# Tracing the Impact of Mindful Reading Beyond First-Year Composition

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## Project Overview

My proposed study, *Tracing the Impact of Mindful Reading Beyond First-Year Composition,* involves gathering data to better understand the extent to which first-year writing students who have been exposed to the “mindful reading” pedagogy use what they learned about reading in future classes and contexts. Introduced in *Securing a Place for Reading in Composition: The Importance of Teaching for Transfer* (2015)*,* this pedagogy has become popular in light of the 2017 publication of the open-access, free digital textbook, *A Writer’s Guide to Mindful Reading,* which enacts this pedagogy.While it is impossible to track how many instructors have adopted this pedagogy, a little over a year after its publication, the textbook had been visited by 20,931 unique IP addresses and downloaded 32,137 times. This study has two parts—an anonymous online survey component and an interview component. To encourage a fair and diverse sample, community college students, a population that remains underrepresented in writing program research, in addition to students from one private university and two public universities where the book was adopted will be recruited. As such, the findings will be relevant to instructors and writing program administrators at a range of postsecondary institutions.

## Statement of Significance in Relation to Previously Published Research and Scholarship

With the popularity of *A Writer’s Guide to Mindful Reading* and the mindful reading pedagogy, more generally[[1]](#footnote-1), it is important to begin assessing the effectiveness of this pedagogy and to share those findings with instructors and writing program administrators either already using this approach or considering doing so. The findings will provide insight into the pedagogy’s most effective aspects, as well as those that need to be further developed and/or revised. Because funding for writing programs is often dependent on the achievement of favorable outcomes this study is a crucial step in that process.

While compositionists have long assessed various writing pedagogies, they have not assessed postsecondary reading pedagogies likely because the field has largely ignored reading, writing’s counterpart in the construction of meaning. Alice Horning (2013, 2017, 2018, 2019), David A. Jolliffe (2008), Mike Bunn (2013), Debrah Huffman (2010), Ellen Carillo (2015), Mariolina Salvatori and Patricia Donahue (2012), among others, have pointed to the implications of this neglect. In fact, in Horning’s “Now More than Ever” (2019) she surveyed the tables of contents of five of the field’s leading journals, including *WPA,* and found that aside from *TETYC*, there are almost no articles on reading or literacy in these publications. Since 2013, for example, there have been only four articles on reading published in *WPA*. The study I am proposing would help fill this gap by taking seriously a reading pedagogy that has emerged in response to students’ difficulties with critical reading.

These difficulties have been underscored by large scale quantitative and qualitative studies, including the Citation Project (Jamieson) and the Stanford History Education Group’s 2016 study, as well as students’ declining SAT and ACT critical reading scores. Without research on the most effective ways of teaching reading at the postsecondary level and across various kinds of institutions, writing program administrators remain in the dark when it comes to integrating attention to reading into their writing programs all the while students are in need of a more integrated literacy curriculum perhaps more than ever before. Readers generally, including our students, are under unprecedented pressure to navigate the torrent of information they encounter daily. Teaching our students how to understand and assess the assumptions, biases, perspectives, and credibility of what they read is crucial. The mindful reading pedagogy is intended to support this work, but its large-scale efficacy remains largely unknown.

Moreover, because this study examines how the mindful reading pedagogy affects students across different kinds of institutions its findings will be relevant across student populations, including community college students, who remain underrepresented in writing-program research. As legislation is requiring community colleges across the country to combine reading and writing instruction in the form of integrated reading and writing (IRW) courses and accelerated learning programs (ALP), more attention must be paid to reading and to this underrepresented population of students. This study can begin to assess one of the reading pedagogies that has already been adopted by instructors and may be adopted as more community colleges are looking for support as their curricula shift in this direction.

## Expertise in This Area

For the last decade, my scholarship has focused on teaching reading at the postsecondary level and encouraging others to turn their attention to reading. In two scholarly monographs and one textbook (with an additional textbook and one handbook forthcoming), as well as more than a dozen journal articles and chapters, I argue for attending to reading in both the first-year writing classroom and across the disciplines as a means to simultaneously improving students’ critical reading and writing abilities. I am regularly invited to postsecondary institutions, including community colleges, to speak on this subject. I have also studied the transfer of learning, and transfer has always been the goal of the mindful reading pedagogy. This study, which considers transfer, complements earlier grant-funded research I conducted on transfer in writing centers, as well as a national study I conducted on the teaching of reading in first-year writing classrooms.

## Methods

This study has two parts—an anonymous online survey and an interview component. As mentioned above, in order to create a diverse sample, students from a community college, two public universities, and one private university will be recruited. The survey will be sent via email to students in first-year writing courses in which instructors adopted the textbook. The final question of the survey asks students if they are interested in participating in follow-up interviews for which they will be compensated with a gift card. Interviews will be transcribed by a professional transcription company. The goal of this longitudinal aspect of the study is to follow students after they used the textbook in order to track if, where, and when students are continuing to use what they learned about reading in other courses and contexts.

The survey is based upon instruments discussed in a range of research guides, including *Composing Research: A Contextualist Paradigm for Rhetoric and Composition* and *Methods and Methodology in Composition Research.* Because I am interested in how students think and reflect on their reading, as well as how they have constructed knowledge about reading since being in a course that focused on mindful reading, I am relying on self-reports (in the form of surveys and interviews). This approach has been taken by Schraw and Dennison, two educational psychologists who developed a 52-item inventory to measure adult’s metacognitive awareness, including that of undergraduates. In this and related studies, the goal is to tap into students’ perceptions, metacognition, and reflective capacities rather than their actual practices, as is the case with my study. The surveys will provide general insights into the pedagogy, while the follow-up interviews will allow for a more in-depth look at whether and how students carry their knowledge about reading with them to future courses and contexts.

To analyze the data, I will use open coding and thematic coding. The survey results will be open-coded, which, as Strauss and Corbin detail, involves “breaking apart and delineating concepts to stand for raw blocks of data” so they are qualified “in terms of their properties and dimensions” (195). Portions of the surveys that seem especially relevant to my study will then be subject to microanalyses, which, according to Strauss and Corbin “break open the data and to consider all the possible meanings” (59). The interview questions will be based on these microanalyses. I will triangulate data from the interviews to test their validity. This process may ultimately suggest that the categories that emerged during coding may need to be revised or modified. My university’s IRB deemed this study exempt from a full review. Its protocol number is X18-170.

## Dissemination of Findings

The findings from this study will be written up in the form of an article to be submitted to *WPA: Writing Program Administration* whose readers, as noted above, could benefit from more articles that pay attention to the role of reading in the writing curriculum. The findings will also be drawn on and presented at relevant professional conferences. As mentioned in the Timeline section below, because of the longitudinal nature of the study, I would not be able to write up my ultimate findings until at least one year from the start date. Still, I could begin presenting the results from my surveys in less formal settings, including work-in-progress sessions at various professional conferences.

## Timeline

The online survey will be distributed in November 2019. I will begin holding follow-up interviews in early 2020. I will continue with follow-up interviews through 2021/2022, as necessary. As noted just above, because of the longitudinal nature of the study, I would not be able to write up my ultimate findings until at least one year from the start date. Still, I could begin presenting the results from the surveys in less formal settings, including work-in-progress sessions at various professional conferences.

## Budget

Incentive for students to complete the online survey (Amazon gift card giveaway): $50

Incentives for students to participate in follow-up interviews: $450 ($15 gift card for each interview)

Transcription services: $500

A transcription service with a confidentiality agreement will be hired to transcribe the follow-up interviews at a reduced rate for nonprofit organizations. The interviews will run roughly 10-15 minutes, and students will participate in as many as 5 interviews over the course of the study. The transcription budget reflects my (realistic) goal of conducting these follow-up interviews with approximately 5-7 students, although if more are interested, I would certainly accept additional participants. Transcribing the interviews on my own would delay the process significantly because of my teaching and administrative responsibilities. As such, a professional service is crucial to begin studying— in a timely manner— the efficacy of the mindful reading approach and to disseminating those findings.

Note: I do not have access to matching funds.

**TOTAL REQUEST: $1000**

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1. In 2016, a half-day workshop at the CCCCs was devoted to reading pedagogies, with the mindful reading approach as its centerpiece. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)