Title: Improving Critical Analysis Skills in Introductory World Literature
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Summary: My course redesign focuses on an introductory World Literature course. My aim is to make the process of critical analysis of literature both more accessible and more attainable for students.

Background

Probably the greatest insight at which I have arrived in recent work on my World Literature introductory course is that I need to make what I mean by “critical analysis” more visible to myself as well as to my students, by breaking it down into smaller and more concrete steps that can be built into my course design (assignments, rubrics, planned activities). I realize now that, when I first began asking my students to write critical analysis essays several years ago, I was operating on faulty assumptions about what seemed obvious or common sense to me based on my own years of cultivating literary habits of mind. As Sherry Lee Linkon points out, research suggests that “cognitive habits that appear to come ‘naturally’ are actually acquired abilities, special ways of thinking that our students do not yet have and must develop” (Literary Learning: Teaching the English Major. Indiana UP, 2011, p. 8). Linkon furthermore notes that English classes too often foreground content knowledge while providing too little overt instruction on elements of strategic knowledge” such as “giving direct attention to helping students learn to write literary arguments” (29). Thus, making the techniques of literary analysis and argumentation more visible and accessible to my students has been the key impetus of my work.

Background

My course redesign focuses on EN 2760, World Literature Since the Sixteenth Century, an undergraduate course which introduces students to college-level literary study and prompts them to begin to think on their own as they read, interpret, and write about texts. The course chiefly involves practice in and refinement of critical thinking, reading, and writing skills, using the study of literature as a basis for this work. Open to all Rockhurst students as fulfilling an introductory-level literature core requirement, the course is typically enrolls around 25 students, mostly populated by sophomores who have already fulfilled their first-year writing requirements.

The course is one which I have re-designed considerably a few times over a period of ten years:
- Leading an effort about ten years ago to help my department to integrate more non-Western content and perspectives, to pay attention to the “world” in the “world literature” we said we were teaching (but weren’t).
- Devising targeted ways to encourage my students to come prepared to class, having done the reading on their own (and discouraging their reliance on web resources that may enable them to avoid actually engaging the literary texts).

In the last few iterations of the course, I have been conscious of concentrating increasingly disproportionate energy toward addressing the problem of getting students to commit to doing the reading, whereas (with relative long-term success on the latter) I now perceive more crucial needs particularly in how students work to develop skill in critically analyzing literature.
At the heart of deep learning in this class is introducing students to techniques of critical analysis which will offer them strategies for thinking deeply on their own about literary texts. By critical analysis, I mean the process of taking an interpretive stance that can be justified by a logical argument that uses evidence from the text, and developing that argument in a way that is well-supported and carefully organized for readers. Most crucial to developing skill in critical analysis is cultivating an ability to think for oneself and to develop one’s ideas fully, not just repeating what others have said or summarizing the story.

Course Learning Goals
* To develop skill in close reading of texts in order to interpret works in various genres drawn from a variety of traditions and cultures.
* To analyze a work of literature by making arguments (interpretive claims) about the text.
* To apply reasoning to interpret texts.
* To use evidence from primary and secondary sources effectively, to support arguments.
* To present written arguments in clear, well-organized academic prose.

Activities and Assignments
Quizzes help me communicate early in the semester the expectation that students must commit to doing the reading, and to read actively, throughout the course. Then, as the semester progresses, the focus inside and outside of class turns increasingly toward activities that offer opportunities to practice critical analysis—culminating in students’ work on essay exams and on out-of-class essays.

Reading quizzes
From the earliest moments of the course, foundational to promoting ongoing development of close reading skills are reading quizzes and reflections, designed to promote students’ prepared engagement upon arriving in class, so that we can focus class time on activities that will achieve deeper levels of thought. From the beginning, I am articulating expectations for the quizzes—a grasp of “the basics”—the “who, what, when, where” of the text—character, plot, and setting. I tell students that there will be throughout the semester frequent, easy reading quizzes, to reinforce the crucial nature of keeping up with these basic aspects of the texts. What we are doing, early on, is refreshing their memories about concepts they likely learned back in primary school: though surely not brand new to them, these terms are imperative for us as a class to use, to build a common language that we will employ moving forward.

In-class work
With quick quiz assignments measuring and reinforcing “the basics,” the majority of our in-class time is spent actively wrestling with critical thinking tasks: attending to the “hows and whys” of the text—paying attention to style, genre, perspective, theme, connecting text to contexts, and (where appropriate) symbolism. In class discussions or small group work, we might, for example, seek to pay attention to choices that the writer has made in shaping the text; we will seek to open up possibilities for how we can interpret the text as we consider the text and some of its cultural and historical contexts; we will explore how the ideas that our readings of the text produce relate to or impact our own lives and culture; and we will seek to envision the way that other (esp. our own) contexts might inform alternate ways of reading.

A crucial feature of my course design is how students are engaged in critical thinking—via the group discussions we have in class. Students come to expect that during nearly every meeting
they will spend part of class time working in groups of 3-4, engaged with discussion prompts about the text we’re reading for that particular day. Questions, first from me, later generated by the students themselves, become a way of engendering students’ independent thinking, prompting them to participate in making sense of the text on their own terms and to work effectively with other students to arrive at speculative answers that must be anchored in evidence from the text. Typical questions for small groups to work on require that they speculate on a structured series of “how” or “why” questions related to a character’s behavior or motivation, or the significance of a plot element, or the relevance of the setting, or especially the predominant ideas the text inspires or provokes us to explore.

The active, engaged in-class opportunities for students to practice thinking deeply about texts are intended to set the stage for opportunities from mid-semester onward for students to translate this thinking into critical analysis writing—on essay exams and out-of-class essays.

Exams
Exams at midterm and at the end of the semester prompt students to make an argument based on a prompt that directs them toward one particular topic (which might be, for example, learning or traveling or power), and asks them some questions that guide them toward choices for arguments they can make. Students are encouraged to shape interpretations by applying the topic they’ve been given to write about a range of readings we have done (usually four or five texts). Students are given the exam prompt a week ahead of time and verbally encouraged beforehand to come to the exam fully prepared to write in class by bringing a page of notes and/or an outline. The exam chiefly attempts to measure their ability to execute a literary argument, supplying relevant textual evidence, and organizing their thinking coherently.

Essays
During the middle part of the semester, students practice and develop skills of literary argumentation with two out-of-class critical analysis essays (rubrics for which can be found here and here). These typically call on students to develop and frame an argument about how a textual theme offers a lens through which to interpret particular works of literature we’ve been reading for class. For these essays, students are expected to marshal evidence from the text to assert claims of their own (a thesis) and to make and support their arguments.

Rationale
Critical analysis is the key critical thinking skill my students are practicing when they work on in-class exams and out-of-class essays. On these major assignments, I expect students to make an argument about a theme, to stake an interpretive claim for what the literary work is about or how a particular idea functions in the text. As “critical analysis assignments,” the exam and the essay both expect that students will marshal and present evidence and generate a logically organized argument. But a key difference is that the essays require students to choose a topic and narrow it to generate a theme on their own, whereas on exams, students are given a preset topic with questions to guide them toward arguments.

On exams, furnished with a prompt, most students can quite capably map out a specific claim to guide their work. However, when students need to generate their own critical analysis to write an essay, they struggle. I provide students with a short reading that helps them conceptually distinguish “critical analysis” from “plot summary,” but although students intellectually grasp this distinction, they struggle to put it into practice. Without the additional scaffolding that the
exam prompt offers (helping them to narrow topics to themes), students often produce written essays that merely summarize instead of analyzing.

When provided with additional opportunities to revisit their work, those students who have produced first drafts that summarize are able to turn them into final drafts that analyze. But this extra step is achieved generally via extensive formative feedback from me to help students see how and where revision will help them revise a summary-laden draft into an analysis-driven essay. Most students indicated on surveys that they developed a good understanding of critical analysis writing only after they received my feedback on a major essay assignment. A significant majority of students surveyed ranked my written feedback on a paper or exam as the most important factor helping them learn critical analysis writing.

As I began work on this project, my students and I seem to agree that my written feedback has been the key aid to their learning critical analysis to date. This method of providing extensive individual feedback has typically yielded results that suggest that most students are learning critical analysis techniques. However, my offering extensive written feedback is ultimately quite time-consuming and inefficient. Even when afforded the opportunity to revise, many students do not pursue such invitations: for example, only 11 out of 24 students pursued the option to revise an essay in the most recent iteration of the course. Furthermore, many students are not mindful that comments I have made on their first critical analysis assignment point them toward transferable skills that apply to their work on later critical analysis writing in the course.

I have been asking myself, therefore, are there alternatives to “extensive feedback from me” that will bring about improved student work and demonstration of learning? Are there other ways of prompting students to revisit their critical analyses, besides my own commentary? Are there other, perhaps better, ways of encouraging and expecting students, in a more independent way, to delve back into rereading their own texts?

The impetus of this project, thus, is in search of equally successful but more efficient ways for me to teach, and for my students to learn, critical analysis techniques. There are obvious benefits to implementing alternatives to labor-intensive commenting if there are better ways to maintain and even improve the student learning that is involved in critical analysis writing. The present project is driven by my desire to learn more about how, and when, and how effectively, students are learning critical analysis skills in my course.
Implementation

Over the course of the three years of this project, there are four significant changes I’ve made to the course:

1. Clarifying how I articulate the thinking that is involved in critical analysis writing

It has been helpful for me to break down what may appear to students as “esoteric codes” into a more concrete acknowledgment of the complex, multiple components of critical analysis thinking and writing. Specific steps that break down the process of writing an effective critical analysis include:

- Conceptualizing a means of analyzing a literary theme
- Focusing a critical analysis (by creating an effective thesis statement)
- Marshalling evidence to support a critical analysis
- Organizing a critical analysis (foregrounding/signaling the main points for readers)

The first of the steps articulated above has become the focus of some of the course’s early-semester class meetings – in the hope that, through initial and ongoing exposure and through low-stakes practice, my students can become sufficiently adept at this skill, before they create a draft of an out-of-class essay. If students cannot first conceptualize the theme for their critical analysis and begin to formulate an argument, then this misstep will obviously impede the success of the rest of their essay as an effort to analyze. However, students’ relative success in their work on essay exams for my class suggests that once they have mapped a direction for an argument (i.e., if they are given one by an exam prompt), they find the later steps in the critical analysis process more manageable and easier to navigate. Therefore, I have found that I need to focus special attention on the stage of students’ conceptual formulation of a literary argument.

Also, although I have been using analytic rubrics for most of the courses I teach for many years, I realized in the first year of this project that an impediment to assessing student learning was that for this course’s assignments I had been employing holistic rubrics. The process of converting holistic rubrics into discrete analytic rubrics has helped me clarify how I articulate my thinking about critical analysis skills and my expectations for student learning.

2. Devoting more class time to explicit introduction to and practice, via sample texts, of critical thinking skills in analyzing literature and of literary themes.

In Fall 2015, I developed a first iteration of a handout intended to help students distinguish a topic from a theme and to articulate their chosen theme as an argumentative claim. I designed an accompanying brainstorming activity in which all students contribute, before class, a set of “themes” they have come up with (some of which may be topics). Working in small groups in class, students use the handout to distinguish “topics” from “themes” in the class-generated list, leading the class toward a consensus. Then, students work on drawing from one of the sample themes to begin constructing an argument about their theme. In a subsequent class, we work on reviewing and fine-tuning these arguments.

3. Adjusting assignment sequencing, especially in creating a new Self-Annotation assignment.
For the past two years, I have been paying special attention to how time is invested as well as to the sequencing of this course’s assignments. Previously, I had sought to incorporate as much reading of literature as possible into the course, and devoted a disproportional effort toward assuring students completed all of the readings. Because of that emphasis on reading, writing about literature was secondary: writing assignments were completed outside of class and returned at the end of a class meeting. Now, in hindsight, I recognize that with the exception of minutes spent previewing and answering questions about the writing assignment itself, there was little actual class time devoted to student writing. Furthermore, writing was relegated to a private, solitary activity, never really assuming a public space or role in my classroom. Now, I find myself seeking to pare down the number of literary reading assignments to make sure to allow the time needed for in-class work on written critical analyses.

In Spring 2016, I began scaffolding my students’ work on critical analysis learning more effectively. Introducing “theme” more self-consciously, earlier in the course, aids students in gaining more practice and being able to transfer skills practiced in class and on smaller assignments into greater success on their out-of-class critical analysis essays, in the draft stage as well as in its finished formed. I have been working, in other words, to build into the course more effective connection between the writing students are doing early in the semester, and the critical analyses students perform on essays and exams at the end of the semester. To that end, I introduced a few models to enable students to engage with and integrated knowledge. As a homework assignment, students read two short writing samples, one demonstrating a more successful example and one a less successful example of critical analysis. We also take a look at an early draft and a later draft of the same piece of critical analysis writing, so that students have some concrete models of how thinking evolves and becomes more precise as writers progress from draft to draft.

I also transformed an early-semester annotation assignment into a tool for students to use close reading skills to self-assess their critical analysis. In the course’s first out-of-class writing assignment, I had previously expected that students would annotate the text of a long poem in order to practice close reading. I overhauled that annotation assignment, to that students instead begin by writing a draft of a critical analysis of a text and then, via an interconnected follow-up assignment, self-annotate their own text, their critical analysis, using a guide that points them toward crucial elements of essay writing and of critical analysis. In other words, students are asked to practice close reading and annotating but do so in a self-directed way, using their own text as a basis. The Self-Annotation assignment is an innovation intended to get students to slow down, to pause and review their own work with care—to notice and pay attention to the most fundamental aspects of critical analysis writing. It is intended to inspire them to want to revise their own work, to improve the quality of their skill in critical analysis, not just on one essay but in a more transferrable way.

4. Employing student surveys to help me understand what and when students are learning.

In-class surveys are designed to help me gauge student perceptions of their own learning, of what helped them to learn in the course, and of when they think they learned what they learned about critical analysis.
**Student Work**

As I began this project, I was well aware that there was a significant range of performances within any particular class of students on their written work for the World Literature course. It is a joy to read well-written critical analyses, and sometimes a humbling or even exasperating experience when students’ thinking demonstrated in class is not matched by their performance in written work. Overall, it has been rewarding also to revisit students’ work anew to take a careful look at what their performances tell me. The following are examples of student work representing a range of student achievement:

- Example 1 – Grade A  
- Example 2 – Grade A  
- Example 3 – Grade B  
- Example 4 – Grade B  
- Example 5 – Grade C  
- Example 6 – Grade C

The work representing the highest levels of achievement shows that students are making a significant claim and structuring their thinking in the body paragraphs in order to develop and justify that claim. The writing is clear, well-organized, and driven by analysis. Work that is good (3 & 4) rather than excellent states and develops an argument but is somewhat less precise, specific, or consistent in the way students communicate their thinking. Work that is adequate (5 & 6) makes or develops a claim in a more vague/general way, often tending somewhat to summarize the plot rather than develop its argument in the essay’s body paragraphs. Adequate work does not demonstrate thinking that is carefully organized for readers. Poor work does not demonstrate significant development of a claim and often mostly summarizes the plots of texts; such work may be hampered by organizational problems.

On the whole, there is significant evidence of more than satisfactory achievement in students’ performances on Critical Analysis 2 essays and final exams. For example, consistently two-thirds or more of students have earned grades of A or B on their final exams during the three years of the project.

However, one of the key observations I made in the first year of the project was that there were more students scoring in the merely adequate to poor range on Critical Analysis 2, toward the end of the course, than I would have liked. Most students were earning high final grades (in the A or B range) for the course overall at the end of the semester, but these grades were aided by mostly excellent scores on reading quizzes. Students were quite evidently keeping up with the reading and engaging in good discussions in class, but how could I get them to demonstrate critical analysis skills more effectively in their writing?

Over the first two years of the project, 56% (40 of 71) of my students earned grades of A or B on their Critical Analysis 2 essays, but 44% (n=30) of them earned grades of C or D. Making some adjustments to allow more activities to help students prepare for and work incrementally on Critical Analysis 2 in Year 3 seems to have led to some progress, with 65% of students earning grades of A or B and 35% earning grades of C or D.

Upon taking a closer look at particular aspects of my students’ performances in spring 2016, comparing initial and final grades on CA 1 with grades on CA 2, I found that performances trended upward on Critical Analysis 1 when students were offered extensive, specific written feedback from me and when they took advantage of the opportunity to revise and resubmit work,
but I also found that offering them the opportunity to revise the first major essay did not translate into significantly higher achievement on the second. The key innovation of my project was to see if I could prompt students to take more responsibility for their own learning of critical analysis skills. To what extent did the most significant change, the incorporation of the Self-Annotation assignment in Year 3, lead to actual improvement of student learning?

The conversion of rubrics from a holistic guide to an analytic grid enabled me to isolate particular performance attributes of my students’ work, to be able to notice when students were learning, and when they were or were not successful in the later essay at transferred skills from one assignment to the next.

Examining student performances on the “Critical Analysis” rubric category allowed me to notice that most students (29 out of 45, or 64% during Year 3) achieved at an excellent or good level, compared with 55% (12 of 22) during Year 2, when the class was pretty evenly divided between those who scored at an excellent or good level versus those who scored at an adequate, poor, or unacceptable level. This data suggests that the Self-Annotation assignment helped students carry over critical analysis skills from CA 1 to CA 2.

On the other hand, I observed in student performances on the “Articulation of Theme” category only a slight difference between Year 2 to Year 3 results. According to my rubric, 54% (13 of 24 students) in Year 2, and 44% (20 of 45) in Year 3, were articulating their themes in a vague or unsatisfactory way. I will want to rethink what else I can do to teach or break down the process, to enable students to learn to apply this skill successfully.

The clearest way in which I have been able to notice my students’ learning-in-progress is in examining their work on the Self-Annotation assignment, which prompts them to pause and reflect on their work on a draft of their critical analysis writing, to self-evaluate their performance and, most crucially, to return with active engagement to a process of rereading and annotating their own text, so that they can metacognitively perceive what they have achieved and what they might achieve through some revision. Whether they are re-stating their own arguments, demonstrating their awareness of their claims and supporting evidence, or developing a plan for how to revise, the Self-Annotation assignment provides a quite transparent and interesting snapshot of student learning. Here are three fine examples of Self-Annotations from students 1, 2, and 3 with secondary assistance either from a fellow classmate or from a peer tutor at Rockhurst’s Learning Center.

Supplementing this closer look at my students’ work were critical analysis surveys I have been conducting since this project began in Fall 2014, to help me gather information about students’ own perceptions of whether, how, and when they have learned about critical analysis.

When asked, “did you enter this course already knowing how to write a critical analysis?”, 40% (51 of 127) of students indicated that they had. However, students’ perception of their understanding does not always correlate with definitive demonstration of such skills in the class. For example, seven of the thirteen students who answered this question affirmatively early in the spring 2017 semester earned at least one grade in the adequate to poor range (C or D) on an essay or exam. Overconfidence or cognitive dissonance may play a role in this discrepancy.

Toward the end of the spring 2017 semester, I asked these same students, “what has been new
about the concept or practice of critical analysis writing for our class?” Only six of the students responded that there was nothing new, and two of these six offered the clarification that additional practice was helpful to them, even if they already felt they knew what they were doing. Meanwhile, all of the other eighteen students offered specific responses about new aspects of critical analysis to which they had been exposed in the course, with responses ranging from “everything” (3) to “integrating quotations” (4) to “focusing on the details,” “depth of critical thinking and problem solving,” “paying attention to transition and topic sentences,” and, most especially, “thinking for yourself” (8). Six of the eight who offered the latter response provided their own specific iterations of independent thinking:

| “Making a claim (one that is not a safe opinion) was a new concept for me” |
| “How to support my points effectively” |
| “Conveying details in a concise way—getting to my point” |
| “Coming up with our own ideas about themes in literature” |
| “Asking more how and why questions to prompt our own thinking” |
| “Interpreting the text on my own & often re-reading to see messages I did not get before” |

The specificity of nearly all of the above answers contrasts starkly with the responses of Year 1 students who were asked the same question:

<p>| “What has been new about the concept or practice of critical analysis writing for our class?” |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall 2014</th>
<th>Spring 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>no response (13)</td>
<td>no response (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“it’s hard”</td>
<td>“looking more in depth” (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“expanding on every thought”</td>
<td>“better practice once I had better understanding”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“learned to take out summaries”</td>
<td>“avoiding summary, discussing big picture things”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“hard for me because I’m a bio major”</td>
<td>“learning to develop my viewpoint”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“more detail, thinking completely outside the box”</td>
<td>“structure”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“emphasis on your opinion”</td>
<td>“read every story with an open mind”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“rough transitions, dropped quotes, topic sentences”</td>
<td>“reinforced basic ideas I had”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Everything” (3)</td>
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My inference is that the active engagement with critical analysis prompted by the Self-Annotation assignment in Year 3 increased students’ metacognitive awareness of what they were learning.

Perhaps the most compelling survey answers for the sake of my project were to the question, “by what point in the semester had you developed a good understanding of critical analysis writing?” The chart below, complicated though it is in reporting on responses by students at the conclusion of all six semesters of this project, offers some valuable information.

A majority of respondents in each of the first four semesters indicated that they arrived at a good
understanding only after mid-semester (light blue and purple on the bar graph), with the most frequent response being “by the end (when the last essay was due).” Notice the significant shift in student perceptions in the Year 3 responses, as shown by the large green portion of the graph’s right-hand columns. Many more students during Year 3 (23 of 45, or 51%) indicated that they had learned critical analysis skills after they completed the first essay (CA 1)—when they had just completed the Self-Annotation assignment.

Indeed, I also surveyed students in Year 3 about their perception of the importance of the Self-Annotation assignment to their learning critical analysis skills. 38% of those who responded (8 of 21) indicated that it was very important or important.
Reflections

Toward the end of Year 2 of this project, I found myself responding to one particular essay with such an abundance of comments that I realized I had written just as many words as the student had written in the essay itself. It was clear that the student had superficially grasped some vague ideas about critical analysis skills (e.g., pursuing an open-ended question about the text) but without demonstrating an ability to apply the techniques she was beginning to learn, and that circumstance was leading me into an inordinate amount of time commenting. There has to be a better way, I thought to myself. I am spending way too much time commenting; the evidence suggests that the time I’m spending on commenting is not clearly leading to long-term improvement over more than one assignment; yet many students come to my class rather conditioned to look to my comments for the key to improving their critical analysis skills.

The problem I identified seems to be one of proportionate time invested: The amount of time a student puts into writing an essay seems inversely related to the amount of time it takes a teacher to comment on and grade the work. Even though sometimes students do put in vast amounts of time that may be misdirected and unproductive, recent research suggests that students spend increasingly less time planning, writing, and revising their work. “How can I assure that students are devoting the time needed to reread and revise, to learn to think for themselves?” is therefore a key question with which I’ve been wrestling.

I am reminded as I reread students’ survey comments of how hard it is to learn to think for oneself. In 2016 a student wrote, “This is a very hard concept to grasp, especially for science majors like me. Everyone interprets literature differently, and I asked for many opinions on my critical analyses and everyone told me different things. I think requiring every person to meet with you would be good so you can tell them exactly what you’re looking for.” Alternately, rereading comments from Year 3, I see a few students perplexed by how much I expected them to figure things out for themselves (e.g., “We wrote two critical analysis papers, but we never ‘learned’ how to write one. You were just told to write it and see how it goes”; “I feel as if we were left to do much of the ‘figuring out’ on our own”). Thinking for themselves, for a fair number of the students I teach, seems a foreign concept, and learning to do so, almost an overwhelming challenge when they arrive in my classroom.

But via the Self-Annotation assignment, I am seeing a critical mass of students taking greater ownership of their work, that is, engaging in what scholars of writing pedagogy call “critical self-reflexivity” (the ability to reflect back on one’s own writing processes, through rereading and revising, with a critical eye). I am trying to find a balance in my teaching to avoid the polar extremes of, on one hand, giving students so much help that I am nearly doing the thinking for them and, on the other, leaving students utterly to their own devices, even when they need my help. Overemphasizing structure in teaching writing runs the risk of guiding students to generate prefabricated, almost robotic essay patterns. But a practice at the other extreme may advocate for college students to sink or swim: to figure things out for themselves, without a teacher’s help or support. The Self-Annotation assignment is an attempt to find a middle path, helping to cultivate a reflexive impulse so that students can work on their own to improve the structure and depth of their thinking.

There are hopeful signs in the Year 3 survey data and student work. Evaluation of rubric categories for student work in Year 3 seems to demonstrate high achievement, perhaps even
improvement at a higher level than in student work from previous years, particularly in the rubric categories most relevant to critical analysis. Furthermore, surveys indicated in Year 1 that “Dr. Kerrigan’s written feedback” on essays was most frequently ranked as far and away the most important factor in helping students learn about critical analysis writing, whereas in spring 2017, only five of twenty-one students identified my feedback as the most important factor. This year, other interventions (explanations/handouts on critical analysis, rubrics, one-on-one assistance from a tutor, peer, or the professor) have displaced the function of my extensive feedback in terms of import to student learning.

It seems likely, as I proceed, that I may attempt to incorporate a second self-annotation assignment later in the semester, designed to accompany students’ work on Critical Analysis 2 and offer a further opportunity to practice self-reflection. I will likely seek to formalize students’ collaboration with tutors as an attendant step in the process of their self-reflection.

I will, moving forward, continue to ask myself, how can I help my students work more efficiently—that is, devote needed time to reviewing and revising their work, a recursive practice that is essential to deep learning of critical analysis writing? How can I better facilitate, encourage, and reward students to take responsibility for developing their critical analysis skills in essay writing on their own?