WRITING-ABOUT-WRITING AND JOAN DIDION: CREATING A SPACE FOR EMOTION AS EPISTEMIC TOOL IN FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION

by

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to Lily. She can’t read, but she knows how long four hours is and when it’s time to get me to take a break from writing to go to the dog park. She’s my grad school mascot.
I’m not very good at this sort of thing; I’ve written three drafts of acknowledgements and can’t seem to get anything to come out right. I guess you could say I have too many emotions influencing this particular bit of writing—gratitude, relief, joy, frustration, disappointment, pride, you name it—that they’re causing interference and limiting my ability to use any one as epistemic tool here.

Instead, I give you a set of partially constructed thoughts about who I am indebted to for helping me throughout this project. To my mom, thank you for listening to me more than anyone else this past year and reminding me that certain issues are “their problem, not yours,” and to look beyond the short-term. And, of course, thank you for loving me and being proud of me, no matter what. To Pete, thank you for supporting Mom supporting me and for taking me to sushi when I come home—for your philosophical talks and your willingness to listen to my new liberal agendas 😊. To my dad: though you’ve been gone nearly 20 years, your memory continually inspires me to do both what I’m good at and what I love.

To the people on the periphery of this project who have been my support system here in Bozeman for the past year: Jeff Lynch, Jake Henan, and Doug Downs. Jeff, thanks for all the breakfast dates and for leading the way in this program for me—you’ve been the best in so many ways. Jake, thanks for putting up with me at conferences and for being a good friend. Doug, thanks for believing in me, for saying “Let’s see what we can do,” to all of my project ideas and opportunity-asking, and for standing up for me. Your mentoring is the reason I’m staying in this field.
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This project considers the problem of the cultural binary created between emotion and reasoning as ways of knowing. I address this binary within the context of first-year composition (FYC) by developing three central tenets for emotion as epistemic tool through a review of emotion scholarship in rhetoric and composition. These include: 1) emotions must be specific and nameable; 2) emotion challenges cultural assumptions and beliefs; and 3) we use the connection between emotion and experience as a method of inquiry. Having established these tenets, I situate emotion as epistemic tool in a writing-about-writing (WAW) approach to FYC and argue that this pedagogy is an effective site for emotion as epistemic tool, though it lacks concrete examples for how this works in writing. To address that, I suggest Joan Didion’s memoirs as an access point for students to see emotion working as epistemic tool outside academic writing. Finally, I connect these agendas in a curriculum design for a WAW course in FYC on emotion as epistemic tool that includes a course schedule, assignment sheets, and unit rationales.
INTRODUCTION

DEVELOPING EMOTION AS EPISTEMIC TOOL

When I was an undergraduate student in creative writing, I loved learning how writing could be used as a tool to make sense of experience. We wrote memoirs in my nonfiction workshop classes and I was often impressed by how my peers could take emotional experiences in their lives and make these experiences meaningful to others. Outside of these workshops, however, I was always discouraged by our culture’s insistence on devaluing emotion—that “emotional arguments” are unethical or weak. In rhetoric and composition, I find myself part of a discipline uniquely positioned within academia to challenge these cultural scripts—narratives accepted and supported by the culture at large—that subjugate emotion. Rhetoric’s focus and interest in theories of communication and composition’s connection to how these theories or cultural scripts appear in the classroom make this discipline a useful site for important questions about “what constitutes evidence” and how we use different forms of evidence to make meaning in the world (Agnew et al.).

This project came together as a result of the intersections between my experience as an undergraduate student reading and writing memoir, my own qualms with cultural assumptions about the value of particular kinds of stories, and my introduction to rhetoric and composition as a graduate student. In the spring of 2017, I took an independent study course on the “Rhetoric of Rationality and Emotion” to dip my toes in what rhetorical studies already knows: rationality and emotion create a false binary, one that is damaging
and harmful to cultural epistemology and how we make meaning in the world. It wasn’t until I read work by feminist philosopher Lorraine Code, however, that I felt I had a way to think through and begin to articulate how subjective knowledges like those gleaned from emotional experiences can be valid and powerful ways of knowing. Drawing from my background interests in memoir, my research on emotion in composition, and work from Lorraine Code, in this project I work towards developing emotion as an epistemic tool for writing-about-writing (WAW) approaches to first-year composition (FYC).

As a FYC teacher, my students bring cultural scripts like those mentioned above with them to my class every term. In my Writing 101 classes I use a WAW approach, which prioritizes teaching FYC as an “introduction to writing studies” and teaches writing as the content of the course, rather than just the something students learn how to do. Asking students about their previous experiences with writing and personal conceptions of writing is a central priority for me when I start this course. I ask students what they know about writing when they enter WRIT 101, and how do they know it? Students often share hard-and-fast “rules” about writing that they learned in previous education and, every semester, I am frustrated by the nearly unanimous agreement that “emotional arguments” are weak or unethical, and therefore should be avoided. In most cases, this is a nod back to what students learned in high school about Aristotle’s three appeals—logos, ethos, and (the dreaded) pathos.

My approach to this project is framed by two central observations I have made as an FYC instructor using a WAW approach. The first is that my students bring cultural scripts to my classroom that subjugate emotion as a way of knowing and the second is
that these scripts limit their ability to use reasoning that comes from emotional experience. I believe our discipline’s discussion of emotion as an epistemic tool does not yet provide specific examples of how these theories can work in writing and communication and I argue that memoir can help alleviate this gap in our understanding of how emotion is valuable and valid for making meaning. I define emotion as a specific, nameable (reminiscent of Debra Hawhee’s description\textsuperscript{1}), felt-response to a person or situation that makes us change something about our behavior or our ways of understanding (like Dale Jacobs and Laura Micciche’s definition of emotion as “a way to move”). I look at emotion specifically as nameable because it allows students to describe and explicitly give voice to the everyday emotions that influence their daily experiences in concrete ways (e.g. “the assignment made me frustrated” or “I felt anxious when I tried to write that paper”). By “emotion as epistemic tool,” I mean considering emotion as a way of knowing or a way to make sense of things; it’s a mechanism for constructing new knowledge. Many of my students have been taught to avoid emotional content as evidence for their claims in writing, but I argue that emotion is a through-line in all experience. By through-line, I mean emotion undergirds all experience; we cannot have any experience without connected emotions. For example, a student who feels shame for being labeled a “bad writer” in the past will often use that as evidence for not liking to write or even for believing they can’t write. This becomes their way of making sense of

\textsuperscript{1} Hawhee distinguished emotion from affect in her keynote speech at the 2017 Western States Rhetoric and Literacy Conference in Salt Lake City, Utah. She described emotion as nameable—like fear, joy, frustration, anger, sadness—while affect is more holistic and harder to pin down in concrete terms.
their identity as a writer; they feel they have no identity. Instead of labeling this reasoning as an “emotional argument” to be dismissed, I argue that these previous experiences and this evidence—driven by emotion—work as a great starting point for changing student conceptions of writing by letting them carefully consider and share how they have experienced writing in the past.

While pointing out that emotion is a through-line for all experience—we cannot have experiences without emotion—is a useful starting point, one of the gaps in WAW approaches to FYC is the fact that we not only don’t currently discuss emotion through the scope of writing studies (rhetoric and composition) theory, but we lack validation for emotion as an epistemic tool if we want to start that discussion. WAW starts by asking students about their own previous personal experiences with writing and I argue, along with Candace Spigelman, that personal experience and the subjective knowledges it engenders are central to meaning making.

Digging into personal experience—mining it for ways in which emotion already functions as an epistemic tool—makes me think about how memoir writers draw from deeply emotional personal experiences in order to make sense of life events through narrative. Memoir is also typically a very approachable form of writing—especially for FYC students who struggle with readings in writing studies in my WAW courses—and serves as a great point of contact for emotion as epistemic tool. More specifically, this project considers memoirs by Joan Didion, who writes about the deaths of her husband and daughter while demonstrating both a level-headed reasoning that characterizes much of her nonfiction and an emotional grappling with tragedy, often simultaneously.
Looking at memoir as a specific kind of narrative will help me demonstrate to my students that personal experience and emotions are valid sources for making meaning in academic and professional discourse as well. In my experience thus far, in addition to bringing the conception that logos—simplified to “logic”—is preferable and superior to pathos, my students often believe that knowledge can be unbiased or objective; that we know some things because they are simply True. Lorraine Code points out, however, in *What Can She Know?*, that all knowledge contains elements of subjectivity. She writes, “Science is made by scientists, knowledge by knowers. Hence it cannot be free of subjective interests, values, commitments, and needs” (170). Instead of viewing subjective interests in a negative light—as “bias”—I want to help students see that subjectivity adds richness to their arguments and understandings. Without it, writers miss out on what Spigelman calls “extratextual knowledge and authority of their own voices,” which brings new insights to rhetorical situations that objectivity or rationality alone could not open (24). As Carolyn Matalene writes in “Experience as Evidence: Teaching Students to Write Honestly and Knowledgably about Public Issues,” “Shaping personal knowledge for public communication is, I am convinced, the writing opportunity that genuinely empowers students” (187). In this way, emotion as an epistemic tool both gives students more authority and identity as writers and improves their ability to read and draw from Spigelman’s extratextual knowledge—in this case, their emotional knowledge.

With these gaps in mind, this project builds bridges between composition scholarship on emotion, WAW pedagogical values and approaches, and emotion as epistemic tool in Joan Didion’s memoirs in order to construct a hybrid space in FYC
where students don’t have to choose between rational ways of knowing in traditional research and emotional knowledges. I frame my approach to addressing these gaps using Lorraine Code’s work on subjectivity in her 1991 book *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge*. Code defines subjectivity by breaking down its attributes into usable parts:

- a subject’s (i) historical location; (ii) location within specific social and linguistic contexts, which include racial, ethnic, political, class, age, religious, and other identifications; (iii) creativity in the construction of knowledge, with the freedoms and responsibilities it entails; and (iv) affectivity, commitments, enthusiasms, desires, and interests, in which affectivity contrasts with intellect, or reason in the standard sense. (46, emphasis mine)

I find Code’s points about “affectivity, commitments, enthusiasms, desires and interests” useful for this project because emotion functions—like it does for experience more broadly—as a through-line through each of those aspects. In my discussion of emotion, then, I can pull from the commitments and interests of my students in order to discuss how their personal experiences and subjective ways of knowing matter to both academic and professional discourses. In a chapter in Dale Jacobs and Laura Micciche’s edited collection, *A Way to Move: Rhetorics of Emotion and Composition Studies*, Janet Bean argues that emotion “can function as a powerful tactic when introduced into academic discourse because it opens up a rhetorical space for ambiguity and disrupts—at least for a moment—the privileged position of rationality” (104). Opening up space in my WAW classroom for discussions of commitments and interests—framed within emotional ties to those things—alongside what my students know about rationality allows for both kinds of knowing to coexist in their discourses. Both kinds of knowledge affords what Candace
Spigelman calls *surplus*: “a new kind of understanding that belongs to neither narrative thinking nor analytic thinking alone” (95).

Productive discussions of emotion come from storytelling. Emotion cannot be simply explained with rational arguments, but is drawn out in narrative accounts of experience. Code writes,

Narrative accounts are valuable in their insistence that knowledge is a human construct, hence that it is possible to evaluate it better when one understands the construction process. Narratives fill in gaps left by reductive analyses… they are less liable to suppress the experiences and material, local conditions that make knowledge possible. (172)

In other words, narrative can and does function as an epistemic tool—a way of making sense of things that is productive, useful, and usable. Personal narrative, especially memoir, gets after the “construction process” of knowledge because it allows for moments of introspection from the writer while they make sense of their experiences after the fact. I argue, in fact, that memoir does not simply include these “local conditions that make knowledge possible,” but *centers around* these local conditions—it examines and critically considers these conditions in the course of narrative-making. Drawing from these narrative accounts of knowledge in memoir helps students feel more confident in using their personal experiences—riddled with emotion—to enter academic and professional discourses. Jeannette Harris, for instance, asserts that, “Rather than privileging either experience or information as sources of subject matter, we should encourage students to use both. It is, I believe, this purposeful combination of experience and information that produces the most effective discourse” (qtd. in Matalene 185). By developing emotion as an epistemic tool, I give students opportunities to weigh personal
experience with “information” and decide for themselves which combination of the two is appropriate given certain rhetorical situations.

Using Code’s notion of subjectivity as “affectivity, commitments, enthusiasms, desires, and interests,” let’s consider an example of a spectrum of emotion that starts with complete disinterest from students who are unenthused about discussions brought forth in the writing classroom and stretches to students who select topics for their projects which for them are instead deeply felt passions. Both ends of the spectrum—as with any binary-driven spectrum—are problematic for using emotion as an epistemic tool. The former end is perhaps more obviously a problem because of the challenge it poses to fostering motivation for students who have no emotional connection (or refuse an emotional connection) to their academic work. The latter, however, is just as challenging to address because it requires students to negotiate pre-established emotions and interrogate those deeply felt passions so that those outside their discourse can still see and use these inherently emotional narratives. This negotiation in itself is inherently emotional, too. As Elspeth Probyn writes in *Blush: Faces of Shame*, “There is a shame in being highly interested in something and unable to convey it to others, to evoke the same degree of interest in them and to convince them that it is warranted” (130). My goal is not to teach students necessarily how to convince others that their interests and commitments are warranted, but to help them better articulate their emotional attachments to these interests in order to achieve their rhetorical goals. These goals will not, obviously, always include persuading others to be interested in or committed to the same thing, but to see the value in emotional knowledge gained from their interests.
I want to be careful in this latter pursuit not to privilege rationality while I work to make emotional experiences or contexts into usable, rhetorically effective discourse. By rhetorically effective discourse, I mean communication that gets something done or that the readers or listeners can use in some way. If I have a student who loves skiing—and I often do here in Bozeman—and they pick skiing for their project analyzing discourse communities, I want to help that student use that emotional connection and experience to inform their knowledge and research for their writing. In doing that, I do not want to “rationalize” emotion, or ask students to simply experience an emotion and then think through the objective reasons for their feelings. Instead, I see emotion as its own way of knowing that is not dependent on rationality for its value. These ways of knowing are distinct but should be equally considered, depending on the situation. For example, my skier student will have experiences to draw on that are almost entirely emotional—moments when they experienced a rush of joy on a great run, or fear when they have a close call on the mountain. In these experiences, emotion is their way of knowing and making sense of the world. These emotions also drive their actions—a fearful skier will change their course or do something to feel safe again, while a joyful skier may choose to make that run again. Other situations may call for a combined discussion of experiences that invoke rationality and emotion at the same time. As Code maintains, “knowledge is at once subjective and objective: subjective because it is marked, as product, by the processes of its construction by specifically located subjects; objective in that the constructive process is constrained by a reality that is recalcitrant to inattentive or whimsical structurings” (255). In other words, we make meaning both by our own
negotiations and interpretations of what we see and by what is “objectively” there to be seen.

With this skiing example, I think framing this discussion of emotion as epistemic tool within a WAW approach is useful because this pedagogy already asks students to think in terms of conceptions of writing and how rhetoric and composition approaches writing problems as a discipline. For the research-driven project in my WRIT 101 class, my students study a discourse community of their choice and develop a model for gaining authority in that community. For these projects, my students analyze communities that interest them, or those they are committed to joining, which (ideally) situates the project within emotional attachments or connections students may have. When a student selects skiing for a discourse community, it’s a labor of love and they’re motivated by their passions for the sport. On the other end of the spectrum, when a student selects business management, when they aren’t actually all that interested in business, they refuse emotional connection—or they do not leave a space for an emotional connection to grow. In this case, emotion cannot be used as an epistemic tool because it never existed in the first place.

In order to explore and develop these arguments, I approach this project in four sections. In Chapter 1: Emotion as Epistemic Tool in Current Composition Scholarship, I begin with a literature review of central rhetorical theories of emotion from Laura Micciche, Shari Stenberg, Elspeth Probyn, Susan McLeod, and other scholars working on these issues. I also discuss the work of Candace Spigelman and her considerations of personal experience as evidence because my efforts aim at incorporating emotion into the
composition classroom, which of course will have to include letting students speak from experience (because emotion is experienced). This chapter serves to center my project around emotion as epistemic tool—a way of knowing and making meaning in the world that is just as legitimate as rational ways of knowing, but is considered separately for its own merits.

Laura Micciche, for example, argues for a “strategy for addressing the interconnections between emotion and experience, because the turn to experience as a means of persuasion is inseparable from the emotional stickiness that shapes interpretations of reality… telling one’s story is a way of revealing emotioned commitments to how and what we value” (“Doing Emotion” 103, emphasis mine). Her ideas about “emotioned commitments” as major influences for our values and interpretations of reality fit within Code’s framework about subjectivity as an avenue for “commitments, enthusiasms, desires, and interests” because they more directly connect emotion to subjectivity and knowledge gained from personal experience. Micciche writes, “Seeing emotion as a category of analysis and part of the adhesive that generates belief, attachment, and investment presents an opportunity to rethink instruction of rhetorical concepts” (“Doing Emotion” 108). Teaching my students to consider emotion as a category for analysis will require giving them opportunities to reimagine what Aristotle’s three rhetorical appeals mean in the first place. Instead of using pathos, which my students often claim familiarity with, I will reposition their understanding around emotion as a category for analysis. I can build on what they know about analyzing texts
according to appeals and stretch their understanding of rhetorical situations to include emotion as a channel for making meaning.

I approach Chapter 2 with three agendas in mind: 1) description of pedagogical approaches that are friendly to emotion; 2) analysis of textbook reviews for FYC that look for evidence of emotion in FYC; and 3) discussion of the aims, values, and goals of the WAW pedagogy as it pertains to FYC. In this discussion, I address the emotion gap in both FYC and WAW more specifically. I consider my own experience teaching FYC using a WAW approach as well as scholarship that describes or responds to WAW pedagogy. WAW assigns readings from rhetoric and composition about literacy, discourse communities, rhetorical analysis, and writing practices. Because rhetorical theories of emotion make up a piece of our discipline’s scholarly conversation, teaching students how to negotiate and reconstruct emotion as an epistemic tool fits nicely within this particular goal in the WAW approach. I argue that rhetorical theories of emotion and scholarship in composition on emotion will give students the tools to use emotion as a category for analysis and a way to make meaning that will improve their writing and rhetorical reading of scholarly (and other) texts.

In Chapter 3: Situating Emotion as Epistemic Tool with Joan Didion’s Memoirs, I engage in a close reading of Didion’s two memoirs—The Year of Magical Thinking and Blue Nights—in order to carefully consider how she approaches emotion as a way to know and make sense of her experiences. Didion’s ability to simultaneously embody a highly reasoned ethos and one that experiences deeply felt emotions and is cognizant of those emotions positions her as a great choice to look at in a WAW class because her
writing represents both traditional reasoning and emotional reasoning. Her memoirs reject what Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson describe as “the healing of ‘scriptotherapy’”—comfort that comes from writing about loss or grief—and instead center around Didion’s keen observations of the events surrounding the deaths of her husband and daughter (139). In both memoirs, Didion does not reject emotion but is pragmatic about her approach to writing about emotional experiences.

This chapter also includes some brief discussion of how emotion is considered and studied within memoir or—more broadly—life writing theories like those in Reading Autobiography: A Guide to Interpreting Life Narratives by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson and in Paul John Eakin’s Living Autobiographically. Because approaches to writing memoir are so varied—it would do memoir a disservice to say “all memoir does x”—I acknowledge disparities in this chapter in order to approach Didion’s work as a specific way to do memoir instead of as a demonstration of how memoir works.

Chapter 4: Using Emotion as Epistemic Tool for WAW in FYC brings together my work on emotion as epistemic tool and Didion’s memoirs to demonstrate how emotion can work within WAW approaches to FYC. The goal of this chapter is to develop concrete examples of how to incorporate emotion as epistemic tool in the composition classroom through curriculum design and explanation of pedagogical strategies. This chapter serves to expand the thinking and purposes for writing-about-writing by introducing rhetorical theories of emotion as part of the curriculum and grounding those theories using non-academic writing that is accessible for FYC students. I include recommended readings for FYC students to introduce them to emotion.
scholarship in composition within a range of WAW goals and contexts. I also develop and explain course objectives and assignments that fit the needs of teaching emotion as an epistemic tool within existing WAW values and expectations.

These cross-disciplinary applications are important because they continue to support WAW goals for teaching rhetoric and writing studies as the content and subject of the FYC course and they introduce new available paths within this approach to fit a broader range of values for teaching FYC. By assigning readings and discussions of how our discipline approaches emotion and by including specific examples of what this kind of writing can look like outside writing studies, these applications help students challenge cultural scripts for what counts as evidence and what is valuable for making new knowledge. Didion’s work in her memoirs helps to ground these approaches to emotion in useful, usable ways. I really value examples as both a student and a teacher, and trying to show students how participating in academic discourses with emotion is possible has to include examples outside the discipline so these traits and moves are recognizable in both academic and non-academic settings. It doesn’t do an FYC student a lot of good to be able to discuss rhetorical theories of emotion without being able to point to examples or find ways in which these theories are working outside rhetoric and writing studies, especially when most of these students will not go on to become writing or English majors.
CHAPTER ONE

EMOTION AS EPISTEMIC TOOL IN CURRENT COMPOSITION SCHOLARSHIP

In my introduction I argued that our cultural scripts willfully fail to acknowledge emotional knowledge as a valid and valuable way of knowing. These scripts, which privilege rationality or objectivity, explicitly reject emotion and claim that “emotional arguments” are weak or unethical compared to the objective Truth. Fortunately, rhetoric and composition rejects this binary, and feminist composition scholars have been hard at work incorporating emotion into their composition classrooms. In this chapter, I highlight the work done by scholars like Laura Micciche, Shari Stenberg, Susan McLeod, Candace Spigelman, Elspeth Probyn, and others in order to trace some of the conversation about emotion in composition—particularly FYC—and lay the groundwork for my own arguments about emotion as an epistemic tool in a WAW approach to FYC.

This review serves several functions in the larger scheme of this project. First, it provides context for how I come to my own arguments as synthesized from parts of this scholarly conversation. Second, it establishes a foundation of scholarship on this subject in order to differentiate how my approach to teaching emotion as epistemic tool both draws from some of this conversation in rhetoric and composition and departs from the conversation by specifying a pedagogical approach and arguing for more concrete examples than the field currently works from. In selecting specific approaches to rhetorical theories of emotion or emotion in composition, I situate the aims of my project within the gaps of current conversation. I argue that these gaps are most apparent in
popular and pervasive applications and pedagogies in FYC, and aim to fill these gaps by offering a specific set of examples from which to begin teaching emotion as epistemic tool in a WAW approach to FYC. These arguments come later—in Chapter 2 especially—but this chapter sets up a review of the work being done on emotion in composition that informs my work in a more specific context.

**Definitions of Emotion**

Emotion is often considered in relation to other terms like pathos, affect, and embodiment (or felt-sense). It feels important, then, to consider the various ways scholars working with these terms define emotion specifically, because the spectrum is wide. By reviewing this spectrum, I am able to select the highest impact statements on emotion from our field to best approach teaching emotion as epistemic tool in a composition classroom. As I mentioned in the introduction, my definition draws from Debra Hawhee’s brief description of emotion, in her key note at the 2017 Western State Rhetorics and Literacies Conference, as nameable—like fear, joy, frustration, anger, or sadness—while affect is more holistic and harder to pin down in concrete terms. I also borrow from Dale Jacobs and Laura Micciche’s definition of emotion as “a way to move” in that emotions influence and inspire change (3). Therefore, I define emotion as a specific, nameable, felt-response to a person or situation that makes use change something about our behavior or our ways of understanding. With this definition, I argue that emotion is a through-line for all experience; every experience we have comes from and contains emotional knowledges.
In Notes on the Heart: Affective Issues in the Writing Classroom, Susan H. McLeod discusses emotion entirely in relation to affect but asserts that the two are not identical terms. She opens the 1997 book by arguing for coming “to terms with affect, viewing the affect/cognition split not as a dichotomy but as a dialectic” (7). In my own research, the binary that made me interested in studies of emotion was emotion/rationality—not so dissimilar to the affect/cognition McLeod begins with. However, McLeod is careful to state upfront that affect is “not a synonym for emotion; an emotion is an affective state, but not all affective states are emotions. It is important to note that the cognition/affect dialectic should not be equated with rationality/irrationality, as it often is in common usage” (9, emphasis mine). I argue that working closely with tightly constructed definitions of emotion is important because of the distinction McLeod is making between cognition/affect and rationality/irrationality. Without these distinctions and careful definitions, it is too easy to assume—as I did initially—that my initial interest in emotion/rationality was somehow equitable to McLeod’s starting point.

McLeod’s definition of emotion comes from her research in cognitive psychology; she writes that “cognitive psychologists generally agree that emotions consist of a bodily activation (arousal of the autonomic nervous system involving a visceral reaction—increased heartbeat, a knot in the stomach, a heightened awareness of external stimuli) and a cognitive evaluation of that activation” (10). She goes on to describe emotions more specifically as something we experience physically while “we construct them mentally… we experience the feelings of emotion when the expectations
of some schema are violated—when there is a discrepancy in what we think will happen and what actually happens” (30). In other words, emotions are a result of felt-sense, and they arise when our expectations for particular situations are not met or are disrupted. While I agree that emotions do result from these discrepancies in expectations, I argue that this is a fairly narrow definition and description for emotion because we can experience emotions even when our expectations are met (happy tears at a wedding, for example). We need to think beyond emotions as responses to discrepancies in expectations.

Dale Jacobs and Laura Micciche, in their 2003 edited collection *A Way to Move: Rhetorics of Emotion and Composition Studies*, take a different approach to emotion that does not depend so much on notions of affect and cognition. In the introduction, they define emotion concretely using the Latin root “motere, which means ‘to move,’ suggesting that a tendency to act is implicit in every emotion. Movement, or repositioning oneself in the face of ever-changing situations, is the central goal of both classical and contemporary rhetorical theory” (3). In my own definition of emotion, I adopt part of this “tendency to act” in order to argue that emotions make us change something about our behavior or our way of believing or knowing the world. We change our ways of thinking because of emotional experience, not rational arguments alone. By situating emotion as a “way to move,” Jacobs and Micciche further point out that “emotion is not only individually experienced but is also socially experienced and constructed,” which has helped me consider the impact of emotion as epistemic tool on the cultural scripts I mentioned in the opening of this chapter (4). These cultural scripts
shape our expectations for the way the world should work and, while McLeod’s scholarship works more closely with emotion as a result of discrepancies between expectations and reality, Jacobs and Micciche make sure to point out that “emotion is not a simple phenomenon of the individual body, but a complex phenomenon of attention, body, belief, and judgment that can both contribute to argument and deliberation and be influenced by them” (17). In other words, Jacobs and Micciche complicate earlier ideas of emotion by pointing to the complexities and interactive, social nature of emotion, and describe how closely emotion is related to judgment and—by extension—argument.

Micciche expands on ideas from *A Way to Move* in her 2005 article “Emotion, Ethics, and Rhetorical Action,” where she argues that emotion is central to rhetorical action because “emotions, like reasons, move people to judge, decide, and act in certain ways” (169). This article is particularly useful for my work because Micciche takes issue with the notion that emotion is only personally experienced and felt by individuals. While I argue that emotion is directly linked to personal experience, I contend that Micciche’s point about how “emotions take form and are coded as appropriate or inappropriate within communities” allows for a space where using emotion as epistemic tool can challenge the cultural scripts my students bring into my classroom (176).

In 2005, Elspeth Probyn published *Blush: Faces of Shame*. In the opening chapter, Probyn describes the difference between emotion and affect: “A basic distinction is that emotion refers to cultural and social expression, whereas affects are of a biological and physiological nature” (11). By situating her discussion around emotion as cultural and social expression, Probyn opens up a space in the scholarly conversation about
emotion to consider emotion as epistemic tool, rather than simply a rhetorical appeal or something experienced within individuals alone. Her work allows for questions about what we value and why, and how the relationship between emotion and culture is both symbiotic and tenuous—cultural scripts subjugate emotion to rationality, but emotional knowledges can and do also shape cultural scripts.

Probyn then moves beyond general discussion of emotion in relation to affect and specifically takes on shame as a specific, named emotion that results from interest. In my own consideration of emotion as epistemic tool, I frame emotion within Lorraine Code’s work on subjective knowledges. Code’s discussion of interests as a key element to subjectivity is a relevant connection to Probyn’s work on shame in particular. Probyn gets even more specific about what interest means, defining the term as “lines of connection between people and ideas… without interest there can be no shame; conversely, shame alerts us to things, people, and ideas that we didn’t even realize we wanted” (13-14). By looking at one specific emotion—shame—Probyn demonstrates more precisely how emotion functions as epistemic tool. If an emotion can “alert us to things, people, and ideas,” then it can change the way we make sense of the world by introducing new data. For example, a student who experiences frustration when she cannot get her writing to come out how she imagines it should indicates that she a) has expectations for herself and her abilities as a writer that are higher than what she is currently producing and b) that something about the situation has to be addressed before she can meet those expectations. Suppressing this frustration—instead of mining it—would willfully ignore the knowledges that it signals about expectations and about the problem to be solved. This
project argues that we should be asking students to consider and mine their emotions for ways of knowing, where they may have shut themselves off from them in previous writing instruction.

Probyn’s arguments for specificity are the ones I find most compelling because specificity is what makes emotion a useful epistemic tool. By narrowing a discussion of emotion to a discussion of shame in particular, she points towards how these concepts and emotional knowledges can function in making meaning in writing. She writes,

An epistemological point hovers in the background: a precise emotion demands precise description. *It is the precision of a description that allows for a larger comprehension of what affects and emotions can do.* In other words, affects have specific effects; it makes no sense to talk about them outside this understanding… If we want to invigorate our concepts, we need to follow through on what different affects do, at different levels. The point needs to be stressed: different affects make us feel, write, think, and act in different ways. (137, emphasis mine)

Probyn’s points about different affects creating different responses—feelings, thoughts, actions, ways of writing—support my argument for specifying and naming emotions as well. If the emotion cannot be named, it cannot be used deliberately as epistemic tool. It’s not that emotions cannot be powerful or cannot impact our experience if they are not nameable—far from it—but that emotions cannot be used as cognitive tools for constructing knowledge until we can name them. It is in the act of carefully considering and paying close attention to these emotions so that we can name them that allows emotion to be used as epistemic tool. By precisely describing and naming these emotions—such as shame—we are able to more carefully determine how that emotion impacts our epistemologies, or ways of making sense of the world.
In another article that focuses on specific, nameable emotions, Kristie Fleckenstein takes on empathy in “Once Again with Feeling: Empathy in Deliberative Discourse.” Fleckenstein shatters the emotion/rationality binary by starting with “the contention that all emotions, including empathy, involve a rational, particularly an evaluative, element. No emotion is blind” (703). While I agree that emotion can include evaluation, I struggle with her phrasing that emotions contain rational elements because this is too easily a path to arguing that emotion is actually just another facet of rationality, and therefore is only epistemic because of this rational element. Fleckenstein’s points about emotion in FYC are also problematic for me because the examples she uses depend specifically on issues of blatant difference. In her analysis of empathy in the classroom, she looks at Tod DeStigter’s *Los Tesoros* project on critical empathy. This project puts at-risk Anglo students from a high school American literature course with Latino/a students from a Spanish-speaking English as a Second Language class in order to “help students succeed academically by building on literacies they already possessed and to help students connect with others” (712). Because Fleckenstein’s examples depend on situations of obvious, visible difference, it makes it difficult for me to find Fleckenstein’s arguments about emotion compelling. I think, instead, we need strategies for composition where emotion as an epistemic tool works in even the blandest classroom dynamics and becomes perhaps more interesting with increased levels of difference. But I do not wish to depend on obvious issues of difference for emotion as epistemic tool to be effective, because that precludes the notion that everyday emotions could be used as epistemic tool without visible issues of difference.
Laura Micciche also works on emotion through a cultural lens, with particular consideration for emotion as a culturally-developed concept in *Doing Emotion: Rhetoric, Writing, Teaching*. In this book, Micciche shifts her definition of emotion from that in *A Way to Move* to account for the cultural dynamics of the term. She writes, “emotion is experienced between people within a particular context (and so resides both in people and in culture) and that emotion is an expression, experience, and perception mediated by language” (7-8). This definition resonates with Probyn’s work on emotion as cultural and social expression and with my own claims about emotion as a through-line for all experience. In the rest of the book, Micciche offers “a revisionist theory of emotion that borrows from and builds on contemporary theories, most of which put a premium on emotion as a social act that shapes and is shaped by social norms, conventions, and acts of resistance” (xiii). Like Probyn, who connects emotion to interest and like Code, who considers commitments to be part of subjective knowledge, Micciche establishes a clear connection between emotional knowledges and argument. She writes, “In other words, how we think about what constitutes evidence and grounds for an argument—indeed, how we come to decide that an issue deserves to be ‘argued’—is already shaped by our emotional investments in how things ought to be” (3). This definition is also a nod towards McLeod’s description of emotion resulting from a discrepancy in expectations—in how things ought to be—so, in many ways, Micciche’s work in *Doing Emotion* synthesizes much of what these other scholars had to say in the years leading up to this book.
More recent scholarship supports work on emotion as a social, interactive concept influenced by the culture. Shari Stenberg argues “for a pedagogy that repurposes emotion as a cultural discourse and facilitates examination of how social and cultural factors shape the ways we respond (emotionally) to others’ words and views,” in her chapter “Feminist Repurposing of Emotion: From Emotional Management to Emotion as Resource” in *Repurposing Composition: Feminist Interventions for a Neoliberal Age* (43). For Stenberg, this pedagogy means looking at public discourse like that of President Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton and determining how emotion adds value or detracts from certain discourses and why. She argues that “examining how our emotions have been schooled and how and why we respond emotionally to the world, we gain an opportunity for deeper reflection and insight” (43). In this way, Stenberg is less interested in how emotion currently functions as epistemic tool within the culture and more interested in how the culture has already shaped the ways in which we treat emotion (or how emotion is allowed to be an epistemic tool, if at all).

Stenberg points towards this notion of emotion as epistemic tool by drawing from Micciche’s argument that “‘Without a framework for understanding emotion’s legitimate role in the making of meaning and in the creation of value in our culture, we impoverish our own and our students’ understanding of how we come to orient ourselves to one another and to the world around us’” (43). It’s important that Stenberg (and Micciche) are interested in emotion’s role in making meaning and in how emotion creates value in our culture because these discussions allow for consideration of emotion as epistemic tool that can help us understand how cultural values have been constructed (past-tense) and
how this epistemic tool can help change the culture (in the future). I am most interested in
considerations of emotion as epistemic tool that can engage and (possibly) change
cultural scripts, and I argue that developing emotion as epistemic tool specifically for
WAW approaches to FYC allows us as teachers to engage the broader culture—since my
FYC students do not often take more writing courses beyond WRIT 101. WAW in
particular is an approach interested in challenging cultural conceptions about writing, but
there is a gap in this pedagogy in that it has not yet considered emotion’s role in writing
as a meaning-making activity and therefore must include these discussions of emotion as
epistemic in order to “keep up” with the rest of the field and avoid impoverishing student
learning of emotional knowledges as valid ways to make meaning.

Stenberg’s goals for repurposing emotion are specifically geared towards teaching
composition, and she makes concrete arguments for specific pedagogical strategies in the
classroom in order to teach emotion and challenge (normative) cultural expectations for
emotion. She argues that teaching rhetorical concepts must include,

work[ing] with students to develop a vocabulary for a rhetoric of emotion. This would involve helping students to rethink normative conceptions of emotion, in and outside of the academy, so as to establish that emotional responses are part and parcel of our intellectual work; grappling with new ideas will necessarily both employ and invoke emotion. (60)

This section, towards the end of her chapter on emotion, sets Stenberg up as a starting
point for considering concrete ways that emotion as epistemic tool can be taught in a
WAW FYC classroom. Because WAW approaches specifically consider writing as the
content of the FYC course—we study and assign texts from publications like Rhetoric
Review or College Composition and Communication—rhetorical concepts and contexts
are central to course outcomes. Stenberg’s argument for developing a vocabulary for a rhetoric of emotion would simply be an additional set of tools added to an already rich existing foundation of rhetorical concepts that WAW offers. Instead of shifting the goals of the pedagogy entirely to make emotion as epistemic tool “fit” in with the conversation, I argue that emotion as epistemic tool fills a gap and complements existing WAW goals and values. In the next part of this excerpt, I find Stenberg’s specific direction to “rethink normative conceptions of emotion in and outside of the academy” to be helpful for WAW FYC courses because normative conceptions of writing—which are already foundational discussions for WAW—can be discussed alongside emotion as an epistemic tool. In her conclusion, Stenberg specifically argues for this kind of conversation: “When emotion is regarded as epistemic, it no longer falls outside of rationalism; indeed, I contend that rational inquiry requires us to consider emotion as part of knowledge making” (68). By uncovering how the value of emotion has been determined by the culture and not by objective means, emotion can be considered alongside rationalism as another available method for making meaning.

My project begins to diverge from Stenberg’s helpful starting point when I consider teaching emotion as epistemic tool within the WAW context and with my argument for using readings that already use emotion as epistemic tool for concrete examples in that context. While it is one thing to explain to students how emotion can function as epistemic tool, it is another to show them a demonstration of how emotion already functions as epistemic. WAW pedagogical values center on studying how writing already works, so this context is ideal for studying texts in which these phenomenon is
happening and for discussions of how it’s happening. In Chapter 3 I more specifically point to Joan Didion’s memoirs as an available site—and a rich, complex one, at that—for specific, accessible writing that treat emotion as epistemic.

The Role of Personal Experience

As I have previously asserted, I believe emotion is a through-line to all experience. Because my end goal for this project is not just to develop and adapt emotion as epistemic tool for WAW approaches to FYC, but also to incorporate grounded, accessible examples of emotion as epistemic tool in writing, some work must be done towards making connections between personal experience, emotion, narrative accounts of knowledge, and memoir. I have traced the central arguments of some leading scholars in rhetorical theories of emotion or emotion in composition, but I would do this chapter an injustice if I did not include a review of conversation about using personal experience in composition. In this part of my purposeful review, I bring in scholarship on personal experience in order to connect emotion to narrative accounts of knowledge and memoir and to set up my larger argument for using memoir as accessible example of emotion already working as epistemic tool in writing.

A central figure in my research on personal experience is Candace Spigelman. In her 2004 book *Personally Speaking: Experience as Evidence in Academic Discourse*, she begins with a dichotomy of personal writing and academic argument. In the same way McLeod breaks down the dichotomy of affect/cognition and instead argues for a dialectic, Spigelman believes that “personal writing can do serious academic work; it can
make rational arguments; it can merge appropriately with academic discourse” (2). I should note that I am not making the claim that emotion is equivalent to personal writing, and I am especially hesitant to connect my understanding of emotion to Spigelman’s arguments in a 1:1 manner. I have serious qualms with claiming that emotion, for example, can make rational arguments, because this statement still subjects emotion to rationality as the dominant cultural epistemology. I instead wish to point out that emotion as epistemic tool can stand on its own, separate from rationality, but should be considered as equally legitimate. Spigelman acknowledges this privileging early in her argument for a place for personal writing in academic discourse by noting that, “because the privilege of reason over emotion is so entrenched in academic discourse conventions, academics fear any form of expression that suggests sentimentality” (18). Many of the students who enter my FYC classroom are familiar with this convention. They believe they cannot use “I,” for example, in their writing because it is unprofessional or somehow “not academic enough.” Using personal experience as evidence is, of course, off-limits because these students have been taught that personal experiences are constructed by opinion alone and never “fact,” which is preferable for persuasion or making an argument. These are some of the conceptions that impact early discussions in WAW approaches; the rules students bring with them come from cultural scripts that I maintain are damaging and untrue when subjected to inquiry.

Spigelman is particularly interested in addressing cultural concerns about subjective experience because subjectivity still carries epistemological burdens that objectivity does not have to bear. Lorraine Code’s definition of subjectivity actually
allows for a pretty rich analysis of contexts, values, and assumptions that overlay—or interact with—subjective experience, but this is not the default position for cultural understanding of subjectivity (What Can She Know? 46). Put more simply, Westerners are culturally conditioned to believe that objectivity (or rationality, or reasoning, or logic) is superior to subjectivity and therefore the former should be chosen for argumentation whenever available. Spigelman, however, argues for teaching both kinds of knowing in her composition classroom because using both personal experience and traditionally academic evidence creates what she calls surplus, “a new kind of understanding that belongs to neither narrative thinking nor analytic thinking alone” (95). In a similar way, I assert that using emotion as epistemic tool opens new avenues for ways of making meaning and for enhancing both academic and professional discourses.

Carolyn Matalene takes a slightly different approach to arguing for using personal experience in academic discourse. In her 1992 article “Experience as Evidence: Teaching Students to Write Honestly and Knowledgeably about Public Issues,” Matalene points out that academic conventions already necessarily begin from the personal. She asks, “Doesn’t the scholarship we really care to read and write begin with a deeply personal commitment, interest, curiosity?” (187, emphasis mine). Like Code’s notion of subjectivity including commitments, enthusiasms, desires, and interests, Matalene goes straight to the core of why we write in the first place. In early discussions of exigence—the most challenging term for my WAW FYC students—I ask my students to consider the driving force behind their writing. Most times, they’re not sure what I mean. I ask what problem or need were they solving with their writing, and remind them that it’s
easier *not* to write than to write, so why did they bother to write? According to Matalene, for those of us who are already interested in scholarship (as opposed to many FYC students, who are interested in a passing grade in the course), our exigencies *must* come from a personal place or we would not spend so much time working on these problems in rhetoric and composition.

In the final chapter of *Doing Emotion*, Micciche also makes compelling connections between experience and emotion, which is especially helpful for my own arguments about narrative accounts of knowledge, personal experience, and memoir. Micciche argues that the meaning we glean from emotional knowledges helps us make meaning that will allow for action. She writes, “emotional ‘truth’ aligned with individual experience functions as a reliable basis from which to form judgments” (100). In other words, it is the connection between individual experience and emotional knowledges that allows for emotion to function as an epistemic tool. In my case, I am arguing that emotion is the through-line for all personal experience—meaning that all experience contains emotions—so using personal experience necessarily means drawing from emotion. Micciche makes this distinction even clearer by saying that her students’ “experience *is* emotioned, which is distinct from saying that they speak about their experiences in emotional terms” (101, emphasis original). Instead of asking students to describe their emotions and then rationalize them, or asking them to describe what they are experiencing using emotional terms, using emotion as epistemic tool means recognizing that experience is riddled with emotion and emotions can always be investigated in order or make meaning. Micciche concludes by calling for “a strategy for
addressing the interconnections between emotion and experience, because the turn to experience as a means of persuasion is inseparable from the emotional stickiness that shapes interpretations of reality…telling one’s story is a way of *revealing emotioned commitments to how and what we value*” (103, emphasis mine). Considering these interconnected agendas, I argue that developing and adopting emotion as epistemic tool necessarily addresses interconnections between emotion and experience, which Micciche calls for. Further, her point about telling one’s story to reveal emotioned commitments fits with my own call to look at Joan Didion’s memoirs as an approachable example of emotional knowledges and the commitments that underlie these. Both of these strategies—emotion as epistemic tool and Didion’s memoirs as demonstrative of emotion as epistemic—come together in WAW values because of this pedagogy’s interest in students’ prior experiences and knowledges about writing, about cultural expectations for writing, and about writing as a meaning-making (or epistemic) activity (Wardle and Downs 451-452).

**Drawing out Emotion as Epistemic Tool**

In this review of scholarship, I have traced trends in rhetorical theories of emotion and emotion in composition in order to carefully locate my own arguments about emotion within this conversation and distinguish this project from other agendas in this field. Our discipline knows that emotion work is cultural work, that emotions occur between people and are supported or rejected by cultural scripts (Probyn and *Doing Emotion*). We know that this relationship between emotional knowledges and the culture is symbiotic and
tenuous because the two are interconnected and have the ability to change each other. Cultural scripts tell us what to believe about emotion—and typically subjugate emotion to rationality in binaries that need breaking down—while emotion also has the ability to change cultural scripts by shifting our expectations for how the world should work (McLeod).

Drawing from this scholarship, I assert the following points are central for emotion to function as epistemic tool: 1) emotions must be specific and nameable; 2) emotion challenges cultural assumptions and beliefs; and 3) we use the connection between emotion and experience as a method of inquiry. More specifically, for the purposes of adopting emotion as epistemic tool for a WAW approach to FYC, I argue that WAW values for discussion of cultural conceptions of writing include gaps that emotion as epistemic tool can fill. Cultural scripts brought to the FYC classroom and discussed in a WAW context allow for incorporating a clear definition of emotion and a new vocabulary for emotion as epistemic tool into existing conversations (Stenberg). Furthermore, specific methods such as Stenberg’s example of developing a new vocabulary for emotion discussions fill a gap in WAW approaches while complementing existing methods within that pedagogy. Finally, I believe that these strategies must be developed to be effective even in classrooms that do not have obvious issues of difference.
In this chapter I situate emotion as epistemic tool within a WAW approach to first-year composition (FYC). In Chapter 1, I asserted three central tenets for emotion to function as epistemic tool: 1) emotions must be specific and nameable; 2) emotion challenges cultural assumptions and beliefs; and 3) we use the connection between emotion and experience as a method of inquiry. In a composition classroom, I frame these tenets by how emotion functions within writing—in what ways are specific, nameable emotions used in writing now, and how is that working? In terms of the second point, I start with how emotion challenges cultural assumptions and beliefs within the context of writing—how do writers currently challenge cultural expectations for emotion by addressing those emotions in unexpected ways? Finally, I explore the connection between emotion and experience within kinds of writing that draw from personal experience as evidence (as Candace Spigelman advocates for), like life narratives that include emotion. By showing students how other writers use personal experience and emotion to make new knowledge and arguments all the time, we start to shift cultural scripts that say emotion cannot be used as a valid way of knowing.

Given this framework, I begin to develop my argument for WAW as an especially effective site for discussion of emotion as epistemic tool by addressing philosophies of other approaches to FYC that would be friendly to emotion as epistemic tool like
expressivism and feminism. Then, I consider how the work of composition scholars in emotion is (or is not) represented in composition textbooks, and, finally, how WAW pedagogy needs emotion as epistemic tool and how the values and frameworks of WAW create a space that would allow emotion as epistemic tool to flourish in FYC. As an approach that investigates and researches about how writing actually works both within and outside academia, WAW creates a space for questioning cultural givens and narratives about the nature of writing and culturally accepted forms of reasoning. By studying “how writing works,” I mean studying the habits and patterns of actual writers in order to see how writing gets down outside schooled expectations for writing. This is an effective site for challenging cultural scripts on how emotion works and where it might be better used in FYC because WAW embraces research on writers (like Joan Didion) who already do this and therefore are already subverting cultural scripts about emotion. By opening up a space in WAW for discussion of emotion as epistemic tool, I also address critiques of the pedagogy that say WAW doesn’t allow for students to develop their own “personal urgency” with writing (Goldblatt 461). Bringing emotion as epistemic tool into WAW means maintaining the pedagogy’s ethos for research and critical inquiry—in that we read research and theories of emotion by scholars in writing studies—while also filling a gap in the pedagogy by bringing in emotion as a central category of analysis where FYC generally is lacking (Micciche “Doing Emotion” 7).
I am interested in developing methods for using emotion as epistemic tool in FYC in particular because first year students’ values are often usefully representative of cultural values at large. The majority of college students in general are not writing majors and, as a general education course, FYC caters to students who may not take other courses that are interested in challenging cultural scripts for writing and communication. While I do not argue that the central aim of a composition course should be to challenge cultural scripts broadly—especially since freshman seminar courses and diversity requirements often have curricula designed precisely for that—I do assert that a writing course is a good place to challenge cultural scripts about writing and about argument. Where better than in WRIT 101 to ask students to think about how our culture views and values (or does not value) writing, and why? Most of these students, in my experience, believe certain cultural scripts that are clearly traceable to values of their parents or to myths about writing propagated by our education system in this country. I choose FYC as my central focus not because I believe it can or should “do all our educational work” for our discipline—as Libby Miles et. al (mis)interpreted some of the earliest statements about WAW approaches to FYC—but because of its unique position to address cultural values and spread that practice beyond writing studies and into other majors (Miles et al. 505).

FYC covers a wide spectrum of interests and pedagogical approaches, and I want to keep the bulk of my discussion on the WAW pedagogy for FYC. However, it’s important to get a sense of other pedagogical philosophies in composition in order to
clarify specific reasons why WAW is an especially effective site for developing emotion as epistemic tool and distinguish WAW values and tenets from other FYC pedagogies. For example, because expressivist and feminist pedagogies would also be friendly sites for developing emotion as epistemic tool, I address the differences in order to highlight why I choose WAW over other approaches.

Expressivism came from a rejection of theme-based and grammar-focused writing instruction and sought to teach an aesthetic of writing process that values personal expression, struggle, and development of authentic expression through freewriting and extensive revision. Significant developers of expressivism, like Donald Murray, Ken Macrorie, and Peter Elbow, re-centered writing instruction on values for individual expression and “the writer’s imaginative, psychological, social, and spiritual development and how that development influences individual consciousness and social behavior” (Burnham and Powell 113). Expressivist philosophy aims to help student writers understand themselves better, and understand themselves within the context of the community they participate in. Thomas O’Donnell describes practices of expressivism as follows: “‘what we do is encourage students to bring words to bear on their experiences, to ground their writing in their lives, to be responsible for their words, and to be responsible to the community in which they are reading, writing, and responding’” (qtd. in Goldblatt 429). In this way, a central goal for expressivism is empowerment of the writer through self-expression and giving writers autonomy over their texts. WAW shares this value for empowerment but for different reasons and with different aims in mind—more on that later.
In a recent article for *College Composition and Communication*, Eli Goldblatt names four habits of mind for expressivism, which he calls the “tacit tradition” because of the pervasive influence it has had on all kinds of pedagogies that may not actually claim the term “expressivist.” These include a value for individuals finding their way in the world through expression, identification with a particular group’s discourse, recognition of and support for expression for individuals and groups who are “not usually sponsored in their own autonomous uses of reading and writing,” and, finally, teaching as a personal commitment to the literacies of our students and their communities (Goldblatt 443). Expressivist practices—or at least practices made popular by expressivism—including practices that I would consider now to simply be good teaching practices in any writing classroom, like Ken Macrorie’s “third way” of teaching that includes building strong habits in peer workshopping and having “great respect for the thoughts and feelings of students ‘given real choices and encouraged to learn the way of experts’” (Goldblatt 449). In my own WAW classroom, peer workshops are an important habit, but the *reason* for workshopping comes from a different philosophy than self-expression and developing individual identity within community. For WAW, workshops are important because they more closely model how writers work in the world—with readers, peer-reviewers, editors, and so on—and they help students to understand how writing is collaborative; it is not done by a lone, autonomous writer with no influences or guidance. This is important even for students who will never become writing majors because it also helps re-center writing as a practice that everyone engages in, whether they are professional writers or not. By thinking about writing as something we all do, students
can begin to think about how they might write in their chosen fields—whether it’s project proposals for engineers, trial briefs for lawyers, patient charts for nurses, and so on—so they can start to establish their writing identities.

Susan C. Jarratt and Lynn Worsham explain early philosophies of feminist pedagogies as responses to “the movement from a rhetoric and politics of recognition to debates over issues of representation” and considerations for how women’s ways of writing differ from dominant (male) practices (8). This initial interest in gender in particular sets the philosophies behind feminist pedagogies apart from expressivism, a point Goldblatt acknowledges in “Don’t Call it Expressivism: Legacies of A ‘Tacit Tradition.’” He writes that feminist pedagogies had to stand outside expressivism—even if the two pedagogies had shared values—because they “needed to establish gender as a legitimate and urgent category for investigation; allying with an earlier and increasingly devalued movement would not have furthered the case for either legitimacy or urgency” (446). This is also a key distinction between agendas in feminist pedagogy and WAW philosophy. While WAW opens a space that makes gender an available avenue for inquiry about how writing works (e.g. a student research question could easily be about how gender impacts the way we write), it also recognizes that there are many other factors that influence how writing gets done and does not focus on one over another.

Contemporary feminist pedagogies consider more intersectional values and “share a common goal of actualizing social justice through teaching and learning methods,” with social justice ranging from addressing subjects of gender, sexuality, class, race, and interests in “the material, political, corporeal and emotional effects of living in a
globalized economy” (Micciche “Feminist” 128-129). As a result of these intersections, feminist pedagogies offer opportunities for discussion and development of emotion as epistemic tool because of their value for “theoretical, political, intellectual, and emotional understanding of intersectional identities” and—more specific to my development and use of emotion—for “content focused on women’s experiences and contributions to knowledge-making” (Micciche “Feminist” 128, emphasis mine). Historically, for feminism, discussions of emotion begin with an interest in women’s experience. Situated in a WAW course, discussions of emotion can be made more broadly available than those ascribed to women’s experience. Broadening this discussion to include more than women’s experiences allows for more possibilities of how emotion functions as epistemic tool for everyone, not just women.

I acknowledge these other FYC pedagogies in order to bring WAW values more sharply into focus as an especially effective pedagogy and approach in which to situate development of emotion as epistemic tool. Like expressivism, WAW rejects writing instruction that does not reflect how writing actually gets done outside of typical academic settings. WAW also shares the belief that writing is a meaning-making activity and that it is not simply to communicate ideas from one person to the next (Estrem 19). WAW certainly owes many of its classroom practices to work done by early expressivists—like peer workshops and student conferences—but it’s the philosophies behind these practices that distinguish WAW from expressivism. For WAW, de-emphasizing product is about giving writers the space to learn more about themselves as writers as well as why and how they’ve encountered cultural inhibitions about writing in
the past. In contrast, expressivism’s value for process over product comes from the need to free student writers so they can be empowered through uninhibited expression in writing. WAW opens up a space for students to consider themselves as writers in future contexts—because “writing is relevant to all of us”—which makes breaking down cultural inhibitions about writing an important step forward for students to be successful writers in their chosen fields (Wardle and Downs 2, emphasis original). Empowerment through uninhibited expression, however, does not necessarily get students to consider how they will approach writing in the future, outside an FYC class. Instead, I argue that my students benefit more from being able to read new rhetorical situations and the constraints inherent with each new kind of writing than by being allowed to write whatever they choose.

Feminist pedagogies value collaborative work, a practice WAW shares. However, feminist rationales for collaboration focus more on the personal and the political alongside “systemic analyses of inequality aimed at uncovering the production of knowledge, meaning, power, and belief in particular contexts” (Micciche “Feminist” 128). WAW, on the other hand, values collaboration in writing as part of its investigation into the nature of writing and how writing actually works for writers and is not explicitly interested in breaking down systemic inequality through collaboration. WAW does shares feminist pedagogy’s critique of cultural (mis)understandings that collaboration in intellectual work is less valuable than individually produced pieces (typically by men in power). However, its priorities for teaching writers how to collaborate come from
rejecting cultural assumptions about “lone writers” and institutional beliefs that collaboration is plagiarism, and not from gender-focused concerns.

While these three pedagogies—expressivist, feminist, and WAW—share some values and practices, it’s the rationales, reasons, and broader philosophies that differentiate the *why* between these values and practices and make WAW my choice site for emotion as epistemic tool. With WAW’s specific focus on researching how writing works—the habits and practices of writers in the world—and its interest in helping students investigate writing misconceptions through critical inquiry, we don’t have to compromise between critical and empirical research and discussions of emotion as sites for making knowledge in composition (and communication).

WAW provides the critical frame for thinking about how writing works that allows for discussions of emotion that go beyond what expressivist pedagogies advocate for while remaining capacious enough to include more than gender-focused discussions of emotion that feminist pedagogies might start with. Another aspect of WAW that sets it apart from expressivist and feminist priorities is its focus on challenging conceptions of writing that come from previous schooled experiences. More specifically, we spend a good deal of time in class discussing how the five-paragraph essay or timed writing tests are not representative of how people get writing done outside of school settings, so we don’t ask our students to continue these patterns in WAW². Finally, because WAW does

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² I acknowledge, however, the paradox of challenging schooled writing conventions within a schooled writing context and argue that it’s important for students to recognize this paradox as well. For this reason, these kinds of discussions can never be perfect in classroom contexts.
not limit its focus to any specific identity category—like gender, socioeconomic status, race, sexual orientation, etc.—investigating emotion can take any avenue that students wish to travel. In these ways, WAW philosophy opens doors for emotion to serve as a category of analysis for writing and communication—both in academic contexts and outside the academy (Micciche “Doing Emotion” 7).

Treatment of Emotion in FYC Textbooks

While WAW is not the only pedagogical philosophy that is conducive to discussions of emotion as epistemic tool, I note that even in expressivist and feminist pedagogies we lack evidence in FYC more broadly for pervasive discussion of emotion (not to mention as epistemic tool). By looking at textbooks, including the WAW textbook, as an indicator of how FYC is taught in the majority of college classrooms, I observe that FYC lacks approaches to and discussions of emotion as epistemic tool. Composition textbooks are widely understood to have a strong impact on how FYC is taught, a generalization well in line with my own experience as a graduate student instructor. It’s not that we must use these textbooks or that we are always dependent on textbooks, but that many teachers of FYC are new graduate students who are unfamiliar with the field and its teaching practices and often have limited preparation or training before beginning to teach our courses. My own experience is limited to teaching FYC as a graduate student, but looking around at our contingent faculty (who teach 100 percent of the FYC courses at Montana State), most of these teachers learned to teach by teaching FYC, too. Textbooks, then, provide a generally accessible resource for new teachers who
need guidance on curriculum design, readings, and assignments because textbooks are specifically designed for classroom use in these ways.

In this section I turn to two reviews of 25 popular composition textbooks from 1998 and 2016 and my own mini-review of an exception-to-the-rule text in order to argue that our field has not yet bridged the gap between scholarly theoretical knowledge about emotion and what is communicated in our FYC textbooks. In part, I note composition’s general failure to distinguish between emotion, pathos, and affect in the limited spaces that it does discuss emotion. This part of the field still struggles with depending on logos, ethos, and pathos to discuss rhetoric, with a particular difficulty with using pathos as a broad stand-in term for anything related to feeling, emotion, or affect. The two reviews I look at—by Gretchen Flesher Moon and Tim Jensen, respectively—study textbooks for discussion of pathos in particular, but both reviews acknowledge that by “pathos” we also often mean emotion, affect, or feelings. In any case, these reviews reveal a pattern of neglect for pathos (and, by extension, emotion) in FYC textbooks, which indicates that emotion is not a popular priority for discussion in FYC classes.

In the 2003 essay “The Pathos of Pathos: The Treatment of Emotion in Contemporary Composition Textbooks,” Gretchen Flesher Moon traces trends across 25 popular composition textbooks published after 1998 and argues that “pathos as a rhetorical appeal gets very short shrift in textbooks,” a result of textbook writers who “have uncritically followed western culture’s binary habits, which run deep and largely unchallenged” (Moon 33 and 39, emphasis original). Tim Jensen continues and extends Moon’s 2003 article in “Textbook Pathos: Tracing a Through-Line of Emotion in
Composition Textbooks,” which was published in 2016 and also studies 25 contemporary composition textbooks, this time published after 2010. In this review, he points out the disparate relationship between field knowledge and textbook content by noting that “analyzing textbooks for the impact of scholarship has a long tradition within rhetoric and composition, and the gap between what is discussed in journals and what is communicated to students can be measured in terms of decades” (PDF 2). This gap is important to address when developing pedagogical strategies for emotion as epistemic tool because it asks us to consider how to bring our scholarship forward to textbook publishers, which are a very specific and politically (read: monetarily) complicated audience to convince to change. There’s also something to be said about the changing dynamics of students who enter our FYC classrooms and the politics of emotional labor in teaching composition, but I don’t have the space for that discussion within this project. I anticipate there will come a point where textbook publishers have to adjust to the needs of the millennial generation, but I can’t say how emotion as epistemic tool will fare in those adjustments.

While my focus is specifically on WAW approaches—and fortunately Jensen’s study includes the Wardle and Downs text Writing About Writing: A College Reader—an inquiry into how FYC textbooks more broadly handle pathos is important because it says something about general trends in composition and the accessibility of teaching emotion in FYC. I do not claim that pathos is equivalent to emotion, but instead recognize the limitations in studies of emotion specifically—as distinct from pathos—within textbooks because emotion is often lumped together with pathos or affect. In this project, I argue
that emotion is distinct from pathos, but I acknowledge Jensen’s points that the two words—along with affect, as well—are combined or treated as equivalent terms in composition textbooks. He notes that “all of the textbooks that define pathos do so with the word ‘emotion,’” and then fail to define emotion clearly (PDF 9). This is a constraint for my kind of project, but his study of pathos—defined as emotion—is a great starting point for measuring considerations of emotion in composition textbooks. It also reinforces the need to pay attention to emotion in composition more specifically because it tends to get lumped together with these other terms.

In 24 textbooks of the 25 in his study, Jensen notes trends that align closely with my students’ (mis)conceptions about emotion and writing. He finds that, generally, pathos gets treated in two ways: first, as something to be avoided or to “be used carefully in academic writing” and second, as equivalent to or defined by emotion (PDF 6). He quotes invocations from two texts: first, “‘Avoid using arguments that rely only on wrenching the reader’s heart rather than logic and real evidence’ (Appendix, Source 12, p. 91), and second, “‘Emotional appeals should be used carefully in academic writing, where arguments are often expected to emphasize logical reasons and evidence more than emotion’ (Appendix, Source 7, Glossary/Index, emotional appeal)” (PDF 6, emphasis mine). By using comparative language, both of these textbooks demonstrate our culture’s propensity for binaries—emotion is in contrast to “real” evidence, and these two concepts are mutually exclusive.

In addition, observe how both excerpts, which Jensen claims have to do with pathos, do not actually mention pathos at all, but instead refer to “wrenching the reader’s
heart” or using “emotional appeals.” I assert that Jensen’s choice to frame his textbook study in terms of pathos instead of affect or emotion was a choice that reflects the standard appeals to logos, ethos, and pathos that many students learn for “rhetorical analysis” in high school, and not a choice Jensen makes to limit his study to pathos alone. In other words, even in studies that look at pathos as composition’s broad umbrella term for anything related to emotion, affect, or feelings, discussions of these subjects are limited and treated as something to avoid rather than as an epistemic tool or a method of inquiry. A particularly compelling example of pathos serving as the stand-in term for emotion and affect can be observed in a chapter from one text that Jensen finds promising for discussions of emotion: *Rhetorical Analysis: A Brief Guide for Writers* by Mark G. Longaker and Jeffrey Walker. In the chapter titled “Affect (Pathos Revisited),” pathos is mentioned only 18 times while affect is mentioned 52 times. Emotion, however, gets 102 mentions, nearly twice as many as affect and more than five times as many as pathos and, yet, Longaker and Walker stick with affect and pathos as their title terms for the chapter. This is important to consider because even the textbook that Jensen notes as a promising shift in recognition for emotion is still bogged down by language used in classical rhetorical appeals—logos, ethos, and pathos.

Jensen does, however, point towards some promising trends in composition textbooks. He reviews two texts from Moon’s original list that she highlighted as “anomalistic because they articulate pathos in more relational, dynamic, and expansive ways” and finds that these texts and a few others for his contemporary study counter “the culturally prevalent notion that emotion and logic are separate and antithetical
It’s interesting to note how easily pathos and emotion are equivocated through these studies, particularly because Jensen does actually stop to note the pattern of dead-end definitions for pathos; pathos is emotion, but we don’t define emotion. Overall, Jensen notes a lack of sustained progress across these texts for consideration of pathos or emotion as a legitimate appeal or strategy in composition (PDF 7). As I have found myself with composition scholarship outside of textbooks, Jensen notes that the list of texts that specifically name emotions is short and fails to account for “the array of emotions we routinely experience,” like guilt, frustration, and disappointment (PDF 8).

As I briefly noted above, the one text that stands out in Jensen’s study is Mark Garrett Longaker and Jeffrey Walker’s Rhetorical Analysis: A Brief Guide for Writers. This (very tiny) textbook is published by Pearson and splits up its elements for teaching rhetorical analysis into eight parts: an introduction to rhetoric, Kairos, argumentation, structure, style, ideology (or “logos revisited”), affect (or “pathos revisited”), and habit (“ethos revisited”). I was initially surprised to find an entire chapter dedicated to affect, and less surprised to find that affect, pathos, and emotion are used nearly interchangeably within the chapter. In the first paragraph of “Affect (Pathos Revisited)” the authors begin with the assumption that “emotions are a big part of who we are, what we believe, and how we behave” (208). Note that they do not write that affect or even pathos has this impact, but emotion, and they still don’t consider how emotion creates knowledge—only belief and behavior. Longaker and Walker further break down emotion into three key terms: affect, interpretation, and behavior (209) and describe specific, nameable emotions
like terror or disgust that can further be “parsed into a bodily disposition (an affect) and an interpretation” (210). Given this taxonomy, it seems to me that Longaker and Walker’s chapter could be titled “Emotion (Pathos Revisited)” instead of centering around affect. In any case, emotion is the nameable response to a situation, affects are the bodily dispositions (or felt-senses) like nausea, and both are followed by interpretations (or judgments) of the experience. Following these elements is a change in our behavior, which comes close to my own definition of emotion as a specific, nameable, felt-response to a person or situation that makes us change something about our behavior. The missing piece for my project is that Longaker and Walker haven’t considered emotion as something that changes our understanding or helps us make knowledge, but it’s a start.

After setting up clear distinctions between terms, Longaker and Walker explain their method for rhetorical analysis of emotion. They argue that “separating the affective, the behavioral, and the interpretive components of an emotion also helps us to see that we can disagree about our feelings. We believe that this ability to understand disagreement over pathos is the most significant contribution that rhetorical analysis can make to the emerging study of emotions” (212). Note how quickly Longaker and Walker slip into equating “our feelings” to “pathos” in the parallelism about disagreement, but I also take their point about understanding the components of an emotion (or a pathos?) as central to my own goals for developing emotion as epistemic tool. Finally, Longaker and Walker come around to emotion as culturally experienced in their last term of the chapter: “emotional repertoire.” They define emotional repertoire as “a relatively stable range of emotions shared by a large group of people and often in response to situations or objects
that these people all encounter in their public lives” (223). In other words, emotional repertoire describes emotions that are accepted by a culture and are considered “universal” within that culture. Their central argument for the chapter, that “the astute rhetorical analyst can locate an affect, can notice a behavior, can find their allied interpretation, and can theorize a new emotional appeal, incorporating the same affect into a new interpretation, a new behavioral response, and thus a wholly different argument,” is a good starting point for thinking about how emotion impacts behavior and interpretations, for certain (Longaker and Walker 213). It does not go as far to consider emotion as a way of making new knowledge, though.

Situating Emotion as Epistemic Tool within WAW Philosophy

This chapter thus far seeks to map the intersections between FYC, composition textbooks, and WAW approaches to FYC in order to specify a space in WAW for emotion as epistemic tool. In acknowledging other pedagogies in FYC that are inclusive of discussion of emotion as well as the clear lack of attention to emotion in the pedagogical applications provided by FYC textbooks, I situate WAW by the differences that make it a good choice for implementing emotion as epistemic tool in an FYC classroom. In the intersection between FYC, WAW, and composition textbooks, even WAW—which I argue is an especially effective space for emotion as epistemic tool—fails to incorporate productive discussion of emotion in its central textbook, *Writing About Writing: A College Reader*, edited by Wardle and Downs. This textbook is now in its third edition and has gone through two extensive user reviews—with significant
feedback from instructors on which readings are being used in the classroom and which readings should be added or removed—and there’s still no substantive attention to emotion in the current text. These decisions are not solely made by Wardle and Downs as editors; these are choices made based on instructor demand, and the readings chosen for the newest textbook suggest that emotion is simply not in demand. This is a cultural problem: as a culture, we don’t yet feel a pervasive need to think about emotion as epistemic in FYC. This does not mean that WAW is not an effective pedagogy for emotion as epistemic tool, but that it just hasn’t made it there in its first decade of practice.

The table of contents for the 3rd edition of Writing About Writing divides its chapters into five central themes: threshold concepts, literacies, “individual in community” (or discourse communities), rhetoric, and processes. None of the available readings specifically name emotion as their subject, though it could be argued that a reading like Jim W. Corder’s “Argument as Emergence, Rhetoric as Love,” might get towards discussion of emotion’s role in argument and writing. The closest the textbook comes to opportunities for discussion of emotion as a through-line for experience are in the literacy narratives—which are autobiographical in nature—like Malcom X’s “Learning to Read” essay, but I am careful not to equate literacy narrative to memoir. Both are autobiographical in nature, but literacy narratives focus on a specific concept—developing one’s literacy—while memoirs tend to center around an event or a person (e.g. the death of Joan Didion’s husband). Despite the lack of available readings in the WAW textbook, next I highlight the aims, values, and central principles in the WAW
pedagogy in order to explain how this approach already has productive starting points and spaces for discussion and implementation of emotion as epistemic tool.

Three principles serve as a through-line in WAW approaches. The first, as I’ve mentioned, makes writing the content of the course and subject for study—students are asked to “think deeply about what writing is, does, and means to them, and it is in writing about these concepts that students form their writer identities and develop deep writing knowledge” (Bird et al. 1, emphasis mine). In this way, WAW has a strong foundation for discussions of epistemology through writing, how we make knowledge by writing, and—more specifically—emotion as epistemic tool in writing. The second principle, which centers more around stances towards students in the writing classroom, is that students are treated as fellow writers, “not student writers” (Bird et al. 2, emphasis original). This environment is designed to shift the teacher/student relationship from one of a teacher who owns the knowledge and a student who is there to receive it, to a mentoring relationship where students and teachers learn together about writing. This leads into the final principle, wherein teachers seek to “advance writing knowledge with students” instead of maintaining the divide between teacher as scholar and student as learner (Bird et al. 3, emphasis original).

These central principles serve WAW’s philosophies, which aim to help students learn about writing studies from the perspective of researchers and scholars in this field in order to empower students as writers. The goal is not to turn students into writing majors, but to get students to think about themselves as writers no matter which contexts they enter; when they write in their future courses or careers, they’re writers. WAW treats
students as fellow writers and investigators of writing by setting up a course where they pursue specific research questions framed by writing studies scholarship. In this way, students actively join the scholarly conversation on writing and—as a result—feel empowered as writers (not just “student writers”). Empowering student writers is also a value for expressivist and feminist pedagogies, but the methods in which these pedagogies pursue this goal and the reasons for pursuing empowerment differ. For WAW, the value for student empowerment comes from the identification of a systemic injustice built by an education system that (incorrectly) believes that writing can be taught for all situations in a one-semester FYC course. WAW aims to address education myths that have misunderstood writing as a subject to teach, which harms students by teaching them things about writing that aren’t realistic for what we know from empirical research in writing studies. For example, WAW rejects the notion that collaboration is plagiarism, that writing comes easily for “good writers,” that grammar is more important than content, and that learning to write is a “skill” you learn once and can then apply to every future situation. Beyond rejecting these notions, WAW asks students to explore research that demonstrates why and how these conceptions are not true or why they should not be true. It is this metadiscourse and further extensive research that distinguishes WAW from pedagogies that similarly reject these misconceptions, and that makes WAW an effective site for critical consideration of emotion as epistemic tool to be considered concurrently with more traditional ideas of research.

While feminist pedagogies are also interested in systemic injustice, the sources of injustice that are worth addressing are more specific than education as a whole—like
gender, race, socioeconomic status, etc. Expressivists, too, are interested in empowering students, but their value for empowerment comes more from individual obstacles to literacy that are not limited to schooled writing. The priority for expressivism, as explained by Eli Goldblatt in his 2017 CCC article, is to get writers to understand themselves through writing and see themselves as part of a larger community. Goldblatt, along with others like Doug Hesse, have offered articulate critiques and concerns about using WAW in an FYC course that expose gaps in WAW for emotional content. Goldblatt in particular writes that WAW doesn’t foreground positive emotional attachment to writing—what he describes as “intentionality, joy, seriousness, and intimacy available in the act of writing”—and instead focuses too much on preparing students for academic and professional spheres (460). He writes,

I fear Writing About Writing elevates the study of writing over the experience of writing… Without an urgency that is felt as personal, a writer will always be looking to the teacher, the boss, the arbiter for both permission to begin and approval to desist. This doesn’t mean students must always write autobiographically, but they must learn how to find the motive spark, the intention to speak, within whatever subject they take up. (461)

As a new teacher who teaches only a fraction of the available readings in the 912-page Writing About Writing text, I can’t disagree with Goldblatt’s claim that the text doesn’t focus on teaching writers to love writing or to even care about writing. In fact, part of my own interest in this project—bringing emotion as epistemic tool to WAW in FYC with accessible examples—stems from my background in nonfiction creative writing and practicing writing in ways that address emotion in a narrative way. Those are the classes that made me love and care about writing and made me see writing as a way of making meaning. I argue that bringing some of these values into WAW—especially Goldblatt’s
point about personal urgency for writing—will fill an existing gap in WAW pedagogy and strengthen its purposes by asking students to do writing research on subjects (or emotions) that they’re deeply invested in. Furthermore, I continue to advocate for bringing emotion as epistemic tool into WAW because of the framework WAW provides for reading critical scholarship on writing (and emotion in writing)—a framework not provided by expressivist pedagogy nor by the pedagogies I’ve seen in creative writing workshops.

A related critique of WAW that addresses my creative-writing-oriented concerns about emotion as epistemic tool for this pedagogy is made by Doug Hesse in his 2010 CCC article “The Place of Creative Writing in Composition Studies.” Hesse points out a divergence between values in creative writing—where I first learned about Joan Didion—and the values of rhetoric and composition studies—where I first began to consider emotion from a critical, epistemological perspective—in terms of student experience of these at-odds sub-fields within English departments. He writes that students experience the relationship between creative writing and rhetoric and composition in three ways:

silence, in which the connections among different genres and purposes of writing go unremarked; truism, in which teachers trying to be hopeful offer a few general precepts about kinds of writing, in ways that strike even students as shallowly reductive; or stridency, in which interested proponents decry the (choose one) strictures/ preciousness/ limits/ vapidity of their counterparts. (43)

I read this relationship as a willful gap between creative writing values and rhetoric and composition values, despite many shared interests. It is this gap—or, more aptly,
crevasse—that I hope to address on my way to bringing emotion as epistemic tool to WAW with Joan Didion’s memoirs.

WAW is a pedagogy that specifically addresses and challenges cultural assumptions about writing and writing instruction—this is the starting point for all WAW approaches—which therefore makes this pedagogy an effective starting point for challenging cultural assumptions about emotion as a way of knowing in writing and developing and applying emotion as epistemic tool in an FYC setting. Because the pedagogy is already interested in challenging cultural conceptions of writing, it only takes some minor adjustments (with major epistemic implications) to build in space for challenging cultural conceptions of how emotion works within writing. In the current edition of the Writing About Writing textbook, these values and starting points are framed in the introductory chapter on Threshold Concepts. Threshold concepts are “ideas that are so central to understanding a particular subject that a learner can’t move forward in that area without grasping them,” and in the case of WAW, these concepts are related to addressing (and extinguishing) cultural (mis)conceptions about writing (Wardle and Downs 6). The threshold concepts for writing outlined in the WAW textbook are borrowed from Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies, edited by Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle. Developing writing knowledge with students allows our students to investigate how writing helps us “generate new thinking”: we find out what we think or what we know by writing (Estrem 19). This practice of writing in order to think through something is not new, nor is it unique to WAW approaches, but it is a central value for WAW. We teach our students that writing is not
just something we do, but something we study and use to contribute new knowledge to conversations about our subjects and fields (Wardle and Downs 2). Because I argue that emotion is a through-line for all experience, a failure to discuss emotion is a failure to glean new knowledge from every part of our personal experience. By walling ourselves off from emotional ways of knowing, we prevent ourselves from gaining access to a more complete picture of our experiences.

In asserting that emotion as epistemic tool can only function when 1) emotions are specific and nameable, 2) when emotion challenges cultural assumptions and beliefs, and 3) we acknowledge the connection between experience and emotion, I describe a tool that complements WAW goals and values. Because WAW centers around teaching writing as content we can study, incorporating specific emotional content into a larger discussion of writing as a meaning-making activity would be a logical (if I may) next step. By studying what writing does instead of what writing could or should do, WAW opens a space for discussion of how writers actually make meaning, which can lead to productive discussion of how writers already use emotion as epistemic tool in their work. In the case of this project, looking at how Joan Didion uses emotion as epistemic tool in her memoirs gives students practice with looking at emotional aspects of different writing situations so it becomes obvious practice to consider emotion in writing and communication instead of a stretch.

Existing WAW practices do a good job of questioning writing “rules” or cultural scripts for writing that my students bring with them into WRIT 101. Students, for example, have been taught that correct grammar is more important than content in their
writing, and that academic writing cannot use “I” or draw too much from personal experience. They’re often fixated on pointing out that “emotional arguments” are weak, and that writing should somehow be unbiased. Within this list of examples, a clear gap in the *Writing About Writing* text for subverting cultural scripts is in discussion of emotion. As I alluded to early in this chapter, the only specific reading that highlights emotion is Jim W. Corder’s “Argument as Emergence, Rhetoric as Love,” but it fails to specifically address emotion as epistemic tool in writing. Corder, instead, focuses his piece on developing a new way to argue that is not agonistic but is framed “as humans becoming and learning to love and respect each other as people” (Wardle and Downs 600). He does name specific emotions in his essay to make a point about arguments we are deeply attached to—these arguments make us feel “hushed, feverish, quaky, shaky, angry, scared, hurt, scared, shocked, disappointed, alarmed, outraged, even terrified” when others disagree with our position—but does not address those emotions in order to determine how they shape our understanding of the world or our experience (Corder 607). I see Corder as a starting point in the WAW textbook for consideration of emotion as epistemic tool and build my list of readings to buttress Corder’s work later, in Chapter 4.

Beginning with discussions of students’ past experiences with writing and connecting those experiences to readings from writing studies also allows for rich discussion of how emotional arguments are *not* actually unethical or weak, but instead can make for complex, nuanced categories of analysis (Micciche “Doing Emotion” 108). Centering reading discussions around students’ personal experiences with writing is
something I personally value within WAW because it gives students agency in creating new knowledge about writing (they have a voice that matters) and it allows for students to repair potentially negative previous experiences with writing by exposing them to other truths about writing that they didn’t learn in high school. Of course, part of the battle in breaking down schooled expectations for writing is simultaneously trying to prevent further damage in another schooled context for learning about writing. This value for personal experience informs my goals for teaching writing in general because it opens up a space in the classroom where students can feel validated by other students’ personal experiences in discussion as well. These discussions foster a community of writers, which creates an environment in which students can learn more about their writerly identities in a collaborative space. In terms of emotion as epistemic tool, starting with personal experiences and further opening the door for discussing the emotions inherent in those experiences is a great starting point for uncovering how emotions shape our understanding of experience.

Finally, connecting personal experiences to reading discussions in a WAW classroom creates space for discussion of emotion because emotion is a through-line for experience. While we currently ask students about their previous experiences with writing and students share what they know, we are not yet asking them about the emotions that hold that experience together. Did they feel frustration? Sadness? Shame? How did that emotion shape their understanding of themselves as writers? How did it change their behavior as a writer (if at all)? These are some follow-up questions we might ask when implementing emotion as epistemic tool into a WAW setting.
My argument for developing and implementing emotion as epistemic tool in a WAW FYC course is at least two-fold. First, FYC is the space we most need to demonstrate how research in the field has progressed on emotion as epistemic because FYC is the writing course that the culture sees most directly and most frequently, and is likely—as a result—to equate the work we do in FYC as the work writing studies is capable of as a whole. So far, I have not found strong evidence for concrete, pervasive implementation of emotion as epistemic tool in FYC, as demonstrated by the serious lack of consideration of emotion in composition textbooks (including the *Writing About Writing* textbook). While I do not argue that composition textbooks are representative of the moves in the field—far from it—I do argue that the textbooks serve as an acceptable proxy for larger trends in teaching composition. What we have so far is not adequate.

To my second point, WAW specifically is an effective place in FYC to develop emotion as epistemic tool because it’s a popular and widespread contemporary pedagogy and because its values already create openings for critical discussion of emotion as epistemic tool in writing. By treating students as writers instead of student writers and by developing writing knowledge with these writers, WAW becomes an obvious site for discussion of epistemology or ways of making meaning. How do we develop knowledge or make meaning? First, according to WAW, we think through the ways in which writing already creates meaning and look for further ways to continue developing that knowledge. In studying *how writing works*, instead of how writing could or should work, WAW courses open more avenues for students to discover how emotion is already
functioning as epistemic tool in existing writing. This is an interesting site for emotion as epistemic tool since the broader field of rhetoric and composition already has so much to critical scholarship on emotion as a way of knowing and a way of making meaning in our writing and in our lived experiences, but it has not yet provided many accessible pedagogical points of entry for students to understand how emotion works as epistemic tool in writing. In my specific argument for emotion as epistemic tool in WAW, Joan Didion’s memoirs are a great starting point for grounded, accessible (because memoir is generally more accessible than academic writing) examples of how writers use emotion as epistemic tool.

The relationship between my strategy for emotion as epistemic tool and WAW pedagogical values is co-dependent. Emotion as epistemic tool needs WAW for the opportunities it creates in daily discussion, in research outcomes and knowledge creation, and in questioning the status quo for writing. WAW needs emotion as epistemic tool because the latter recovers a big part of what is missing in WAW conversation and approaches by including aspects of our field’s scholarship on emotion and ways of knowing that haven’t trickled down to textbooks and popular composition pedagogies yet. Because the exigence for WAW as a pedagogy was to reconceive FYC goals and shift those goals to reflect the knowledge of the writing studies field, this is the especially effective site for developing a space for specific discussion of emotion as epistemic tool (Wardle 176). In this way, developing and implementing emotion as epistemic tool into the broader WAW pedagogical conversation both advances the teaching of emotion as
epistemic tool in composition pedagogy and enhances and broadens the scholarly reach of WAW pedagogy itself.
CHAPTER THREE

SITUATING EMOTION AS EPISTEMIC TOOL WITH JOAN DIDION’S MEMOIRS

In the last chapter, I argued that teaching emotion as epistemic tool in a WAW context for FYC needs specific, accessible examples for our students. Teaching our students productive ways for discussing emotion is not enough; they must be able to see and consider concrete ways in which emotion already functions as epistemic tool in writing in order to transfer awareness of how emotion can stand on its own as a way of knowing or a way of meaning-making in future writing situations. In WAW approaches, we expose our students to texts in which writers and scholars study and consider how writing works outside of schooled writing in order to break down cultural expectations for writing. In this chapter, I argue that Joan Didion’s particular iterations of memoir are an effective site for discussion of both how writing works and how she uses emotion as a tool for meaning-making. Memoir is an approachable form of writing and Didion’s ethos as a self-reflective, self-aware professional writer allows her to discuss how writing works for her as a meaning-making activity and how emotion shapes her narrative-making (and therefore meaning-making).

I choose Didion as my entry point for teaching emotion as epistemic tool using memoir because she refuses expectations for memoir that dictate heavy-handed emotional narratives. In this way, she challenges both cultural expectations for how emotions are “supposed to be” felt or responded to and reader expectations for what memoir is supposed to do. It isn’t that Didion’s work is void of emotion—far from it—but that the
emotion is implied, under the surface, and requires interpretation and meaning-making from the reader in order to understand how emotion is working. These narratives—in The Year of Magical Thinking and Blue Nights—draw strongly from cultural scripts about what it means to be a partner, what it means to be a mother, how our identities are shaped by these roles, and what it’s like to experience loss, in order to create implied instances of deeply felt, easily recognizable emotions or (sometimes and) to challenge these scripts and redefine what it means to experience grief, or to feel self-pity.

By tracing epistemic patterns in Didion’s memoirs, I articulate the connection between emotion and experience, or, more specifically, ways in which we write about our experience. A strong example of this connection between emotion and experience in writing is in life writing and memoir because these writers have to reconstruct (and therefore make choices during their constructions) memory in order to create narratives that give meaning to their experiences. While I recognize that many memoirs may contain the kinds of emotion, experience, and epistemic (making-sense-of) narratives that would allow for discussion of emotion as epistemic tool, I argue that Joan Didion’s work in memoir fits the values of the WAW pedagogy best because of her specific reflections on how writing works for her and the ways in which she refuses to accept cultural scripts for her own emotions. Our students—and, frankly, often we ourselves—are so comfortable with explanations and examples made from “facts” or logical, reportorial writing, that Didion’s own values for journalistic writing—for “getting it right”—make her an approachable starting point in FYC. With The Year of Magical Thinking and Blue Nights, Didion creates compelling examples of emotion as epistemic tool—as something
that shaped both the experiences themselves and her interpretations of the experiences—because she gets where these cultural expectations come from.

Finally, I point to some available, specific places in *The Year of Magical Thinking* and *Blue Nights* where emotion functions as epistemic tool in Didion’s writing—both for herself as the writer and for those of us who read her work—in order to start conversations about how emotion can work as epistemic tool and why Didion creates particularly interesting opportunities for discussion and expansion of these concepts. I look at ways in which Didion’s work addresses the three tenets for emotion to work as epistemic tool that I outlined in Chapter 1, which include 1) emotions must be specific and nameable; 2) emotion challenges cultural assumptions and beliefs; and 3) we use the connection between emotion and experience as a method of inquiry. I also discuss ways in which Didion’s memoirs fit especially well in a WAW course because of her position as a professional writer who reflects on the act of writing as a meaning-making activity. In Chapter 4, I more specifically situate teaching emotion as epistemic tool using memoir with concrete pedagogical practices and course design framed by WAW approaches to FYC.

**Memoir as a Site for Emotion as Epistemic Tool**

In my introduction I began to articulate how memoir—and personal narrative more broadly—gets after how we construct knowledge and make meaning because it examines and critically considers “local conditions that make knowledge possible” in the course of narrative-making (Code 172). I argue that turning to memoir for an example of
how knowledge and meaning is *socially and culturally constructed* allows for
implementation of my second tenet for emotion as epistemic tool: that emotion
challenges cultural assumptions and beliefs. Scholars on life writing like Paul John Eakin
extend this notion that writing personal narratives is an epistemic practice by pointing out
the element of translation needed to make these narratives. Eakin writes, “We can never
expect to witness the emergent sense of self, of life story, as an observable event, for it is
an ongoing process. The datable moments…are explicit or implicit moments of
recognition that the sense of self and its story has *already* taken a decisive turn; we never
catch ourselves in the act of *becoming selves*” (125, emphasis original). In other words,
we can only understand our experiences, our “becomings,” and—by extension, our
emotions—through the process of creating narratives. These “datable moments” cannot
be plucked from their contexts and transcribed but must be thought-through and put back
together in narratives. Eakin further argues that the making of autobiography is part of
what gives life itself meaning—that in the creation of these personal narratives we are
participating in “part of the fabric of our experience as we live it,” and not simply a
retrospective, reflective act (148). Joan Didion—the central subject for this chapter—
makes a similar point herself in her 1979 essay “The White Album,” which begins with,
“We tell ourselves stories in order to live” (11). This notion of creating narratives in order
to understand experience fits in the broader goal of WAW, where we demonstrate to
students how writing is a meaning-making activity.

Other scholars on life narratives, like Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, articulate
more specific attributes of life narratives that make memoir especially compelling for
teaching specific examples of emotion as epistemic tool. In *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, Smith and Watson highlight varying definitions of life narrative, autobiographical subjects and acts, the influence and popularity of memoir on this larger category of personal narrative, and theories of autobiography. In the opening chapter, Smith and Watson define self-narration as “an epistemological act of thinking through what one as a subject knows to be or not to be” and a practice that includes “conscious invention” (18, emphasis mine). More specifically, memory’s role in the creation of life narrative is slippery and requires interpretation in order to make meaning. Smith and Watson, like Eakin, distinguish between retrospection as looking back and remembering as an act of reconstructing memories. They write that “narrative memory is an interpretation of a past that can never be fully recovered,” which requires “organiz[ing] and form[ing] fragments of memory into complex constructions that become the changing stories of our lives” (Smith and Watson 22). This active reconstruction of memories—the putting together of available fragments from the past—makes memoir an effective site for discussions of both writing as a meaning-making activity and emotion as epistemic tool, since the content of memoir usually centers around emotional narratives.

I want to more carefully consider this relationship between memory and emotion, particularly because—while my argument for Didion’s work hinges on how emotion functions as epistemic tool in her writing—memory obviously has a major impact on how emotion is communicated in memoir. Smith and Watson argue that memory is an active “creation of meaning of the past in the act of remembering” and note how memory
changes over time; it is not easily pinned down (22, emphasis mine). The act of creating meaning instead of discovering or finding meaning demonstrates the need for reconstruction of memories from available pieces and requires acknowledging the agency of the writer in telling his or her story. Eakin more specifically investigates memory and argues that “consciousness is not a neutral medium in which memories can be replayed and the past repeated in tact… research in brain studies offers no support for belief in invariant memory or belief in the possibility of re-experiencing earlier stages in selfhood” (10-11). In other words, though memory is a central source from which Didion must draw from for the content of her memoirs, its malleability makes it a factor within narrative-making that requires consideration and careful arrangement in order to best communicate the emotions she wishes to convey. Put conversely, emotion cannot be used as epistemic tool without mining memory; we cannot “re-experience” earlier emotions without associating those emotions with specific memories.

A significant feature of autobiography or life narratives is the fluidity of content, subjects, and constructions. Smith and Watson write that “the stuff of autobiographical storytelling, then, is drawn from multiple, disparate, and discontinuous experiences and the multiple identities constructed from and constituting those experiences” (40). These discontinuous experiences and the identities constructed within our experience make life writing an interesting site for discussion of how writing involves active construction of meaning and how all writing involves making decisions, not just transcribing truths. The act of writing a life narrative means having agency and claiming authority over one’s story. In addition to the practice of creating personal narratives, autobiography itself is
“not at this historical moment (and, we would argue, never has been) a unified form, nor is it distinct from literary modes of either fiction or nonfiction” (Smith and Watson 127). It is in recognizing the complexity and variance in autobiographical forms that I narrow my focus to memoir, and Joan Didion’s memoirs in particular for this project. I do not wish to argue that all memoir looks like Didion’s memoirs, or that all memoir engages in certain behaviors, but instead recognize Didion’s specific iterations of memoir as great fits for WAW values and discussion of emotion as epistemic tool.

As narratives of grief (according to Smith and Watson), The Year of Magical Thinking and Blue Nights fit in with other memoirs related to loss that are “often passed from hand to hand as how-to guidebooks, serving as contemporary books of consolation” (138). However, Didion’s approach to these memoirs also serves as a refusal to grieve in culturally acceptable ways and denies “the healing of ‘scriptotherapy’” or the comforts that writing memoirs about grief is supposed to bring (Smith and Watson 139). Smith and Watson write that Didion instead “insists on the fragmentary process of writing grief and articulates a vulnerability rendered in, but not contained or resolved by, life writing” (139). Didion is making meaning of her experiences by using emotions like grief, but she isn’t trying to find answers or concrete conclusions. This is important because it provides examples of how good inquiry—e.g. how grief shapes experience—doesn’t have to have end with an exact answer, which is a writing misconception most of my students have picked up at some point in their previous education. Instead, Didion’s work demonstrates a different way of making meaning that is not at all dependent on finding answers.
For the context of the WAW classroom, investigating memoir as a site in which writing is inherently a meaning-making activity or, perhaps more aptly, a making-sense-of-things activity, is straightforward (though less so to teach). We recognize that any time we look back on our memories—which are selective, fragmented, and change with each new iteration—we are constructing a new narrative and making new meaning out of the pieces that are available to us either from personal experience, from cultural expectations, and from choices we make. A given for discussion of how writing works includes this assertion: we can only tell what we know, and our knowledge is constrained by what the culture tells us. Smith and Watson explain it better by writing, “People tell stories of their lives through the cultural scripts available to them, and they are governed by cultural strictures about self-presentation in public. In this sense, then, there is no autonomous, agentic subject outside of discourse, and no freely interpreted or fully controlled self-narration” (56). That last line is particularly significant because it addresses cultural myths that WAW approaches currently work on investigating with our students. Didion’s memoirs provide specific examples for how writers are not entirely autonomous in their decisions or what they can know by writing, which fits into and expands existing agendas in WAW pedagogy.

Joan Didion’s Ethos as a Professional Writer

Didion’s approaches to memoir are not representative of most memoirs, necessarily, and her own strategies for recounting and reflecting on her story are strongly informed by her work as a professional writer. I borrow from Nedra Reynolds’
conceptions of ethos as something we dwell in, a way of being that connects to “concepts from classical rhetoric—ethos as haunt, for example—and invites us to revisit the connections between habits and places, between memories and places, between our bodies and the material world” (141, emphasis original). Inhabiting her roles as a fiction writer, a journalist, and memoir writer, Didion places great value on inquiry and research in her work. In terms of her ethos, I consider her habits of mind and her way of being as a writer that influence how she pursues these roles. She states in the Netflix Documentary *The Center Will Not Hold* that, “If I examine something, it’s less scary” (Dunne). These stances and proclivities for writing from the research and working on problems by writing position Didion’s memoirs as effective examples of how writing works but also how emotion works within writing—but more on the latter later. Writer and critic Hilton Als describes Didion’s approaches to writing *The Year of Magical Thinking* and *Blue Nights* as reportorial. He says, “She wasn’t writing through the haze of romanticism, she was writing through the deeply felt poignancy of someone who could report on grief. It’s the hardest thing to write about. She did it as a reporter. She did it as the ‘Joan Didion character’ of the novels. And she did it on grief” (Dunne). The contrast between the difficulty of writing about grief and doing it “as a reporter” creates an interesting tension between expectations that reporting is easy because the facts are readily available—they just need to be written down—and the actuality of how writing works. Of course, reporting is not just transcribing the facts; meaning has to be made in reported stories—as in memoir—by selecting details that are most valuable or pertinent. I argue that Als’ point is not that Didion made writing about grief easy, but that she combined her
reportorial values for information as knowledge in order to tell an emotional story. This combination creates the surplus that Spigelman outlines (95). Her surplus of values for rational thinking and the unpredictable emotional challenge of thinking through the deaths of her husband John and, later, her daughter Quintana, allows Didion to make meaning of these experiences in such a way that they’re accessible and can be understood by her readers.

Throughout *The Year of Magical Thinking* and *Blue Nights*, Didion references her values and work as a career writer, and includes her own metacognitive writing about writing—she considers how her approaches as a professional writer change drastically when she’s working with emotional material. In *Blue Nights*, Didion writes,

> Even the correct stance for telling you this, the ways to describe what is happening to me, the attitude, the tone, the very words, now elude my grasp. The tone needs to be direct. I need to talk to you directly, I need to address the subject as it were, but something stops me. Is this another kind of neuropathy, a new frailty, am I no longer able to talk directly? Was I ever? Did I lose it? Or is the subject in this case a matter I wish not to address? (116-117, emphasis original)

Writing, a practice that has always come easily to Didion working as a writer throughout her adult life, suddenly becomes an extremely challenging task when the subjects are the deaths of her husband and daughter. In passages like the one above, Didion considers how the emotional content of this kind of writing shapes the meaning differently than her normal writing process or ability to write throughout the rest of her career. Early in *Blue Nights*, for example, Didion notes how the subject of this memoir—which she first believed to be children, since she was writing about the death of her daughter Quintana—shifts as she writes. In the act of writing and working through what she thought on the
page, she constructs a new meaning out of her experience and demonstrates writing as an epistemic activity. She describes her realization that, “their actual subject was this refusal even to engage in such contemplation, this failure to confront the certainties of aging, illness, death. This fear. Only as the pages progressed further did I understand that the two subjects were the same… Once she was born I was never not afraid” (54).

As a reflection on her ability to shape and steer the content of the memoir, Didion is using writing as a tool for making sense of her experience of losing Quintana. More importantly, Didion is framing her ability to make meaning by reflecting on and investigating her emotional knowledge about the subject. When she set out to write Blue Nights believing the piece would be about children, she wasn’t wrong. Of course, a memoir about her daughter has to be about children, but it was in the practice of writing and working through her experience by writing that she recognized the more compelling subject—fear. Fear, as a specific, named emotion, allows Didion to consider the implications of motherhood through emotion as epistemic tool because she is only able to suss out a meaningful interpretation of her experiences by directly addressing the emotions that ran through these experiences. This is why, as I argue in Chapter 1, the nameable quality of emotion is necessary for emotion to work as epistemic tool in writing. It is in deciphering and considering what we feel—even if we can’t name it at first—that helps us give meaning to those emotions and understand how these emotions shape our understanding of our experiences.
Didion continues this reflection on the practice of writing for these memoirs when she includes an excerpt from her own notes on an old project. She explains her reasoning for including these notes in *Blue Nights* by writing,

I offer [these notes] as a representation of how comfortable I used to be when I wrote, how easily I did it, how little thought I gave to what I was saying until I had already said it. In fact, in any real sense, what I was doing then was never writing at all: I was doing no more than sketching in a rhythm and letting that rhythm tell me what it was I was saying… The arrangement was the meaning. (104)

It's interesting that Didion uses arrangement as her choice of noun in this passage—as opposed to, say, composition, in a musical sense, as she’s describing rhythms—because arrangement is one of the five canons of classical rhetoric (along with invention, style, memory, and delivery). Nedra Reynolds, in fact, describes the relationship between arrangement, memory, and meaning-making in *Geographies of Writing*. She writes that, “texts, like dwellings, need to be planned, built, and then occupied, filled with meaning, significance, or history. They need to be arranged, and those arrangements are often enacted through memory” (140, emphasis mine). What is particularly striking about this passage in terms of cultural conceptions and expectations for how writing works is Didion’s admission of “how little thought I gave to what I was saying until I had already said it” (104). In this instance, Didion describes writing as a meaning-making activity; she made meaning by arranging rhythms, which would then reveal (if you will) what she meant. This is a significant feature of Didion’s carefully considered work in other writing as well, but it’s especially interesting that she uses this passage to distinguish between the ease with which she used to write and the challenge she faces in writing about emotional experiences like the death of Quintana. By naming this specific obstacle to her normal
writing practices, Didion acknowledges the struggle to make meaning with emotion and makes an argument about the importance of working with emotion in this kind of writing instead of trying to avoid it. Instead of treating emotion as a negative constraint, Didion recognizes how emotion functions in her writing and uses it as a method of inquiry in other places in her memoirs.

**Challenging Cultural Expectations for Emotion in *The Year of Magical Thinking* and *Blue Nights***

In her memoirs, Didion addresses cultural scripts about grief, sometimes directly but more often through careful consideration and reflection about the deaths of her husband and her daughter. Didion refuses “the healing of scriptotherapy,” by challenging cultural expectations for how grief should be experienced and responded to; she does not easily assume the role of grieving widow or mother (Smith and Watson 139). Instead, Didion walks the line between clarity or rationality and emotional wreckage by exploring these expectations deliberately and with intention. Walking this line makes Didion’s work useful for discussion of emotion as epistemic in a WAW setting because it prevents us from coming to easy conclusions that recreate a false dichotomy between emotion and rationality; Didion is engaging with both simultaneously, and her work cannot easily be parsed out into “rational vs. emotional” arguments. In *The Year of Magical Thinking*, she writes,

This is my attempt to make sense of the period that followed, weeks and then months that cut loose any fixed idea I had ever had about death, about illness, about probability and luck, about good fortune and bad, about marriage and children and memory, about grief, about the ways in which
people do and do not deal with the fact that life ends, about the shallowness of sanity, about life itself. (7)

These fixed ideas about death, illness, marriage, children, grief, etc, are Didion’s starting points for her own inquiry into how she can make meaning from the traumatic experience of her husband’s sudden death at their dinner table. By beginning the memoir by admitting that this is an attempt and that she will be investigating all of these cultural values, she sets up her work as epistemic and as a challenge to how responses to death “should” be. I take “attempt” as a significant verb because it suggests that effort must be made in order to make sense of these events and that success is not inevitable; she might fail in this attempt, the truth of it all will not simply reveal itself because it’s a making of meaning. In so many layers, this is an ideal context for discussions of emotion as epistemic tool because of the interweaved nature of writing, personal experience, memory, narrative, and emotion.

Grief is difficult to specify. It’s extremely complex, but in specifically naming and shaping what counts as grief for her, Didion is able to distinguish between the experience of losing John to other losses in her life. She compares the feelings of sadness, loneliness, regret, and pain that she felt when she lost her parents to the shocking reality of the grief she felt after John’s death. She writes, “Grief is different. Grief has no distance. Grief comes in waves, paroxysms, sudden apprehensions that weaken the knees and blind the eyes and obliterate the dailiness of life” (27). To focus this part of her inquiry on grief, Didion specifically names these other emotions in order to distinguish how the emotions are what made meaning of the different experiences of losing her parents compared to losing John. She had to use and describe these other emotions in
order to make sense of these events as disparate in terms of the experience itself because, rationally at least, a death is a death. But she uses emotion in particular as a category for analysis. John’s death was different and impacted her ability to make meaning of her experience because the emotions that followed were different.

In the above excerpt on grief, I want to point out of the power of naming these emotions as part of distinct experiences. Didion uses these emotions as specific categories to sort out reasons for why coping with John’s death was so different from coping with those of her parents. I argue that these kinds of passages allow us to teach our students how to use emotions gleaned from specific personal experiences in order to make meaning by analyzing and considering the similarities and differences between experiences. For example, for our FYC students, a negative previous experience with writing or writing classes carries a different meaning and different implications for how they approach writing if they feel frustration rather than if they feel shame. The former can produce resistance and impatience in a writer who may refuse to engage in class activities they are unfamiliar with. The latter might produce an unwillingness to take risks in writing for fear of rejection or judgment. Both kinds of pedagogical values—introducing students to new kinds of writing and expectations for writing and asking them to take risks—are central to WAW approaches. These approaches can benefit greatly from consideration and discussion of emotion as epistemic tool because of the opportunities to use emotion to better understand experience and identity as a writer.
Emotion Working as Epistemic Tool in *The Year of Magical Thinking* and *Blue Nights*

In more straightforward passages of *The Year of Magical Thinking* and *Blue Nights*, Didion specifically names the emotions that shaped her interpretation of her experiences. In *Blue Nights*, for instance, Didion fixates on how to avoid feeling self-pity: “I kept saying to myself that I had been lucky all my life. The point, as I saw it, was that this gave me no right to think of myself as unlucky now. This was what passed for staying on top of the self-pity question. I even believed it” (172). In this instance, she is using self-pity—a specific, nameable emotion—as a heuristic for how she should behave and respond to the loss of her daughter. Her focus on self-pity shapes what she writes and how she writes it in that she’s very careful to avoid this particular emotion; she doesn’t want to feel pity for herself. Later, Didion comes back to the question of self-pity in *Blue Nights* and writes, “The very language we use when we think about self-pity betrays the deep abhorrence in which we hold it: self-pity is *feeling sorry for yourself*, self-pity is *thumb-sucking*, self-pity is *boo hoo poor me*, self-pity is the condition in which those feeling sorry for themselves *indulge*, or even *wallow*” (193, emphasis original). In this instance, Didion’s inquiry into the emotion of self-pity leads her to a criticism of the language we use to describe this emotion, not the feeling itself. It’s the words we choose to describe emotion—as a culture—that make these kinds of emotions character defects or weak points. She rewrites self-pity by thinking about how experiencing the emotions that come with feeling wronged are normal and part of our experience, but it’s the culture that tells us feeling “sorry for yourself” is a negative trait that should be avoided. What does that tell us, then, about emotions as nameable for epistemic purposes? If we can
rename emotions in positive ways, could they be more culturally acceptable as evidence and for making meaning?

In this category of specific, nameable emotions, Didion spends an extensive amount of time discussing fear in *Blue Nights*. In a previously cited passage, I pointed out how the act of remembering and constructing the narrative of *Blue Nights* led her to realize that the book was not about children, as she first assumed, but about fear. At the end of the book, she wraps up this reflection and writes, “The fear is not for what is lost. What is lost is already in the wall. What is lost is already behind the locked doors. The fear is for what is still to be lost. You may see nothing still to be lost. Yet there is no day in her life on which I do not see her” (188). This passage is deeply unsettling in its placement, at the end of a memoir in which Didion has exhaustively pointed to all the ways in which she has lost everything, to the point at which she realizes she does not even have someone left in her life to list as an emergency contact anymore. Like the other passages in which sadness, pain, and loss are so clearly present, Didion draws on cultural scripts for the making of this reflection as well. The script here is that parents are not supposed to outlive their children, that there is nothing worse than losing a child. Didion also denies the script of closure; her loss never stops. Indeed, Didion’s continuing loss is living out her life without Quintana: a reality that seemed so impossible on the day of Quintana’s adoption in 1966 and continues to leave Didion in an overwhelming state of shock and grief: “*This was never supposed to happen to her*” (16, 23, 101, emphases original).
The striking thing about Didion’s ethos as a writer and her journalistic disposition towards “getting it right” is how this plays out with the emotional content of her memoirs (“Year” Didion 156). Her primary interest in writing as a meaning-making activity is through the lens of a professional writer, where research and accuracy of reporting are first priorities. This disposition is still readily apparent in her memoirs, which creates an interesting site for discussion of emotion as epistemic tool because Didion spends much of her emotional currency by implying the deeply felt emotions which run through the experiences she is reconstructing into a narrative. When Didion does name emotions, she brutally investigates how these emotions really play out for her, but these instances are rare. Instead, she often implies the weight of a scene by working with the cultural scripts available to her in order to challenge larger, more problematic scripts. For example, a particularly pointed (and heartbreaking) section of The Year of Magical Thinking comes when Didion reiterates a line that appears throughout the memoir—I love you more than one more day—which John and Quintana shared. She writes, “‘I love you more than one more day,’ Quintana said three months later standing in the black dress at St. John the Divine. ‘As you used to say to me’” (69). The situation itself is implied—Didion never says that Quintana was speaking at John’s funeral; she doesn’t need to because wearing a black dress in a church is enough. Nor does Didion need to describe the emotions. The past tense of “used to say” implies the grief, the sadness, and the loss without ever naming those emotions. While she does not name these emotions, emotion is still epistemic here because it’s these felt-responses by the reader that guides the interpretation of her implied situation. We use these cultural cues—the black dress in the
church, and the past tense—in order to make meaning of the writing and we feel the grief, sadness, and loss that Didion feels. This matters because it demonstrates how inherent these kinds of emotions are, we just don’t always take the time to stop and look at how they shape and influence our understandings and behaviors.

In another instance, this time in *Blue Nights*, Didion describes looking through old mementos from her life with Quintana and finds that she cannot stand to think through all these memories. She writes, “I find many engraved invitations to the weddings of people who are no longer married. I find many mass cards from the funerals of people whose faces I no longer remember. In theory these mementos serve to bring back the moment. In fact they serve only to make clear how inadequately I appreciated the moment when it was here” (46). In looking back and reflecting on this period in her life, Didion also carefully investigates the emotional nature of memory. By listing concrete items—photographs, invitations, mass cards—that we tend to hold on to as keepsakes, she challenges how this practice actually works in reality. For her, these are a reminder of what is lost, of what used to be but is no longer, and of those things that she wishes she could have back. She doesn’t want the memories. It’s these implied emotions of loss, regret, and—conversely—appreciation that allow for an investigation into these difficult experiences of looking back through her life when Quintana was still alive. Didion concretely connects emotion with her experience in order to investigate the cultural understanding and role of keepsakes. In addition, this passage demonstrates how emotion can challenge cultural scripts and beliefs by pointing out how memory and keepsakes don’t always work “in theory” (46).
In the end, this chapter does not represent an exhaustive overview of how Joan Didion’s memoirs can serve a WAW approach to teaching emotion as epistemic tool in FYC—far from it. Instead, next I point to some specific places that are good starting points for discussion of 1) how writing works for Didion, 2) how Didion challenges cultural expectations for emotions by writing about how emotion actually feels and functions in her investigations and 3) how Didion’s particularly “rational” approach to memoir makes for an interesting site for discussion of emotion as epistemic tool. As a professional writer who often reflects on her own writing practices in *The Year of Magical Thinking* and *Blue Nights*, these discussions of how writing works for her are part of larger discussions of her identity. As Paul John Eakin writes in *Living Autobiographically*, our identities are made up of “twin supporting structures, memory and narrative,” and we construct our identities through life narrative (2). This case is particularly true in Didion’s memoirs as she remembers and reflects on her roles of wife (first) and mother (later, in *Blue Nights*) and the implications of losing both of those parts of her identity in a short time span. In selected passages where she analyzes how these losses impacted her ability to write, she is really still talking about her identity, but this time as a writer, a role she has had her entire life. Her emotional connection to this role is especially apparent when she reflects on her last birthday gift from her husband John: “‘Goddamn,’ John said to me when he closed the book. ‘Don’t ever tell me again you can’t write. That’s my birthday present to you.’ I remember tears coming to my eyes. I feel them now. In retrospect this had been my omen, my message, the early snowfall, the birthday present no one else could give me. He had twenty-five nights left to live” (166).
In this rare moment of Didion admitting to tears, the weight of her identity as a writer is counterbalanced by the loss of her partner in life and in writing.

There are very few moments in Didion’s memoirs when she isn’t in some way challenging or calling bullshit on how emotions are treated by our culture, which create especially interesting places for a WAW approach to investigate emotion already functioning as epistemic tool, or as a way of interrogating cultural scripts. For instance, when Didion writes about grief, she writes about it in terms of what we expect to feel before she gets into the real nature of grief. In *The Year of Magical Thinking*, she disputes these expectations:

> We might expect if the death is sudden to feel shock. We do not expect this shock to be obliterate, dislocating to both body and mind. We might expect that we will be prostrate, inconsolable, crazy with loss. We do not expect to be literally crazy, cool customers who believe that their husband is about to return and need his shoes. (188)

Here Didion is approaching a specific, nameable emotion head-on by identifying the relationship between her experience of grief as “obliterate” and what she expected to feel based on what our culture tells us to expect with grief. These passages allow for discussion of emotion as epistemic tool because Didion is specifically contradicting what we are “supposed to” feel with her own experience, and therefore making new meaning of the experience of loss.

Another aspect of Didion’s memoirs that is particularly compelling for considering emotion as epistemic tool comes from her own ethos as a writer. Like many of our FYC students, who believe emotion is an unethical or weak way to make an argument, Didion in many ways initially buys into the rationalist paradigm. In *The Year
of Magical Thinking, she continually reviews medical literature on the massive cardiac event that killed John and tries to remind herself that he had no chance, that he was dead right away. She quotes a line from a book called How We Die, which plainly states that in a situation like John’s cardiac event, the likelihood of survival that night was, “virtually zero” (204). Didion comes to terms with this and admits, “In my rational mind I knew that. I was not however operating from my rational mind,” (205). As a reader, witnessing a writer who so clings to the facts, to objectivity and to getting it right, it’s striking how, even for Didion, emotion is influencing and shaping her meaning of the experience. In these ways, I argue that Didion’s specific approach to memoir is ideal for teaching emotion as epistemic tool in a WAW approach to FYC because students will have to grapple with a very rationalist writer who manages to effectively write about and with emotion while simultaneously maintaining her “cool customer” attitudes (“Year” Didion 15).

Finally, I want to reiterate that I do not argue in this chapter that Joan Didion’s approaches to memoir are the only available kinds of writing for teaching emotion as epistemic tool in a WAW setting. Instead, I believe that Didion’s unique position as a professional writer—especially in the journalistic, nonfiction sphere—before she wrote The Year of Magical Thinking and Blue Nights, situates these memoirs as rich places for discussion of both writing as a meaning-making activity (a central threshold concept for WAW) and emotion as epistemic tool in writing. She writes about her own practices and habits of writing, so a study of Didion means a study of writing as it works and makes the act of writing the content of the course as WAW aims to do. It’s the unique intersection
that Didion occupies—as rational thinker and professional writer and as grieving widow and mother—that creates interesting moments in her writing where the dichotomy between rationalism and emotion breaks down. She makes meaning by drawing from the complexity of her emotions, which often directly contradict cultural (and sometimes her own) expectations and by making sense of the experience through description of the impacts her emotions had on her behavior and ways of being.
In this chapter, I refocus the philosophy of WAW in order to develop and discuss a WAW FYC course for teaching emotion as epistemic tool. By “refocus,” I mean that I shift some of the foci of WAW philosophy in order to incorporate emotion as epistemic tool into the existing frameworks and—as a result—fill the gaps in WAW on emotion. I work through three central levels of pedagogy in this chapter: 1) principles and concepts as exemplified by course goals and objectives, 2) sites in which students would be able to work toward these goals and concepts, as exemplified by course assignments, and 3) work that would scaffold students towards larger assignments, exemplified by daily class activities and practices. By looking at these three levels of pedagogy, I apply my work in previous chapters to propose a themed course in Emotion as Epistemic Tool for an FYC setting that is framed by WAW values and methods.

If I am to really embrace WAW values while teaching emotion as epistemic tool, I must consider how emotion functions as epistemic tool for writing teachers as writers, thinking through implications for how we share this practice with our own students. WAW positions students as fellow writers and researchers of writing and breaks down barriers between teachers and students in the classroom. I conclude this chapter with my thoughts on how teaching emotion as epistemic tool in a WAW setting means being honest and open with my students about how emotion influences the ways I make meaning in my own writing and sharing those instances with my students.
In this section, I describe the course objectives we use in WAW FYC courses at Montana State and then modify and expand these objectives for emotion as epistemic tool. The existing course objectives center around how writing works, on reading rhetorical situations, collaborating with other writers, and doing research on writing problems. They are listed below.

Objectives:
This course aims to change the way you think about writing and the way you understand the practice of writing. By the end of the course, you should:

- Understand the nature of writing and your own experiences with writing differently than when you began.
- Increase your ability to read rhetorical situations and be aware of rhetorical choices in your writing.
- Know what questions to ask when entering new rhetorical situations in order to adjust your approach to writing to meet that situation.
- Be a more reflective (mindful, self-aware, thoughtful) writer.
- Build your ability to collaborate in communities of writers and readers.
- Gain comfort with taking risks in new writing situations.
- Increase your control of situation-appropriate conventions of writing.
- Expand your research literacy.

Course Objectives from a Fall 2017 WRIT 101 Syllabus at Montana State University.

Individually, most of these objectives are not unique to WAW pedagogy. I do not claim, for example, that teaching students to be more reflective writers or to expand their research literacies are WAW-specific. Instead, it’s the combination of these objectives that shapes course priorities around WAW values. By teaching students about rhetorical situations, for instance, we give them a set of concepts and terms that writing studies scholars use so that students will be able to study how writing works in other contexts as well. In my experience teaching WAW, I’ve used Keith Grant-Davie’s article “Rhetorical Situations and Their Constituents”—in the Writing About Writing text—to define
rhetorical situation. He writes that “a rhetorical situation [is] a set of related factors whose interaction creates and controls a discourse” (Grant-Davie 488). These factors (or constituents) include:

- exigence (the need or reason for the communication),
- context (the circumstances that give rise to the exigence),
- rhetor (the originator of the communication—its speaker or writer), and
- audience (the auditor, listener, or reader of the rhetor’s discourse).

The rhetorical situation is a moment in a larger rhetorical ecology, the network of relationships among rhetors in the situation. (Wardle and Downs 898, emphases original)

Teaching students these concepts helps them to frame discussions of their own writing and of articles they read with more specificity and gives them the language to speak articulately about the various factors that influence and shape their writing.

Typically, we follow up Grant-Davie with rhetorical ecologies, which brings the conversation forward into more contemporary rhetorical scholarship. In Doug Downs’ article “Rhetoric: Making Sense of Human Interaction and Meaning-Making,” rhetorical ecology “invokes a sense of a place defined by a network of myriad interconnecting and almost inseparable elements that all shape the rhetorical interaction and meaning that emerges from them” (Downs 466, emphasis original). In other words—and described in another way by Downs in the same article—rhetorical ecologies zoom out from the rhetorical situation in order to look at the larger picture of interactions and influences on the moment—the specific “rhetorical interaction”—in order to see the interconnectedness of communication and interaction in rhetorical situations (Downs 467).

I situate these objectives as my starting point for a WAW course on Emotion as Epistemic Tool because they are effective for teaching students about writing, and because my students have benefitted from learning these concepts and practicing
activities that connect to the other objectives. For teaching Emotion as Epistemic tool, I adjust higher-order concerns in existing WAW FYC course objectives by considering my own three tenets for emotion as epistemic tool. The tenets are as follows:

1. We address emotions as specific and nameable.
2. We believe emotion challenges cultural assumptions and beliefs about writing (and beyond writing).
3. We use the connection between emotion and experience as a method of inquiry.

I add the following objectives: that increasing our ability to read rhetorical situations and be aware of rhetorical choices in our writing has to include a discussion of emotional aspects of rhetorical situations, and that expanding research literacy will include expanding research literacy on specific, nameable emotions and how they work within our culture. The revised list—of objectives and assumptions—is listed below, where bolded items represent revisions to the existing objectives.

**Objectives:**
This course aims to change the way you think about emotion as a way of making meaning in writing and the way you understand the role of emotion in the practice of writing. By the end of the course, you should:

- Understand the nature of writing and your own experiences (emotional, cognitive, or otherwise) with writing differently than when you began.
- Understand writing as a meaning-making activity and emotion as a way that we make meaning in writing.
- Increase your ability to read rhetorical situations (especially how emotions—of the rhetor or audience—influence the situation) and be aware of rhetorical choices in your writing.
- Be a more reflective (mindful, self-aware, thoughtful) writer.
- Build your ability to collaborate in communities of writers and readers.
- Gain comfort with taking risks in new writing situations.
- Expand your research literacy on specific, nameable emotions and how they function within texts in various cultures.

Revised Course Objectives from Montana State WRIT 101 to include discussion of emotion.
By incorporating specific aspects of emotion in the course objectives, I highlight aspects of the course that could be greatly improved by considering emotion as a factor in meaning making and in research. The course I propose begins with a unit on writing as a meaning-making activity, and transitions to a unit on rhetoric and rhetorics of emotion by reading emotion scholarship from Laura R. Micciche, Shari Stenberg, and Candace Spigelman. After that, we explore how emotion works “in the wild”—outside of academia, but still in writing—by looking at Joan Didion’s memoirs, and, finally, a research unit where students are asked to investigate a specific, nameable emotion and participate in a method of their choosing to answer their research question about that emotion. For example, a student may choose to investigate how guilt functions as epistemic tool in legal writing. She may, for example, participate in discourse analysis as her primary method of research.

This sequence of topics within the course aim to meet the course objectives in a progressive way, where one unit very intentionally builds on the knowledge of the previous unit in order to deepen our investigations of emotion throughout the semester. While the majority of these objectives are met throughout the semester with this sequencing, I point to specific places in the course that are designed to meet certain objectives. For example, the final—and longest—unit in the course would center around a student-driven, primary research-oriented project on a specific, nameable emotion. This unit specifically meets the objective for expanding research literacy, but also tangentially fulfills the objectives for understanding the nature of writing and students’ own experiences and building students’ abilities to collaborate in communities of writers and
readers. In the next section I elaborate on what I argue are the more important—or at least more apparent—aspects of pedagogical applications: assignments.

Assignments as Sites for Students to Work on and Grapple with Emotion

In considering course design for a WAW course on emotion as epistemic tool in FYC, I anchor my details around major assignments. I propose 3 major assignments: first, after units 1 and 2, students will write a rhetorical analysis of a previous writing experience with specific attention to how emotion influences the rhetorical situation of their writing and the broader rhetorical ecology that the rhetorical situation comes from. For assignment 2 in unit 3, we read Joan Didion’s memoirs *The Year of Magical Thinking* and *Blue Nights* and engage in reflective journal entries at 8 specific points in our reading that focus on students’ experience with Didion’s work with emotion and how her work changes their perception of emotion as a way of knowing. Finally, Assignment 3 asks students to do primary research on a specific, nameable emotion as it is treated in writing in some part of the culture (Western or otherwise).

In my experience with WAW, I have focused on rhetorical awareness and teaching rhetorical analyses, where we ask students to select and analyze a previous writing experience and a scholarly article—for units 1 and 2, respectively. Students analyze the rhetorical situation that called those pieces of writing into being and consider the exigence of the situation, who the audience was and what their expectations and values were, what the student’s role was as rhetor, and what constraints were in play. I find these assignments to be especially useful for getting students to consider scholarship
as conversation (see Stuart Greene “Argument as Conversation: The Role of Inquiry in Writing a Researched Argument”), and to get students to think about writing as a practice involving specific decisions from the rhetor that are influenced by many variables outside the rhetor’s control. In other words, by looking at writing as not an autonomous act but as a practice influenced by rhetorical ecologies, students “understand the nature of writing and [their] own experiences with writing different than when [they] began” and they “increase [their] ability to read rhetorical situations and be aware of rhetorical choices in [their] writing” (Figure 1, WAW course objectives). I’ve found that shifting these expectations for how writing works and how articles come to be is one of the substantial paradigm shifts for students, and they begin to see work in their own fields as conversations rather than texts that communicate fact alone.

The first assignment in the sequence I propose is a modified version of the rhetorical analysis of a previous writing experience from the Wardle and Downs textbook (692-694). By looking at their own writing, these writers inherently have authority and the ability to “reflect on how that particular writing experience was a result of the particular situation it was related to—how the situation helped determine what you wrote, and why” (Appendix C). By shifting the focus of the existing Rhetorical Analysis of a Writing Experience assignment towards thinking about emotion as part of the rhetorical ecology (“a network of actors and objects that all have an impact in what we say”), students can begin to consider how emotion is already playing a role in their writing and their meaning-making, even when they’ve been asked to avoid it (Appendix C). Students will specifically consider constraints related to emotion—did they feel frustration as a
limiting emotion, or enjoyment as a positive motivator in their writing? Beyond the moment of the rhetorical situation, students will consider institutional and societal expectations for their writing and how (or if) emotion influences those values. For example, students might choose a previous writing experience preparing for an Advanced Placement Exam and examine how the culture of AP is based on managing time constraints and the stress, anxiety, and nervousness that comes with preparing for a 3-hour test in which they have one chance to succeed. In this way, I merely expand the existing assignment sheet to include discussion of emotion and open the door for students to think about emotion as part of the rhetorical situations they write in or for.

In assignment 2, we focus explicitly on how emotion functions “in the wild”—outside academic scholarship, by responding to Joan Didion’s memoirs *The Year of Magical Thinking* and *Blue Nights*. For this assignment, students will complete eight 1-page journal entries on specific reading sections in order to bring their ideas and questions about how emotion is working as epistemic tool into class discussions. These entries will focus specifically on how Didion is working with emotion in her writing, and which aspects of the memoirs resonate with students as writers. As I have argued in previous chapters, one gap in composition scholarship on emotion is in the lack of clear, specific examples of how emotion works in writing. By introducing Joan Didion’s memoirs into the course, I provide accessible examples of emotion working as epistemic tool. I situate this assignment in unit 3 in order to give students the opportunity to use concepts and terms they learned in the first two units in order to speak articulately about emotion and explore it in new ways. We will spend the entire unit—across 4 weeks—
reading all of *The Year of Magical Thinking* and *Blue Nights* (schedule detailed in Appendix A).

I recognize that, in terms of composition theory, turning to literature for teaching writing might be considered a step backwards. Richard Fulkerson describes the move away from literature in composition as a strategy to avoid teaching courses that spend their entire term “reading, analyzing, and discussing the texts upon which the course rests [and] are unlikely to leave room for any actual teaching of writing” (Fulkerson 665). In fact, it is the idea that we should “make the writing of our students the focus (content) of the course,” that preempted WAW and Downs and Wardle’s call for making writing the content of an FYC course (Tate 270, cited in Fulkerson 665). With these at-odds composition philosophies in mind, I clarify my purposes for bringing Didion into the course. I do not wish to focus on literary analysis, although some discussions will, of course, lean that way. By assigning the Didion Journal, I maintain the focus of this unit on how writing works by asking students to write through their thoughts on Didion’s use of emotion as epistemic tool in her memoirs. Students will engage with specific sections of Didion’s work that stand out to them or that resonate with them as writers and think through how they can use their own emotions as epistemic tool in their writing.

In the assignment sheet for the Didion Journal I detail some specific questions students might consider while reading Didion’s memoirs in order to engage with her work in a productive way. I ask students to apply rhetorical concepts they learned in units 1 and 2 to Didion’s writing, and to think specifically about how Didion engages in the emotional writing practices that Micciche, Stenberg, Spigelman, and others theorize in
readings from unit 2. For example, I ask students to consider how Didion’s work fits the three central tenets for emotion as epistemic tool, or how her work diverges from those tenets. I provide other questions about repurposing emotion (Stenberg), creating surplus with emotion (Spigelman), and considering emotion “in light of ‘affect, interpretation, and behaviors,’” as Longaker and Walker describe in their chapter (Appendix D). These questions are meant to guide students toward thinking about the connections between composition scholarship on emotion and how emotion actually looks in existing writing. The goal with this assignment is to give students practice applying these scholarly concepts to existing writing so they know “how to look for emotion working as epistemic tool in writing” when they get to the Emotion Investigation project at the end of the course (Appendix D).

In the final assignment, which builds on self-awareness and investigation of how emotion works in my students’ own writing and examinations of how emotion is working in Didion’s writing, students select a specific, nameable emotion for an Emotion Investigation. For this assignment, students will engage in writing research about emotion by developing a specific research question about how emotion is working in writing either in their particular fields of interest or some aspect of their culture. They might ask questions like how fear is employed in texts and communication in political campaigns, or how shame is used in pop culture, etc. The goal with such an assignment is to get students to engage with the rhetorical and emotional concepts we’ve worked with throughout the semester and to design their own research to investigate those emotions. This assignment is an opportunity for students to “challenge [cultural] scripts and
demonstrate (to me and to yourself) not only that emotion has a place in real research, but that it informs research in a positive way that is often missing from these cultural scripts” (Assignment Sheet, Appendix E). In this way, students create and own their own knowledge about how emotion functions as epistemic tool and can clearly articulate their findings to their peers.

This final assignment is intentionally open-ended so that students have the agency to select and pursue their own specific research interests. Some interesting and meaningful ways for students to complete this assignment might include an investigation of how guilt is used as epistemic tool in the Catholic Church (a topic I’d likely propose myself). A student pursuing this project might do some discourse analysis of papal speeches or publications (like encyclicals) or church publications (like weekly bulletins) and they would likely interview a priest or nun for some situated understanding of how guilt (e.g. “Catholic guilt”) is understood and treated in the church writings and how it impacts or enforces certain practices. Students would also do some reading on how scholars in writing studies have approached guilt—possibly work like Elspeth Probyn’s *Blush: Faces of Shame* in her chapter on “Shame, Bodies, Places”—in order to draw comparisons between scholarship and guilt “in the wild”—outside academic research.

Another potential project might ask how the ways in which our culture treats “happiness” is detrimental to individual fulfillment. In this kind of project, a student might look at how happiness is treated in popular self-help books and investigate the gaps between “how to find happiness” narratives and research on happiness—like Sarah Ahmed’s *The Promise of Happiness*—in order to make an argument about how we can
change these cultural expectations (or imperatives) for happiness. This project might be made more specific by drawing from mental health research on self-care and other aspects of that industry that are often misconstrued or oversimplified by our culture at large. While these are topic-centered research projects—on a specific emotion in a specific context—the methods in which students study these emotions will be text-based and students will look at specific kinds of writing to see how their chosen emotion is handled in those contexts. Students may also look specifically at composing practices and how specific emotions impact the ways we get writing done, if they so choose. I don’t want students to feel limited to choosing research within writing studies alone, however—but I want them to use writing studies as a lens to approach how different texts are created with or influenced by emotion as epistemic tool.

With the Emotion Investigation, students will have the opportunity to practice research methods that writing studies scholars engage in, make their own contributions to the scholarly conversation, and solidify their understandings of how emotion works as epistemic tool by looking at how it’s working in aspects of the broader culture. This will, of course, be the longest project in the course and be the most process-intensive. Students will work together to think through their ideas, write proposals, give in-process presentations, and, finally, write up their findings. Furthermore, students will get to actually practice pairing research-driven work with emotional topics that they may have seen as inappropriate in academic writing before this class, creating what Candace Spigelman calls *surplus*, “a new kind of understanding that belongs to neither narrative thinking nor analytic thinking alone” (95). In other words, by refusing cultural scripts that
say emotion should stay out of researched writing, students gain a richer understanding of rhetorical concepts and how to make meaning in writing by looking at the bigger picture that includes emotion.

**Classroom Practices and Daily Activities that Reinforce Emotion as Epistemic Tool**

For this course, my central classroom practices and daily activities include workshopping student writing, preparing written responses for reading discussions framed by Discussion Panels, and in-class writing. My background in creative writing as an undergraduate student means workshopping is a high priority classroom practice, and I’ve found that workshops are the sites in which students grow the most (or at least the most visibly) as writers. A second important classroom practice for this course is reading discussions and, more importantly, the written responses to the readings that drive discussion. Students benefit more from readings and discussions of readings when they’ve had to think through and write about their responses (see “The Pedagogy of Writing in the Disciplines and Across the Curriculum” by Chris Thaiss and Susan McLeod in *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*). By responding to readings in a written form, students practice making meaning of these texts through writing and are more prepared to have productive discussions of challenging readings about emotion. Finally, I discuss in-class writing as an important practice for the course. I use in-class writing as a much more flexible practice than workshopping or reading discussions: the latter two are scheduled well ahead of time, while I tend to include in-class writing when needed,
dependent on how discussions in class are going and when students need more time to think about concepts.

Workshopping is central to WAW pedagogy because it helps students mimic practices that professional writers engage in and gives students practice working collaboratively on writing. In WAW workshops—as in most other composition pedagogies—students are taught to prioritize ideas and content and how well the writer engages with challenging concepts instead of focusing on lower order concerns like usage, grammar, and spelling. Most students who enter my FYC classroom are highly experienced at editing, but not at actually peer-reviewing, at least as we understand peer-reviewing in writing studies. In WAW, we start by reading a piece called “Responding—Really Responding—to Other Students’ Writing” by Richard Straub from the *Writing About Writing* textbook that gets students to consider what it means to be a friendly and helpful reader of their peers’ texts. The philosophy behind this reading also leaves room for emotion as epistemic tool because it considers how being an empathetic reader can be a constructive feedback method for workshops. For example, Straub calls for students to, “Talk to the writer. You’re not just marking up a text; you’re responding to the writer…Try to sound like someone who’s a reader, who’s helpful, who’s collegial. Supportive. And remember: Even when you’re tough and demanding you can still be supportive” (Straub 48). By reframing workshop attitudes from editors to supportive responders, students get a chance to ask each other for feedback on specific places, and to respond in ways that are productive rather than damaging or hurtful.
I spend so long discussing workshopping as a classroom practice in this chapter because I learned the most about myself as a writer and about good writing practices by talking to my peers about how they got their writing done and listening to how they experienced my writing. Naturally, this has become a central value for my own teaching. For the purposes of a course that prioritizes emotion as epistemic tool as its central topic, getting a chance to really engage and discuss how other students are grappling with questions of emotion is best done by sharing writing and talking through ideas. Workshops allow students to work through their ideas together and inevitably make writing a collaborative act, which fits with WAW values and gives students the opportunity to consider and talk through emotion as a social act that is experienced as “emerging relationally, in encounters between people, so that emotion takes form between bodies rather than residing in them” (Micciche “Doing Emotion” 13, emphasis original). By encountering each other as readers and writers, students can talk through their emotions and work on naming specific emotions in order to use them as epistemic tool.

Reading discussions and written responses to readings are my second central activity for this course. As Chapter 2 discussed in more detail, WAW courses are heavily oriented towards reading load—particularly scholarly articles in writing studies. Downs and Wardle, in their 2007 article for CCC, argue that teaching students how to read scholarly articles is important in FYC because it prepares them to engage in inquiry (“Teaching Writing” 553). Downs and Wardle do not prescribe specific readings and even the Writing About Writing textbook is more of a collection of available readings,
with no “required” readings for courses to be successful. Instead, they note two common denominators among readings suitable for WAW purposes, which include that readings have material in which students have first-hand experience and that data-driven, research-focused readings are more useful than theoretical pieces because students frequently seem to connect to these more easily (Downs and Wardle 560). Part of my concern in the last section about bringing literature into a composition course is that it’s difficult to consider literature as data-driven or research-focused, and I do tend to agree with Wardle and Downs that the readings in the WAW text that exemplify those principles are the readings that students can easily connect to and see as relevant to the goals of the course. However, part of making room for emotion as epistemic tool in WAW means expanding and extending effective WAW practices beyond current trends in WAW.

In Chapter 2, I argued that WAW needs emotion as epistemic tool just like emotion as epistemic tool needs WAW, and that emotion as epistemic tool would help effectively fill gaps in WAW’s reach in writing studies scholarship. In order to do that, WAW has to think more broadly about what counts as research or demonstrations of research. For example, Joan Didion’s memoirs clearly demonstrate intensive research in her explanations of her lived experiences. In recollections of her husband John’s death, Didion draws from swaths of medical research she read on fatal cardiac events in order to talk herself into finally believing that he was dead at the dinner table, that she could not have saved him. Is this the kind of writing that demonstrates data-driven, research-focused methods? I argue it does, just not in the way that writing studies would expect it to. It doesn’t match our expectations for scholarly articles, but that doesn’t mean it can’t
help students to see how data and research come together in narrative accounts of knowledge. This is important in the context of Didion’s work in at least a few ways. Her insistence on maintaining her ability to “get it right” means she is rejecting cultural expectations for emotional narratives; her memoirs are not cathartic or influenced by her emotions alone (Didion 156). This makes Didion’s work accessible to students who have learned that logic is the most effective kind of argument in writing because she meets those needs while also demonstrating emotion as epistemic tool, concurrently.

The composition scholarship I argue for bringing into the WAW classroom (and the Writing About Writing textbook) more closely fits with Downs and Wardle’s expectations for readings in this approach. Laura R. Micciche’s work in Doing Emotion comes from working with students—mostly in the form of anecdotes of how students consider emotion in her classes or how emotion is treated in writing studies settings (as students, teachers, researchers, writing program administrators, and so on). Shari Stenberg’s chapter in Repurposing Composition “Feminist Repurposing of Emotion,” draws specifically from work she does in the classroom with upper division undergraduates or graduate students considering emotion’s role in the broader culture. Her work is especially accessible because she draws from popular culture, like Key and Peele videos that demonstrate and satirize Obama’s reputation for not displaying emotion. While my own applications of emotion as epistemic tool will not focus specifically on emotion in politics, that would be a viable avenue for students to investigate and do primary research on if that’s something they are invested in, as long as the research is focused on how politics communicates emotion through texts. Other
readings, like Chapter 4: “Valuing Personal Evidence” in Spigelman’s *Personally Speaking: Experience as Evidence in Academic Discourse*, and Carolyn Matalene’s “Experience as Evidence: Teaching Students to Write Honestly and Knowledgably about Public Issues,” are also grounded in specific situations in composition classrooms and aim to demonstrate how personal experience—which is riddled with emotion—is an effective strategy for argument and for writing.

I envision two ways for students to engage with these scholarly readings. The first is through written responses to readings that students bring to Discussion Panels. Discussion Panels are an assignment I developed to decenter reading discussions and give students total responsibility and authority in classroom discussions. Students write detailed notes that answer specific questions from my assignment sheet, which asks for 3-5 talking points, 3-5 open-ended discussion questions for the class, 3-5 connections to the text, and an optional critique or suggestion for the reading. In these panels, around 6 students prepare notes in order to lead their peers in discussion, and I am not allowed to speak as the instructor (though I often comment on certain points of the panel after the students have finished their discussion). This assignment—compared to reading responses that just comment on the reading or provided a summary—created higher engagement and more thoughtful than previous semesters I taught the same readings. For this course, I would modify my approach to include Discussion Panels in unit 2—where we read emotion scholarship in composition—and ask students to select 6 of the 7 readings to prepare notes. The flexibility to drop one panel is important to account for
normal student attendance issues and also to keep workload manageable. See Appendix B for my Discussion Panels assignment sheet.

The second form of engagement in these readings and in concepts important to the course is in-class writing. I consider in-class writing as an important practice for my teaching, but I don’t structure the course around in-class writing as much as I do with workshops or written responses for Discussion Panels. Instead, in-class writes give me the flexibility to slow down our thinking (as a class) about readings or concepts where students need it. For instance, if we read Shari Stenberg’s chapter “Feminist Repurposing of Emotion,” and I notice that students have a hard time with her application of studying emotion within cultural conversations, I would take some time that day in class to have students write questions or I would pose questions to students for them to write about in class. In a lot of ways, I use in-class writing as a personal check-in for students; they don’t have to voice their concerns or confusions in front of the entire class, but they still get a chance to write to me about what isn’t working well yet.

Implications for Emotion as Epistemic Tool for Writing Teachers

In this final section, I turn to thinking through what it means to teach emotion as epistemic tool as a WAW teacher. Because WAW pedagogy cares so much about stances toward students as more like colleagues in writing studies than inexperienced writers, teaching emotion as epistemic tool means actively sharing our own experiences with emotion in our writing with our students. In my previous WAW classes, I have shared parts of my writing process with students by digging up documents for current projects I
was working on: one semester I spent half a class period just showing my students how messy my own process is—I had close to ten separate documents open and just explained how I jump back and forth between materials. My goal with these class days is not to show them a model for how to write like me, but to give them an example of how writing processes are rarely linear and clean like they have often learned in previous writing classes. With that being said, teaching emotion means sharing how I encounter emotion as a writer and how emotion has influenced and shaped my own understandings of how writing works. This kind of reflexivity in teaching makes students feel more comfortable in sharing their own emotions with me because I’m willing to meet them halfway.

There’s an implicit vulnerability in all of this, of course. Sharing how emotion influences and shapes my writing and how I use emotion in my work in order to make meaning means I have to be willing to open up to my students about my own personal composing process while thinking more carefully about my own processes for writing in ways I’m not used to doing, since emotion as epistemic tool has not been a focus for my own work until I began this project. Now, I’m certainly more aware of the emotions I feel while composing and how those emotions impact my decisions while writing and what I choose to write. For example, if I were to teach this class in Fall 2018, I would absolutely use chapters from this project to share how emotion impacts my own writing practices. I would describe the frustration and disappointment I felt when I got feedback on and tried to revise Chapter 2 (multiple times over), and how that frustration made me slow down and carefully take inventory of the major issues with that chapter in order to move forward with composing. I would also talk to them about the pride I felt in finishing that
chapter and receiving positive feedback from committee members, and how I used that emotion to press on with later chapters and to continue thinking about those comments when I felt stuck (or got “writer’s block”).

These kinds of opportunities to share how emotion drives (or at least steers) my writing make me more aware of how emotion functions as epistemic tool because I have to be able to 1) name the emotion, 2) interpret how that emotion influenced my decisions or judgments, and 3) think about how that emotion in context challenges what cultural expectations are for feeling that way. For example, frustration and disappointment tend to have negative connotations—frustration is seen as a stumbling block, or something we are supposed to feel when things are not going according to plan. For me, however, frustration serves as a signpost for a need to change something about my behavior or my strategy. Sharing these emotions and how I negotiate these emotions gives my students the permission (as if they need it) to challenge cultural expectations for emotion and shape paths for themselves in which emotion is used as a critical method of inquiry or strategy for moving forward in their writing, rather than a stumbling block.

Teaching Emotion as Epistemic Tool

I am really excited about this framework for teaching emotion as epistemic tool within WAW because this represents a bridge built between a pedagogy that effectively considers critical scholarship on writing and a way of knowing that is often undercut by cultural scripts about writing. WAW, in my experience, already does excellent work helping students shift their own self-perceptions that they are “bad writers,” by removing
the stigma of writing—the cultural scripts that say writing must be done alone, that
grammar is more important than your ideas, that writing comes easily to “good writers.”
By exposing students to scholarship on writing, even if they are never going to become
writing majors, students begin to see themselves as writers in future contexts: whether
that’s a writer of field notes for an ecologist, a writer of project proposals for an engineer,
or a writer of marketing materials for an advertising executive. Providing the space for
my students to shape these writerly identities is important to me and stretching these
practices in WAW to include emotion is a hugely necessary step to complete that process,
because emotion is so entrenched in our experience. My nonfiction creative writing
professor would say that it’s part of “the human condition,”—a pervasive phrase in our
workshop classes.

As I have described throughout this project, my background in creative writing
inspired a lot of my initial interest in consideration of emotion in writing. In writing
memoirs and profile pieces that involved personal interviews, I saw how important
emotion was to writing—both as a composing process and as a product—but I never got
the opportunity in these creative writing courses to do much critical thinking about
emotion. I didn’t know rhetoric and composition existed, and I definitely was not aware
that scholars actually studied emotion and how emotion works in writing contexts. By
bringing emotion scholarship into WAW (an easy modification) and supplementing this
scholarship with accessible examples (which requires some more stretching of WAW
pedagogy to allow for something like memoir), I create opportunities for students to
engage in both critical inquiry on emotion and to see first-hand its importance in the way
we write and communicate with others. This practice alone has the power to break down “the reason/emotion binary,” because it begins by assuming that students don’t have to choose between using their emotions and experience as evidence and using more “objective” sources; the two go together and are treated as equally relevant and useful for inquiry (Micciche “Doing Emotion” 16).
CONSTRUCTING KNOWLEDGE WITH EMOTION

Throughout this project I have been focused on the phrase “emotion as epistemic tool” or emotion as a means for us to construct knowledge—if you will allow the construction metaphor to emerge from my use of “tool.” Given the complexities of this project and the intersections it works with between FYC, memoir, and WAW pedagogy, I feel the need in this epilogue to address the central problem—the “point”—of this project more succinctly. Stacey Waite writes at the end of her recent book *Teaching Queer: Radical Possibilities for Writing and Knowing* that her purposes always come back to writing itself, even if the avenues she pursues reach into other realms. In terms of her own guiding question for that project, she writes, “What might queer pedagogies make visible or possible in the teaching or writing as an art form, skill, process, and way of thinking? I use all of these descriptors to characterize writing because I believe writing is all of these things at the same time, or can be” (169). Because I think this is an extremely well-articulated way of describing purpose, I’m borrowing it. When I think about the various agendas tucked within this project, my own priorities settle around the following question: What does emotion as epistemic tool—as demonstrated in critical scholarship and in memoir—have to offer the teaching of first year composition, and how does it help to extend students’ ability to work with writing as a way of making knowledge, communicating ideas, and challenging cultural conceptions? Or, put another way, how does teaching emotion as epistemic tool in a WAW setting for FYC bridge gaps between
“the emotion/reason binary” that got me interested in this project in the first place (Micciche “Doing Emotion” 16)?

In many ways, construction is an apt term for how this project has come together in terms of a metaphor for the process of building a structure or dwelling—starting with foundation in emotion scholarship in Chapter 1, developing a framework within WAW for emotion as epistemic tool in Chapter 2, establishing details to hold that framework up in the classroom with Didion’s memoirs as examples in Chapter 3, and, finally, inhabiting the space with a proposed course in Chapter 4. I don’t want to stay too long with this metaphor, but there’s something to be said about building something to dwell in when it comes to teaching writing. Nedra Reynolds writes that, “Writers dwell in ideas to make them their own; they squat, intellectually, before moving on. This idea of ‘inhabiting’ discursive spaces connects, of course, with concepts from classical rhetoric—ethos as haunt, for example—and invites us to revisit the connections between habits and places” (141, emphasis original). This project creates a composition ethos—or haunt—that pulls together concern for emotion as an alternative way of knowing, interest in challenging cultural conceptions of writing by reading critical scholarship, and the desire to see concrete examples of emotion as epistemic tool in writing. Less literally, it pulls together my own values for putting traditional evidence and research in conversation with personal experience as a creative writer, which taught me how important emotion is to composing and to understanding.

To construct knowledge means to gather all the details, observations, emotions, and social facts from a situation and interpret those details to make meaning. Western
forms of reasoning and argument break these kinds of knowledge making into
oversimplified categories—like classical rhetoric’s logos, ethos, and pathos—that are
hierarchical in nature and represent clear levels of “good” reasoning (with logos, or logic)
to “weak” reasoning (with pathos, or emotion). By bringing emotion as epistemic tool
into a WAW classroom that already focuses on challenging cultural conceptions of
writing, students have to grapple with the ways in which emotions impact their everyday
experiences and how emotion influences their constructions of knowledge. While WAW
so privileges academic scholarship from writing studies, this project starts to break down
the academic dividing wall—in the form of a binary—created between rhetoric and
composition and creative writing values by bringing Joan Didion’s work in as examples
of how emotion can be used as epistemic tool in writing. In this way, I’ve constructed a
hybrid space in FYC where students don’t feel the tensions—the “silence, truisms, and
stridency” highlighted by Doug Hesse—between creative writing values that make
students care about writing and WAW values that give students the pragmatic
opportunity to see themselves as writers outside of academic settings (43). In this space,
students can explore and pursue their emotional “commitments, enthusiasms, desires, and
interests,” as epistemic tools for constructing new knowledge as writers while also
challenging cultural conceptions about writing and emotion (Code 46). They don’t have
to compromise between emotion and reason, because emotion is part of reasoning.
REFERENCES CITED


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

ABBREVIATED COURSE SYLLABUS
**Syllabus**
WRIT 101: Emotion in College Writing I  
Fall 2018

**Course Description**
In this special topics course of WRIT 101, we will examine how writing is an epistemic (meaning-making) activity and how emotion influences and shapes our compositions. This course will ask you to think about how you have experienced writing in the past—what worked, what didn’t, and how you can adjust the way you think about writing and emotion moving forward.

**Objectives:**
This course aims to change the way you think about emotion as a way of making meaning in writing and the way you understand the role of emotion in the practice of writing. By the end of the course, you should:

- Understand the nature of writing and your own experiences (emotional, cognitive, or otherwise) with writing differently than when you began.
- Understand writing as a meaning-making activity and emotion as a way that we make meaning in writing.
- Increase your ability to read rhetorical situations (especially how emotions—of the rhetor or audience—influence the situation) and be aware of rhetorical choices in your writing.
- Be a more reflective (mindful, self-aware, thoughtful) writer.
- Build your ability to collaborate in communities of writers and readers.
- Gain comfort with taking risks in new writing situations.

Expand your research literacy on specific, nameable emotions and how they function in our culture.

**Required Texts**

The following are PDFs I will provide electronically:  
Adler-Kassner, Linda and Elizabeth Wardle. “Naming What We Know” and “Threshold Concepts of Writing.” *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies*, Utah State University Press, 2015, pp. 1-32.


Didion, Joan. “Why I Write.”

Matalene, Carolyn. “Experience as Evidence: Teaching Students to Write Honestly and Knowledgeably about Public Issues.”

Assignments:
• Major Assignments:
  o Rhetorical Analysis of a Previous Writing Experience
  o Didion Journal
  o Emotion Investigation
• Discussion Panels
• In-class writing (as assigned)

Evaluation and Grading:
Your course grade (100 points) is comprised of:

• Engagement: 29 pts
  o Discussion Panels 12 pts
  o Class Contribution and Workshops 17 pts

• Writing Assignments: 31 pts
  o Rhetorical Analysis 5 pts
  o Didion Journal 16 pts
  o Emotion Investigation 10 pts

• Final Portfolio: 40 pts

Note: The only item that will receive a letter grade from me is the Final Portfolio. All other aspects of the class are based on quality, effort, and completion.

Course Schedule
Unit 1: Writing as Epistemic Activity – Weeks 1-3
- Assignments:
  - Discussion Panels on the readings with prepared notes
  - In-class writing on previous writing experiences.
- Readings:
  - Naming What We Know – pp. 1-32 (Threshold Concepts of Writing)
  - Code: What Can She Know? Chapter 2: “Knowledge and Subjectivity” pp. 27-70

Unit 2: Rhetoric and Emotion – Weeks 3-5
- Assignment:
  - Rhetorical Analysis of a Previous Writing Experience with special consideration of emotion (see Longaker and Walker) (4-5 page analysis of a memorable experience with writing that analyzes exigence, constraints, audience, role as rhetor, and emotional connection(s) to the piece)
- Readings:
  - Corder: “Argument as Emergence, Rhetoric as Love” pp. 600-618 (PDF from WAW textbook)

Unit 3: Emotion in the Wild: Joan Didion’s Memoirs – Weeks 6-9
- Assignment: Didion Journal (8 ~1 page entries responding to The Year of Magical Thinking and Blue Nights)
- Readings:
  - Didion: The Year of Magical Thinking
  - Didion: Blue Nights

Unit 4: Investigating Emotion – Weeks 10-14
- Assignments:
  - Research Proposal (1-2 pages, detailing research question and methods)
- Process Presentation (3-5 minute presentation *in-process* describing research and findings so far)
- Emotion Investigation (6-8 page research paper on a specific emotion of the students’ choice)

**Readings:**
- Ekmans’ Atlas of Emotions (interactive website)

**Activities:**
- Library research day: introducing students to university library resources for scholarly research
- In-class time for shaping the project / working on problems together
- Presentations
- Final workshops.

**Week 15: Workshops**

**Assignments:**
- Philosophy of Emotion (2-3 page reflective assignment centered on transfer of learning and shifting conceptions of writing and emotion in writing)
- Final Portfolio (revised rhetorical analysis, student-selections from Didion journal –best 3 entries, emotion investigation, philosophy of emotion, cover sheet)
APPENDIX B

DISCUSSION PANELS ASSIGNMENT SHEET
Discussion Panels

Assignment Rationale
If I think about research in the writing field that says when students aren’t writing about what they read, they won’t read, I initially want to assign as many reading responses as possible for my students. However, as a student myself, I know that writing for every single reading gets not only exhausting but doesn’t feel that effective for retaining the readings. It becomes robotic. As an experiment—based also on my experiences as a student, not just a teacher—I want to give you more reflective work on fewer readings because I believe in good depth over extreme breadth. These Discussion Panels will increase your agency over six (6) readings this semester while limiting your workload on other readings. These readings will all be in the same unit, and you’ll be able to drop one of the 7 readings.

Assignment Description and Instructions
In the first week of class, you will look at our Unit 2 readings on rhetoric and on emotion in composition (e.g. Spigelman, Matalene, Micciche, etc.) and get a sense of which day you’d like to take off from Discussion Panels.

- On each of your panel days, you will read that piece carefully. You are responsible for this piece.
- The main point of this assignment is to lead your peers in a discussion of the readings. They will have, however, read the piece as well in order to participate. Feel free to pressure your peers to follow through on that, because if they drop the ball, it’s going to make for a very uncomfortable class period for you as a DP leader. I will not speak (or pick up the slack) during your panel.
- You will bring to class a “guide” of sorts for yourself to lead the discussion. It will include:
  - Talking points—3-5 specific points from the reading that encapsulate key terms, important concepts, and places in the reading you believe to be essential to understanding what the writer is trying to say.
  - Questions for the class—3-5 open-ended questions to get your peers to jump in on the conversation. This could be something like, for the Spigelman chapter, “On page 86, Spigelman mentions how Aristotle allows for narrative and story-making arguments. How have you seen narrative arguments in the past?” The more specific (or the smaller the question), the better.
  - Examples of how you connected to the reading (or didn’t)—3-5 examples of specific places in the reading (with page numbers!) that you connected because of an example that came to mind when you read. Share those examples! They help all of us learn more about these concepts.
  - Optional: (Constructive) critique of the reading—If you got through the reading and thought, “Man, this would have worked so much better for me if they’d said x or y,” share that here.
Some Additional Notes:

- While you aren’t required to work collaboratively, collaboration is definitely allowed and encouraged for these panels. It’s not a bad idea—especially on the longer pieces—to split up the work in one way or another so each of you brings something unique to the conversation.

- These panels will last 25-30 minutes, on average. Shorter than that will impact your grade because that demonstrates (typically) a lack of engagement and preparation on your part for the reading. However, certain readings will take longer (or shorter) than others, and I recognize that.

- Discussion Panels comprise 12% of your overall grade in the course. They’re worth 2pts each.
APPENDIX C

ASSIGNMENT SHEET FOR RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF A WRITING EXPERIENCE WITH CONSIDERATION OF EMOTION
Rhetorical Analysis of a Writing Experience with Emotion

Think back: What’s the most meaningful piece of writing you’ve done? Now: what was the situation? And how did that situation help shape the writing? In this **1200-1500 word** rhetorical analysis of a meaningful writing experience, your task as a writer is to reflect on how that particular writing experience was a result of the particular situation it was related to—how the situation helped determine what you wrote, and why.

**Assignment Rationale**
Writers are always responding to the situations they’re writing in, from, and for, more or less consciously. And those situations take place in a rhetorical ecology, a network of actors and objects that all have an impact in what we say. One of the tasks of this course is to give you a beginning understanding of rhetoric as a theory of communication and to explore its implications. One of those implications is that even when you’re not aware of it, you’re responding to situations that arise within such ecologies. The purpose of this assignment is to show you how you’ve already been doing that, to spur your thinking about what possibilities writing holds if you more consciously read the rhetorical ecology and situation you’re writing into, and to give you practice with the language and tools for doing so.

**Assignment Description and Instructions**
Your rhetorical analysis should reflect on some significant piece of writing or a writing experience that you’ve had in the last several years. Your most meaningful writing might have been for school, work, family, community, or your personal life. It could have been completely private (like a journaling experience) or all-the-way public, like a blog or other online post. It could have been a single short document, like a poem or song lyrics, or it could have been an extended project or experience that involved multiple pieces of writing. The key requirement here is that it has to have been a meaningful enough experience that you can **clearly remember the circumstances surrounding the writing**.

Once you know what experience and writing you want to focus on, you need to **reflect on and analyze that experience and writing from a rhetorical perspective**. What’s that mean? Principles in the Downs and the Longaker and Walker readings suggest **questions to ask of** your experience, the circumstances surrounding it, and the rhetorical ecology it occurred within. They will be questions like these:

- **Why did you need to write** to begin with? Since it’s easier not to write than it is to write, for most people, there had to be some reason or purpose behind your writing, some problem to be solved or addressed.
- **Where did that need come from?** What gave rise to it? This is a historical question: to understand the circumstances that demanded writing, you need to know what led to those circumstances.
- **Who was meant to read and use your writing and what did you mean them to do with it?** How was your writing supposed to do something for, to, or with the readers you imagined it for?
• Which people, systems (institutions), and *emotions influenced* what you said?
• Which people, systems (institutions), and *emotions influenced* how you said it, or the means you used to say it?
• How did your *emotions, affects, and behaviors* influence your understanding of the situation or change the way you approached the writing? Which *specific, nameable emotions* can you point to within this experience?
• What *constraints* did you face as a writer? What were the *givens* in your situation—the aspects of it you could not change that shaped what you could do with your writing?

The answers to all of these questions, and others, will help you talk about *why* this piece of writing took the shape that it did.

In order to make your analysis most meaningful and clear both to you and to other readers, it will need to include at least the following features:
• Some *description of the writing* or experience itself. Ideally, you might include an electronic copy of the writing you’re talking about, if one is still available. Whether you can do that or not, take whatever space is necessary in your analysis to describe as clearly as possible what this writing and experience were.
• An extended discussion of the questions above in order to *describe and analyze the rhetorical situation and ecology* in which the writing or experience occurred.
• A *conclusion including implications* of your reflection: What do you learn from this rhetorical analysis? What principles from this analysis can you verbalize that would help you in future writing situations? *How, in future situations, will you be aware of how your emotions help shape and form your knowledge and understanding of situations?*

The Rhetorical Analysis of a Writing Experience is worth 5% of your overall course grade.
APPENDIX D

DIDION JOURNAL ASSIGNMENT SHEET
Didion Journal

In Unit 1, we framed this course by considering how writing is a meaning-making activity and how subjectivities can act as evidence in discourse by reading Lorraine Code’s work. In Unit 2, we got more specific about rhetorical situations, rhetorical ecologies, and scholarship on emotion in the writing classroom. These units serve as the foundation for both rhetorical concepts—like exigence, constraints, audience, etc.—and for how to have productive conversations about emotion. In this unit (Unit 3), we look at examples of emotion “in the wild” by reading Joan Didion’s *The Year of Magical Thinking* and *Blue Nights*.

Assignment Rationale

For this assignment, you will respond to specific sections of *The Year of Magical Thinking* and *Blue Nights* in eight (8) 1-page journal entries. These entries give you the opportunity to start applying what you learned about emotion in Micciche and Stenberg’s work to existing writing, and to think through how Didion develops and uses emotion as epistemic tool—as a way of making meaning in the world. Each entry will have suggested prompts and questions to consider for sections of the memoirs, but feel free to explore and examine other aspects of how emotion is working as epistemic in those sections.

Assignment Description and Instructions

As we read through Didion’s memoirs in this four-week unit, you will make notes on how emotion works as epistemic tool in Didion’s writing and develop arguments for these passages in brief, 1-page entries. These will serve to guide class discussion and give you practice applying concepts of emotion to writing and help you start looking ahead to the Emotion Investigation. These entries should help you think about which emotion(s) you might pursue for that project and how to look for emotion working as epistemic tool in writing.

In these entries, you might consider the following questions:

- In what ways does Didion’s work fit our 3 central tenets for emotion as epistemic tool? Where does her work diverge from those, and how is it more or less effective when it does?
  1. We address emotions as specific and nameable.
  2. We believe emotion challenges cultural assumptions and beliefs about writing (and beyond writing).
  3. We use the connection between emotion and experience as a method of inquiry.
- How does Didion address and subvert the “reason/emotion binary” that Micciche describes in her chapter? Where do we see this happening, and how does it work (16)?
- Where are some specific places that Didion engages in “different ways of knowing,” therefore creating *surplus*, according to Spigelman (92)?
In what ways does Didion repurpose emotion by challenging cultural expectations for how we are “supposed to” feel in specific circumstances? How does this work fit in with Stenberg’s notion of repurposing emotion?

How might you use some of Longaker and Walker’s strategies for considering emotion in light of “affect, interpretation, and behaviors,” to parse out the emotions Didion considers in her writing (211).

Finally, keep in mind that these are suggestions. In terms of specific requirements, entries must:

- Be one page in length (about 300 words, TNR, double-spaced)
- Consider and apply previous readings to Didion’s writing—you’re doing mini-theorizations of her work here.
- Focus on how emotion comes across as epistemic tool.

The Didion Journal comprises 16% of your overall course grade (2pts for each entry).
APPENDIX E

ASSIGNMENT SHEET FOR EMOTION INVESTIGATION
Emotion Investigation

In our first unit, we considered how writing is not just a transmission of our thoughts to the page, but a meaning-making activity. We make sense of things through writing and come to understand what we think by writing. In unit 2, we looked closely at how scholars in writing studies consider emotion and discovered how emotion also functions as epistemic tool—a way of making meaning—in writing and discourse. Finally, by looking at Joan Didion’s memoirs, we saw how writers already use emotion as epistemic tool in writing, despite what our cultural conceptions about emotion tell us. In this 2000-2500 word Emotion Investigation, you will choose a specific, nameable emotion that you have experience with and design an investigation into how that emotion functions as epistemic tool in the larger culture.

Assignment Rationale
As the culminating piece for our course, this project gives you the opportunity to select a topic that is personally meaningful to you and practice research methods that scholars in writing studies frequently engage in. We talk a lot about cultural conceptions of writing in this course, like how emotion is “supposed to” be avoided in academic work. This is your opportunity to challenge those scripts and demonstrate (to me and to yourself) not only that emotion has a place in real research, but that it informs research in a positive way that is often missing from these cultural scripts.

Assignment Description and Instructions
After you choose your specific emotion of interest—joy, anger, frustration, guilt, sadness, shame, excitement, anxiousness, grief etc.—you will develop a research question about how that emotion works as epistemic tool in the broader culture. This project will be broken down into several checkpoints or process-points:

- First, you’ll write a proposal (500-1000 words) where you carefully articulate the scope and goals of your project in an overview, include the steps you will take to complete the project including research methods, and your end goal for this project. This will help you think through (make meaning of!) your project in context, and give you starting points.
- Depending on your research methods (e.g. discourse analysis of several pieces, rhetorical analysis of a few larger pieces of writing, interviews, surveys, etc.), you will have between 8-10 sources minimum, half of which may be broader-culture pieces and half scholarship in writing studies or related field.
- Your project should address and consider the following questions:
  - How does this emotion get treated in the specific cultural context you will research? What is the broader understanding of this emotion in that context?
  - What do scholars in writing studies (or relevant field) have to say about this emotion?
  - What are some of the discrepancies or sticking points between these two spheres? Is there agreement?
Your project will include:

- A brief literature review of the scholarly article(s) you have read for this piece. What does that conversation look like?
- A specific, non-obvious argument about the emotion you are investigating. What are you as a scholar bringing to the conversation?
- Primary research in the cultural context you are investigating. This might mean interviewing members of the community, creating a survey, observations, discourse analysis of written accounts of the emotion in question, etc.
- Discussion of the relationship between academic scholarship on your emotion and how you see it working in that particular cultural context. Could it be made better?

The Emotion Investigation is worth 10% of your overall course grade.