

UofM First-Year Writing Program

CAPster



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Happenings & Accomplishments

English Department Newsletter

Please take a look at the [Spring Newsletter](#) for the Department! This edition includes a Fall 2025 Recap, faculty recognitions and publications, and a look at the exciting events planned for this semester.

Tigers Write

Please consider bringing your class and/or offering incentives for your students to come to Tigers Write in McWherter Library on **Tuesday, February 10th 10-2pm**. This event will showcase the library resources and services available to students to improve their writing!

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 February 9th, Dr. Verner Mitchell will discuss “Lucia Pitts: Poet of the Six Triple Eight” in Patterson Hall 456 beginning at 4pm.
- On February 23rd, Dr. Emily Thrush will discuss “Making Connection: How Subdisciplines Can Inform Each Other” in Patterson Hall 456 beginning at 4pm.

Wordsmith Writing Olympics

Celebrating over 35 years at the University of Memphis, the [WordSmith competition](#) brings 200 middle and high school students from 30 area schools to the University of Memphis to test their writing and creative thinking skills with a series of quick writing exercises known as dashes. This year, the annual contest will be held on **Sunday, February 22nd** in the University of Memphis University Center Ballroom beginning at 1:00pm. Cathy Dice would love to have TAs serve as proctors on Tournament Day or as judges on **Tuesday, February 24** at 11:30am. Judges will meet in the faculty lounge and lunch is provided! If interested, email Cathy (cdice@memphis.edu). This opportunity would look great on a CV!

Conference Presentation: Tek Chhetry

Congrats to Tek on the acceptance of his proposal titled, “Multimodal Resistance of Gen Z Movement in Nepal: A Cultural Turn.” Tek will present at the 47th annual Southwest Popular/American Culture Association (SWPACA) Conference on February 26th.

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: Library Services and Resources Demo

On January 20th, CAP met on the Second Floor of McWherter Library for a demonstration of the tools and resources available to students (both undergraduate and graduate). Here are the [slides](#) from this event.

Presenters:

- Carl Hess, Undergraduate Success Librarian: carl.hess@memphis.edu
- Ashley Roach-Freiman, RIS Librarian: amroach@memphis.edu
- Meredith Boulden, Assistant Director of Writing & Communication: mheath@memphis.edu
- Brigitte Billeaudeau, Special Collections Department Head: bbilledx@memphis.edu

The presenters shared some of the [services](#) that the library offers, including [instruction](#) in information literacy and source evaluation, online and in-person [research appointments](#), [research guides](#) (one specifically for ENGL [1010](#) and [1020](#)), [technology access](#) (think podcast and video studios), [Canvas modules](#) (that you can add to your Canvas shell), [historical records and memorabilia](#) (specifically about Memphis and the Mid-South), and much more! The best part about the library is that they are open to collaboration with instructors, so if you have an idea, they can help you make it happen! They can help you create materials or even come visit your class! You can also reach out to Special Collections to have your students visit them during their ENGL 1020 research project.

Also, don't forget that the library is here to support you! They can offer you a quiet [space](#) to study, [help you research](#) your next project, and [support in writing your dissertation](#).

Teaching Hack: Academic Text Carousel – Lindsay Helms

Our students may struggle with reading academic texts and research articles. Here is a peer activity that I like to use in my classroom to help my students improve their critical thinking skills and support them in creating reading strategies and habits. The purpose of the activity is for students to learn how to read actively, mine important info, and summarize academic texts in a succinct way!

➤ Choose a scholarly article

- This can be a reading from the course textbook or a supplemental reading. Try to keep the reading on the shorter side (you may need to choose an excerpt).
- If possible, print the article and ask students to annotate the printed article so that you can see the students' annotations more clearly.

➤ Close Read and Annotation (15 mins)

- Give the students time to read and annotate (they can color code) for:
 - Main argument / thesis
 - Key evidence / claims
 - Words or sentences they don't understand
- Ask the students to write a 1-2 sentence summary of what they read. The summary ensures that they understand the main ideas of the argument and can communicate those ideas succinctly. It also helps them when writing research and they need to summarize their source texts.

➤ Peer Feedback Carousel (20 mins)

- Students pair up and trade annotated copies.
- Each student reads their partner's annotations and summary and compares and contrasts their answers.
- Rotate so that each student gets feedback from two peers.

➤ Reflection (10 mins)

- Students can now revise their summaries if they choose.
- Students share their summaries with the class (I like to do this on a Google doc or on a large post it note on the wall).
- Discussion questions:
 - What is the thesis? Claims?
 - Were there any parts of the article that were challenging? How so? Do you understand them now?
 - How would you summarize this article? (Read the summaries)
 - What did you learn from this exercise? How could you use this strategy when reading in the future?

TA Spotlight: Seiko Hayashi

This is my eighth semester teaching the first-year writing course as a PhD TA. Having taught ENGL 1010 four times, I've read students' Autoethnography papers four times. Many students become fervent followers of Anne Lamott, saying, "I used to get stuck trying to write a perfect first draft, but now I allow myself to write a shitty first draft. Lamott completely changed my writing process!"

While I'm not a fervent Lamott follower myself, her essay "Shitty First Drafts" helped me accept my "shitty first ENGL 1010 class" as an inevitable first draft and view teaching as a process. If you're a TA with little teaching experience and feel stressed about every class, I recommend reading Lamott's essay, retitled "Shitty First Teaching."

In fact, my first ENGL 1010 class was truly awful. Most students didn't read the assigned text. Group discussions ended in a minute, and students spontaneously started watching YouTube. Silence and their blank expressions filled the classroom, with only my Japanese-accented English echoing. **Meanwhile, fear, guilt, and inferiority spread within me.** Most students relied solely on their existing knowledge and experience with writing, and many final drafts completely missed the core assignment requirements.

Lamott states, "The only way I can get anything written at all is to write really, really shitty first drafts." I taught really, really shitty first ENGL 1010, and there was nothing I just loved in that "very last line of the very last paragraph on page six." But, indeed, **I found within it a rough direction and what I should work on the following semester.**



From the second semester onward, reading became an in-class activity in my class, and the silence of YouTube watching was replaced by the silence of reading. Responding to that day's reading, students brainstorm towards a major assignment and write about it in a 10-minute writing activity. They're almost ready to begin the first draft, while I can track their progress each time. (Killing two birds with one stone.) Each major assignment is discussed, including possible outlines, and understanding is confirmed with a Kahoot quiz. (The top three students receive Japanese Pocky.)

Class activities, discussion questions, and writing prompts are continually revising each semester. Lamott states, "Very few writers really know what they are doing until they've done it." I rephrased this: **I don't really know what I am teaching until I read students' final products.** From students' "Discourse Community Description," I realized I hadn't provided enough activities to help students grasp the difference between description and analysis. From their "Editing Projects," I realized I hadn't explained the difference between revision and editing in a way students could understand. **It feels like playing a never-ending game of whack-a-mole.**

This semester I'm revising my course for the eighth time, but I still often leave the Patterson Hall thinking, "Ah, that didn't work," "I wasn't prepared enough." But I don't use Lamott's recommended exercise to **quiet the voices in your head.** Because mice? Gross! Instead, my Japanese family doctor appears and says, "Don't reflect! Next! Next! Just think of how to make the class laugh!" Back at the apartment, I brew coffee, eat cookies or cake (sometimes both), release that happiness hormone serotonin, and use its power to start planning the next class. It's always the same cycle.

Lamott, my shitty first ENGL 1010 teaching, and three and a half years of trial and error taught me: **Teaching is a process; all TAs have more to learn.**

Lamott, Anne. "Shitty First Drafts." *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*. Anchor Books, 1994, pp. 21-27.

If you are interested in being the next TA Spotlight, contact lldailey@memphis.edu.

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](#).

February 3rd:

-First-Year CAP in Cadres for Mentoring (if Teaching Caps were cancelled last week due to weather, please meet this week)

February 10th:

-All CAP in PT 456 for panel presentation, “The Search Committee's Perspective”

February 17th:

-First-Year CAP in Cadres for Mentoring
-Teaching CAP in Cadres for Mentoring
-Prof CAP in PT 315 for Professional Development

February 24th:

-First-Year CAP in PT 456
-Teaching CAP in Cadres for Mentoring

