Core Principle: Conventions

Abbreviated Course-specific Principle
ENGL1105: Genre Conventions <------> ENGL1106: Style Conventions

- **ENGL1105 outcome:** You will have demonstrated awareness of academic writing genre conventions, including mechanics and syntax.

- **ENGL1106 outcome:** You will have developed awareness of conventions of academic research processes, including documentation systems and their purposes.

Convention defined: 1) a meeting or gathering; 2) a covenant or agreement.

Conventions, understood in these basic definitional terms, hearken to relatively stable, agreed upon patterns in communication. With large organizations, such as MLA and APA, routine meetings refresh and refocus explicitly established conventions related to citation and documentation systems, especially. Agreements about conventional features of communication can also emerge and stabilize tacitly, without organizational sponsorship, such as is the case with hashtags in Twitter. With hashtag conventions, new and sometimes temporary labels can cohere a conversation. In this case, the agreed upon usage pattern does necessarily require any organizational initiation. Any Twitter user can initiate a hashtag, and, importantly, it stabilizes as a convention upon subsequent uptake and re-use. This emergent, sustaining quality is also applicable to many textual forms that circulate every day, such as emails, letters, and SMS texts. The same pattern build-up is activated in academic writing, and it manifests especially with style and genre.

So *what* about conventions? [Introductory Activity]
Write for five minutes about conventions generally or specifically. How do you feel about conventions? How do you feel about specific writing experiences in which conventions had greater or lesser bearing on the prospective effectiveness of what you were writing? Provide an anecdote, or brief, illustrative story, that elaborates upon one of these experiences, while characterizing it as positive, negative, or some combination of the two. Be prepared to share what you have written.

Conventions in Actual Practice [Discussion]
What do we want students to learn *really*?
ENGL1105
- Rhetorical approaches to genre understand genre not only in formalist or structural terms, but also in terms of 1) situated interaction, 2) circulation and uptake, and 2) desired action.
    o Carolyn Miller's work on genre is key to a rhetorical understanding of genre conventions. Miller writes, "a rhetorically sound definition of genre must be centered not on the substance of the form of discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish" (151). As such, when teaching genre, we should ask with students about the action the writing will be used to accomplish—or about what it strives to *do* and why.

ENGL1106
- Style names the third canon of classical rhetoric; consulting that history may be useful for understanding broadly the connections between "sentences" as a unit length that heeds constraints, such as the breath of the communicator (i.e., embodied constraints) and also the attention span of the listener/reader.
- Whereas genre conventions address macro level considerations influencing language choices and design, style conventions attend to language choices at other units of discourse, such as the paragraph, sentence, word (part of speech), as well as with extra-discursive elements, such as visuals (photographs, graphs and tables, or data visualizations).
- Style, in the context of writing instruction, also encompasses relatively stable systems established by the Modern Language Association (MLA), the American Psychological Association (APA), and more, that apply to formal features of academic writing, narrative and parenthetical in-text citations, footnotes or endnotes, and references or works cited.

Class Activity Ideas
1. Stylistic variety rewrites (see Dirk's example of the ransom note).
2. Parts of speech tagging. Attends especially to subjects and verbs, or characters and actions, as Joseph Williams refers to core elements of a kernel sentence (base clause).
3. Annotating genre conventions in a found text or model text (genres wild; genres tamed).
4. Other ideas?

Seven Readings [Abbreviated Resources List]

Bazerman, Charles. "Speech Acts, Genres, and Activity Systems: How Texts Organize Activity and People." *What Writing Does and How It Does It. an Introduction to Analyzing Texts and Textual Practices*, ed. Bazerman and Prior, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003, 309-339.

Dirk, Kerry. "Navigating Genres." *Writing Spaces, Vol. 1*. Eds. Charles Lowe and Pavel Zemliansky. Clemson, SC: Parlor P, 2010. 249-262.

Smitherman, Geneva. "CCCC's Role in the Struggle for Language Rights." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 50, no. 3, 1999, pp. 349–376. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/358856.

Vandenberg, Peter. "Animated Categories: Genre, Action, and Composition." *College English*, vol. 67, no. 5, 2005, pp. 532–545. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/30044647.

Williams, Joseph. *Style: Toward Clarity and Grace*. Chicago: U Chicago P (1990)

Miller, Carolyn R. "Genre as Social Action." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70 (1984): 151-167.

Young, Vershawn Ashanti. "'Nah, We Straight': An Argument against Code Switching." *JAC* 29. 1–2 (2009): 49–76.