 4:30pm in the UC River Room (300)

Conference: Saturday, April 25th beginning at 9:00am in Patterson Hall

For more information, visit the [Graduate Student Conference page](#)!

Happenings & Accomplishments

English Department Awards Ceremony

Join us on Thursday, April 30th (Study Day) in Patterson Hall 456 beginning at 11am to celebrate all of our 2026 award winners! A luncheon will follow at 12pm in Patterson Hall 403.

We would love to celebrate your accomplishments or spread the word about your events! Please send your upcoming conference presentations, publications, and defenses to Lindsay Helms (lldailey@memphis.edu).

ReCAP: Mind Patterns and the Writing Process

In March's All-CAP meeting, Katie shared some research on mind patterns and states of attention pulled from research presented in "Collaborative Intelligence: Thinking With People Who Think Differently" by Dawna Markoba and Angie McArthur. Here's a summary of the content of the meeting.

Mind patterns are the habitual ways our brains process information. Much like writing processes, we don't all have the same mind patterns, and learning about our mind patterns can improve both our metacognition and our self-awareness while also allowing us to make intentional choices about how we direct our focus. They were developed out of a collaboration between neurometrics (the science of measuring the brain's electric activity) and psychology. While mind patterns use some of the same language as the myth of learning styles (visual, auditory, kinesthetic), they are not saying that there is a single way our brains learn best. Instead, the theory of mind patterns posits that visual, kinesthetic, and auditory modes of thought trigger different states of attention for different people.

Our brains have three states of attention: focused, sorting, and open. While our culture tends to only value focused attention, the sorting and open states of attention are where a lot of generative and creative thinking happens. As a Visual 1 thinker, I am most focused when reading and writing, as a Kinesthetic 2 thinker, sorting tasks and comparisons are best completely while I am moving somehow, and as an Auditory 3 thinker, I am in an open state of attention while listening to a podcast, an audiobook, or a person speaking during a meeting. Here is a more detailed breakdown of the different states of attention (pulled directly from page 32 of Collaborative Intelligence):

1. Focused attention describes the conscious state of mind where your brain is producing more beta waves. Your thoughts become certain and form into solid beliefs. You are very directed; you concentrate on what is in front of you; your computer screen, the other person's voice, the hammer in your hand. This is the state of attention best suited for concentrating on accomplishing tasks; decision-making, and attending to details and timelines.

2. Sorting attention describes the subconscious state of mind, where your brain produces more alpha waves. Your thoughts wander back and forth, sorting through information, comparing one thing to another. In this state of attention, you are trying to understand; digesting information or experiences; thinking through confusion; and weighing multiple choices.

3. Open attention is an unconscious state of mind, where your brain is producing more theta waves. Your thoughts are very wide and internal, as in a daydream. In this state of mind you are imagining possibilities and new ways to approach old problems; exploring different options by seeing things in a new way; and associating to past experiences, stories, and people (“oh, that reminds me of this”).

Our brains also have three languages of thought: kinesthetic, auditory, and visual; “each of them will trigger our mind to shift attention from one state to another.” Indeed, “every person uses all three elements to think. It is the sequence of kinesthetic, auditory, and visual elements that trigger your attention to first focus (1), then sort (2), and then open (3). This 1-2-3 order determines your mind pattern” (40). This tells us that while reading will trigger focused attention for some people, for others it triggers the open state of attention. We might also conclude that dependent upon the goal of reading, auditory learners may be better served by listening to an audiobook than by reading words on a page. I wanted to share these mind patterns with writing teachers because learning about them has made my writing process more intentional, and I think it has the potential to help our students as they learn about their writing processes as well.

Identifying which element of thought triggers which state of attention, has enabled me to more intentionally move between the states of attention, saving both time and frustration. In fact, understanding my mind pattern has helped me rethink my writing process. In January I went for a walk with my dog while listening to an audiobook. About forty minutes in, I had an epiphany about how to finish a book that I have been trying to finish for far too long. Walking has been a part of my writing process for many years. When I’m stuck, I walk to think. Before understanding my mind pattern, I thought the walk, or my kinesthetic thinking, allowed for this epiphany, but after learning about my mind patterns, I realized that auditory thinking triggers my open attention, when my brain can wander and think without judgement, so it wasn’t the walk but the act of listening to an audiobook that prompted the daydreaming state that led to this epiphany (of course, this meant I wasn’t really listening to the audiobook anymore when I had the epiphany; my mind was wandering).

Now that I can recognize my mind patterns and know more about the different states of attention, I make more intentional decisions about how to approach writing and thinking tasks. If I need to do sorting tasks, like rethinking organization or making connections between different ideas, walking without an audiobook will allow me to focus in a sorting state. Yet when I am faced with a problem that requires really creative thinking, I can still walk, but I'll need to listen to an audiobook or music if I want to trigger an open state of attention.

I shared this with All-CAP because the First-Year Writing curriculum encourages metacognition in our courses without necessarily giving students the knowledge or language to do the thinking about their thinking that we are asking of them. Introducing mind patterns to students of all ages is a starting point that provides some of the language they need to be metacognitive. Some high school teachers I work with have introduced mind patterns to their students to great success.

At the end of CAP, we moved into groups based on our mind patterns and began to fill out [these writing process charts](#), with the goal of being able to share these with our students to help them think about how they can use mind patterns and states of attention to support their writing process. As you might notice from the writing process charts, the majority of our TAs are Visual I thinkers, so we still have some blank charts.

You can discover your mind pattern by [using the mind pattern maze in this PDF](#). More detailed descriptions of each mind pattern follow the maze. When using the maze, please note that "Step 2" stretches across two pages, so after you identify the Mind Pattern that most sounds like you in Step 1, you will choose between the next two descriptions. Please note that "Step 2" stretches across two pages, so after you identify the Mind Pattern that most sounds like you in Step 1, you will choose between the next two descriptions. These will likely not be perfect descriptions of you. The book explains you should "go through the maze as if it's the game Hotter/Colder... As you read the different descriptions, please be aware that any single characteristic may not be 100 percent true for you—what is significant is your overall description of the pattern. If, over time, the mind pattern you selected does not seem to fit, read through the other patterns and see if another is more accurate... What is most important is that you become curious about the unique and amazing way that your mind works." Once you know your mind pattern, you can read the detailed description of it on pages 42-58. If you end up doing this (either alone or with your students), I'd love to hear about it! Email me at kfrdlund@memphis.edu.

Teaching Hack: Student Self-Reflections by Lindsay Helms

This semester I have implemented a more formalized self-assessment system with my students with the goal of encouraging their metacognitive skills and enriching my one-on-one time with them throughout the course.

At three points during the semester (beginning, mid-term, and end), I have my students fill out self-reflection forms outlining their goals for the course (and in later reflections their progress toward those goals); strengths and challenges as a writer; perceptions of their attendance, participation, and engagement in the course; and their effort in reaching their ideal grade. For the first two self-reflections, I meet with the students one-on-one. These conferences are not in addition to, but rather, implemented into the conferences already a part of the example syllabi (ex: Revision conferences and research proposal conferences).

- [Beginning of the Semester Self-Reflection](#)
- [Midterm Self-Reflection](#)
- [End of the Semester Self-Reflection](#)

Because time is precious, and you may have a lot of conferences to fit into one class period, I recommend assigning the self-reflection prior to the conference and just hitting the highlights when you meet with the student. Another option if you are really pressed for time, is to have the students coming during your office hours.

Before introducing the first self-reflection, you will want to emphasize the importance of reflection and student-directed learning. In 1010, I like to assign the first self-reflection as a journal assignment after introducing the Writing Process Journal. I also assign the reading, "[How Do Students Become Self-Directed Learners?](#)" (Chapter 7) and "Transfer: Applying Learning to New Writing Situations" (pp. 19-24 in WaW).

Prior to the midterm self-reflection, I assign "[Reflective Writing](#)" ([Giles](#)) and do an in-class, collaborative note-taking activity on [Threshold Concept 5.0: Writing is \(also\) a cognitive activity](#). These activities and readings lead to more in-depth discussions about the importance of reflection in writing.

For the final self-reflection, I do not meet one-on-one with my students. Instead, I have the students look over their two previous self-reflections in class and 1) free write about the progress they've made over the course of the semester and 2) engage in a group discussion expounding upon what they wrote. These activities lead up nicely to the final Writing Process Journal assignment, SETE evaluations, course wrap-up, etc.

If you try this out, let me know! I'd love to hear how it goes, and if you have a teaching hack that you would like to share, please email me (lldailey@memphis.edu)!

TA Spotlight: First-Year TAs

At a First-CAP meeting, we asked the First-Year TAs a couple of questions about their experiences teaching in the first-year writing program and any advice they had for upcoming new TAs.

1. What has surprised you about teaching First-Year Writing this semester?

“What has surprised me this semester is how different teaching ENGL 1020 feels compared to ENGL 1010. The fact that the students are writing about Memphis and the course materials are tied to the local context has **helped me learn more about the city.**”

“I’ve been surprised by how much the **students are cooperative and willing to learn.**”

“As an instructor, what surprised me the most was the **students’ strong attachment to the city and pride**, which they reflected in their essay- “I am a Memphian” though the city is often portrayed negatively for crime rates. This shows how deeply the students are connected to writing about Memphis, where they were born and raised. Most of my students expressed their personal experiences in a positive light. Teaching Writing Memphis is like the tip of the iceberg; the deeper you dive, the more unique facts you find about the city’s history, tradition, and culture, which I am exploring some of these together with my students in this course.”

2. What advice would you give a new TA teaching First-Year Writing for the first time?

“Don’t stress if you are teaching for the first time. **You’ll find that you’re learning just as much as your students.** Be flexible and don’t feel like you have to get everything perfect right away.”

“**Have enough grace to share.** Many of the students are going to keep coming back to the same thing you’ve explained.”

“I would advise new TAs to learn facts and figures through academic research before they start teaching writing, rather than relying on negative media portrayals alone. This allows them to be context-aware with a **balanced perspective to construct conducive as well as meaningful teaching environments.**”

“Being in touch with a CAP mentor and experienced teachers **is a must.**”

CAP Calendar

All CAP events are held on Tuesdays from 4:15pm-5:15pm. All events can be found in the [Spring 2026 CAP Schedule](#).

April 7th:

- All CAP in PT 456 for the Teaching Faculty Panel

April 14th:

- First-Year CAP in Cadres
- Professional CAP in PT 315

April 21st:

- First-Year CAP in UC 227, Relaxation Zone
- Teaching CAP in Cadres

April 28th:

- All CAP in PT 456 for End of the Semester Celebration & Recognition of Graduates

