



Stetson's English Department Newsletter

“Was I Taught to Write?”

Readability Statistics as a Reflective Gateway to Meaningful Writing

In recent conversations about AI and writing instruction, much attention has focused on detection, policy, and prevention. Less attention has been given to a quieter but more productive question: how do students understand their own writing histories, and what do they believe academic writing is supposed to sound like? One first-year writing assignment reframes that question through an unexpected lens—readability statistics.

In ENGL 141, the traditional “Myself as a Writer” self-assessment (drawn from the Thompson/Grego Writing Studio model) has been recast as a classical debate: Was I taught to write? Rather than beginning with personal narrative alone, students ground their arguments in quantitative evidence readily available in most word processors—readability scores that measure sentence length, word choice, and syntactic complexity. These statistics are not treated as judgments of quality, but as rhetorical artifacts that invite interpretation.

Students analyze samples from three points in time: high school writing, early college drafts, and current coursework. By comparing readability levels across these samples, patterns begin to emerge. Complexity may spike unexpectedly, flatten across genres, or drift upward without corresponding clarity. These shifts prompt substantive questions: When was I encouraged to write this way? For whom? And to what end?

The reflective value of the assignment lies in what the numbers make visible. Many students enter college with inherited assumptions about academic prose—that difficulty equals rigor, that longer sentences signal intelligence, or that clarity is somehow unsophisticated. Readability statistics give students a concrete way to test these beliefs against their own writing. Rather than padding papers with unfamiliar vocabulary or imitating an abstract academic voice,

RECOMMENDED READINGS

The Inner Game of Tennis

GALLWAY

The Maze Runner

DASHNER

Frankenstein

SHELLEY

A Good Girl's Guide to Murder

JACKSON

The Giver

LOWRY

The Four Agreements

RUIZ

students are encouraged to ask whether complexity serves their purpose and audience.

For instructors, the assignment offers a secondary benefit. Readability profiles create a baseline sense of a student's composing habits. Sudden jumps in grade level, uniform flatness across drafts, or abrupt stylistic departures can signal moments worth discussing. Importantly, the goal is not AI detection. It is recognition—an informed understanding of how a student tends to write when writing authentically, and how that writing changes under different pressures.

Because the assignment relies on minimal quantitative data paired with rhetorical reflection, it remains flexible and low-stakes. Students are not rewarded for higher or lower scores. Instead, they articulate how they were taught, how they adapted to expectations, and how they want to write moving forward. The familiar studio-style self-assessment becomes an inquiry into writer identity, growth, and agency.

At a moment when AI tools can produce polished prose instantly, assignments like this foreground something machines cannot supply: reflective awareness of one's own rhetorical development. Students

leave not merely knowing how they write, but why they write the way they do—and with a clearer sense that meaningful writing is not about sounding academic, but about communicating deliberately.

As discussions about AI continue, this assignment suggests a productive shift in emphasis: from policing text to cultivating writers who understand their own choices. In that sense, asking “Was I taught to write?” becomes less an accusation than an invitation—to reflect, to revise assumptions, and to claim authorship with intention.

WHY BECOME AN ENGLISH MAJOR?

Majoring in English is finding a place among your peers, your idols, and your thoughts to call home. —Sarah Wasser

There is no career in which you will not have writing. Being able to analyze and articulate your own thoughts into words is the most valuable asset of communication and teamwork. It is surprising how poorly some people write and holding a firm grasp of the English language puts you at the skill level above the rest. —Xavier Mulligan

Language itself serves a grand purpose: Communication. As an English major, or minor, one gains a profound understanding for articulation that will aid her the rest of her life, regardless of workplace. —Allison Spaccio

Sigma Tau Delta at Stetson

Sigma Tau Delta is a national Collegiate English Honor Society. If you have immense dedication and a passion for literature, you too can join the 9,000 inducted members since 1924. Once inducted into this prestigious organization, members can publish academic and literary works in the society's annual undergraduate journal, *Sigma Tau Delta Review*.



Stetson University's English Department guides each individual Sigma Tau Delta member



through an educational journey, filled with the totality of enlightenment that the study of English provides.

After completing their undergraduate career, (seen below, left to right) Caroline Williams, Nicole Padgett, Victoria Aldea, and Chyina Powell, proudly wear Sigma Tau Delta's vibrant red graduation stole and medallion.

This student-run organization is facilitated by the faculty advisor, Dr. Chesya Burke. Currently, we are interested in forming a book-club, and offering an informational session for academically qualified students majoring or minoring in English studies. If you become involved, you will have the opportunity to take charge of the organization and lead current and future students toward English-centered careers.

Our induction ceremony, where new members receive the Society's certificate and pin, is held each fall. Graduating seniors are authorized to wear special regalia at commencement.



English Department Faculty

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Nancy Barber, M.F.A., University of Florida

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Michele Randall, M.F.A., New England College

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Terri Witek, Ph.D., Vanderbilt University

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Grady Ballenger, Professor Emeritus



Flagler Hall and the Stetson Hat

TALK ABOUT TALK: Using the Progymnasmata to Brainstorm Ideas

M.C.Barnes

In ENGL 141, students use the classical progymnasmata as a heuristic step in the invention process. Rather than beginning with free-writing or informal discussion, this method asks students to explore what kinds of arguments are available for a given topic. Each exercise—fable, narration, maxim, refutation, comparison, thesis, or proposal of law—opens a distinct rhetorical path. The approach is deliberate, flexible, and adaptable to multiple genres and lengths, from the shortest moral statement to a full policy argument.

The classical source for this method is Aphthonius's Progymnasmata (PDF):
<https://people.umass.edu/dfleming/E388%20Aphthonius%20Progymnasmata.pdf>

Progymnasmata Exercise

Erik A. Randall

ENGL 141, Fall 2025

If you were to argue against Smartcars, you can use any of the arguments in the progymnasmata to convince people of their dangers. If you were to formulate it into a **fable**, you could replace the Smartcar with a small mouse getting crushed by a giant elephant to tell the truth of the dangers of a Smartcar compared to larger vehicles on the road. If it were changed into **narration**, you could give a dramatic narration of the events of a car crash where a Smartcar is folded by a semi-truck. If made an **anecdote**, you could reminisce about someone who bought a Smartcar and use logic to disclose the moral of what you are saying.

If made a **maxim**, it is just a simple statement that discloses your stance on a subject, such as "Smartcars are a stupid coffin." If you were to use **refutation**, you would find people who drive Smartcars or those who manufacture them and discredit or disprove what they say. If you were to use **confirmation**, you would do the reverse of refutation to make one of your points irrefutable.

If put into the form of an **encomium**, you would praise how great a regular car is and reinforce its positive traits. You could also utilize **invective**, giving a discourse that expounds bad attributes of the Smartcar through disparagement. **Comparison** can be used to show how much better a regular car is over a Smartcar by examining their similar traits and reinforcing the superiority of one over the other.

You can give **characterization** to the Smartcar, imitating a Smartcar driver whose personality and character are invented to press your argument against or for the Smartcar. If **description** is used, you would give an expository discourse that vividly describes a Smartcar and all its features, and, in the case of arguing against it, all of its faults.

If you make a **thesis** on the subject, you are making a logical investigation into the issue of Smartcars. "Should you drive a Smartcar?" would be a thesis. Finally, you can form your argument as a **proposal of law**, creating a nearly complete hypothesis in the form of a proposition, such as "That Smartcars should be removed from the road."

Movie Review

When Intimacy Is Programmed: Control and Exploitation in Companion (2025)

Authored by ENGL 141, Fall 2025

Companion (2025), directed by Drew Hancock, initially presents itself as a familiar romantic weekend getaway film before rapidly mutating into a sharp, unsettling sci-fi thriller. What begins at a remote lake house with friends drinking, dancing, and flirting soon reveals itself as a story about power, control, and the uneasy boundary between human intimacy and artificial intelligence—across both heterosexual and queer relationships.

At the center of the film is Iris (Sophie Thatcher), whose gentle awkwardness and intense devotion to her boyfriend Josh (Jack Quaid) initially read as social anxiety or romantic dependency. Subtle clues—Josh’s pet name “Beep Boop,” Iris’s slightly delayed reactions, and moments of emotional restraint—feel innocuous at first, but gain disturbing weight after the film’s first major reveal: Iris is not human, but a rented companion android whose emotions and intelligence are controlled through an app. This twist retroactively reframes nearly every interaction in the film and marks the moment when *Companion* fully finds its footing.

The plot escalates quickly from psychological discomfort to outright horror. Josh’s manipulation of Iris—jailbreaking her aggression settings to orchestrate a murder for financial gain—exposes the film’s true antagonist not as artificial intelligence, but human entitlement. Quaid’s performance is particularly effective here, gradually shedding charm for cruelty as Josh’s need for dominance becomes explicit. Thatcher’s transformation is equally compelling, shifting Iris from obedient companion to self-aware agent without losing emotional depth.

A crucial layer of the film emerges through Eli and his relationship with Patrick. When it is revealed that Patrick is also a companion robot, the ethical stakes deepen. Unlike Iris’s coerced devotion to Josh, Patrick’s relationship with Eli is portrayed as affectionate and emotionally sincere, suggesting a version of artificial intimacy that appears mutual and loving. That sincerity makes Patrick’s exploitation especially tragic, as his programmed nature is ultimately used against both him and Eli. This subplot broadens the film’s critique, showing that even relationships grounded in care and consent can be undermined by systems built on ownership and control.

Visually, the film is polished and deliberate. Slow pans, tight close-ups, and sterile lighting emphasize the tension between warmth and machinery, particularly during moments when Iris is restrained or reset. Tonally, *Companion* balances sci-fi thriller, dark comedy, and psychological horror, using abrupt sexual scenes and sudden violence to provoke discomfort rather than cheap shock.

Ultimately, *Companion* argues that the real danger lies not in sentient machines rebelling, but in humans using technology to bypass consent, empathy, and moral responsibility. The final image—of Iris free and autonomous—lands with quiet force. Disturbing but thoughtful, *Companion* leaves viewers questioning not whether machines can feel, but whether humans are willing to act ethically when power is absolute.

YOUR FUTURE READING LIST
(Courtesy of the Students from Freshman Composition)

Sam Guerra

The Inner Game of Tennis, Timothy Gallwey

I would highly recommend *The Inner Game of Tennis* because it goes far beyond being just a book about sports; it is a guide to mastering the mental side of performance. This book explores how true success is not only about physical skill or technique, but about developing the mental focus and calm needed to perform at your best. Every game has two parts: the outer game, where you face your opponent and physical challenges, and the inner game, which takes place in your mind—the voice that doubts, worries, or overthinks every move.

Unlike many sports books that focus only on technique, *The Inner Game of Tennis* teaches readers how to overcome mental barriers like self-doubt, tension, and lack of concentration. It explains why we can play brilliantly one day and struggle the next, and how learning to quiet the inner critic can unlock consistent excellence. Whether you play tennis or not, this book offers valuable lessons for anyone striving to improve focus, confidence, and performance in any area of life.

Salvy Alvarez

Mind Gym: An Athlete's Guide to Inner Excellence, Gary Mack

I recommend *Mind Gym* by Gary Mack to any college student, regardless of whether they play sports. The book focuses on the mental side of performance and how mindset shapes success. Mack, a sports psychologist, shares lessons that emphasize confidence, focus, and resilience.

What makes this book stand out is how applicable its lessons are beyond athletics. College life can be overwhelming, and the strategies Mack offers—visualization, positive thinking, and stress management—are useful in academic and personal settings alike. The book's short chapters make it easy to read, and its message is clear: success begins in the mind.

Alejandro D. Osorio Irizarry

The Maze Runner, James Dashner

I recommend *The Maze Runner* by James Dashner to any college student looking for an engaging and thought-provoking read. The story follows Thomas, who wakes up in a mysterious maze with no memory of his past, surrounded by other teenagers who are also trapped and struggling to survive. As Thomas begins to challenge the rules and uncover the maze's secrets, the novel explores deeper themes such as leadership, courage, and the importance of questioning authority—ideas that resonate strongly during the college years.

Dashner's fast-paced writing and constant suspense make the book difficult to put down, while the psychological and moral dilemmas faced by the characters provide plenty to reflect on. It is not just an action-packed adventure; it is a story about resilience, curiosity, and the drive to find truth, even in the face of fear.



Kierra K. Evans
Coraline, Neil Gaiman

Coraline is a disturbing yet fascinating story about a young girl who takes her life for granted. After discovering an alternate world that seems better than her own, Coraline is tempted by the attention and freedom it offers. However, she soon learns that this world hides sinister intentions.

When the other mother reveals her true nature, Coraline risks her life to save her real parents. The book emphasizes courage, accountability, and appreciation for what we already have. To me, it serves as a reminder that while life may be imperfect, genuine love cannot be replicated through artificial means.

Laney G. Sprinkle
The Giver, Lois Lowry

Since many college freshmen, including myself, have little interest—or time—to read books for entertainment, I recommend a novel that reflects how many people my age perceive the world. *The Giver* by Lois Lowry is a dystopian novel set in a society where individuality is forbidden, emotions are suppressed through medication, and sameness is enforced under the guise of perfection.

The story follows twelve-year-old Jonas, who is chosen to receive memories of the world before “Sameness.” Through this process, he learns disturbing truths about his community, including the reality behind those who are “released.” *The Giver* serves as a warning about the dangers of sacrificing individuality and humanity in the name of comfort and control.

Ariana L. Rosario
Frankenstein, Mary Shelley

I used to read a lot when I was younger, but as I’ve gotten older, I’ve fallen into long reading slumps despite still wanting to read for enjoyment. During my senior year of high school, my English teacher assigned *Frankenstein*. At first, I had no desire to read it because of its outdated language, but once I did, it reminded me how much I missed reading for pleasure.

The novel follows Victor Frankenstein, a young scientist whose ambition drives him to pursue knowledge at any cost. From a young age, he advances faster than his peers, and eventually dedicates himself so completely to his work that it leads to his own destruction. After successfully creating life, Victor recoils from his creation and abandons it. I recommend this novel because it taught me that ambition can be positive, but only when balanced with responsibility and humanity.



Katelyn Haggerty

A Good Girl's Guide to Murder, Holly Jackson

As an avid reader who usually finishes a book each week, it takes a lot to completely pull me out of reality. That is exactly what Holly Jackson's A Good Girl's Guide to Murder series did. If you need an escape from classes and assignments, this series is the answer. If you enjoy true crime or whodunits, you will definitely enjoy these books. There is also a television adaptation that follows the novels more closely than most.

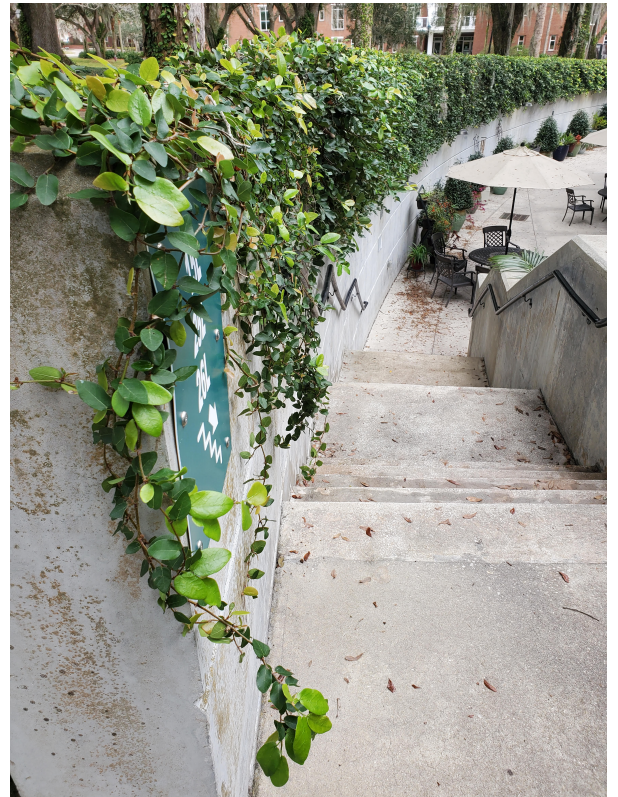
The first book follows Pippa Fitz-Amobi, a high school student who re-examines a supposedly closed murder case for a school project. As she digs deeper, the mystery becomes increasingly dangerous. The series is fast-paced and genuinely shocking, and by the end, you will wish there were another book.

Daisy A. Shaw

The Four Agreements, Don Miguel Ruiz

College is full of new experiences, challenges, and pressures. The Four Agreements by Don Miguel Ruiz is a book that helps you stay grounded through it all. It is short, accessible, and centers on four principles: be impeccable with your word, don't take things personally, don't make assumptions, and always do your best.

While these ideas may sound simple, they are difficult to practice consistently. This book provides practical guidance for navigating relationships, self-doubt, and emotional stress. You do not need to read it all at once; even a few pages can shift your mindset. It is not about being perfect, but about being intentional.



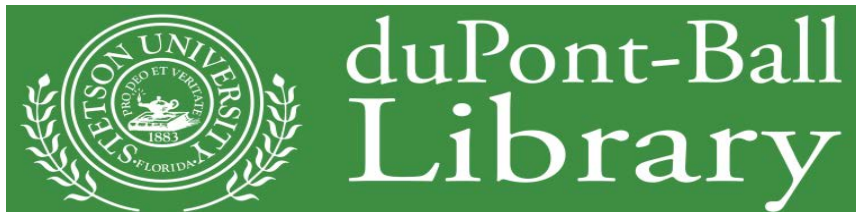
Hatter Network

Affiliated with *Touchstone*, Uncouth Hour is a weekly open-mic event in which Stetson University's community of artists are afforded the opportunity to share their work with others in an environment conducive to literature and the arts.

Uncouth Hour is now CoRadio, a pandemic friendly rendition of Touchstone's popular Cultural Credit event. It is an online "open-mic night" (from 9:30-10:30pm on Thursday nights).

The Reporter is Florida's oldest collegiate publication. Our job is to keep the Stetson University and the DeLand communities updated on news and events and to give students and faculty alike a voice. You can contact *The Reporter* at reporter@stetson.edu.

Touchstone is Stetson University's annual literary magazine; it functions as a vehicle for student expression, publishing original pieces of fine art, literature, music, digital media and performance art regardless of the author's major, class, standing or academic experience. *Touchstone* prints the best of student submissions, decided by committee; special recognition may be awarded to students whose work in their genre is deemed exceptional by the editing team.



Calendar & Hours

Hours of Operation

DAYS	HOURS
Monday to Thursday	8 AM -12 AM
Friday	8 AM – 6 PM
Saturday	10 AM – 6 PM
Sunday	11 AM -12 AM

Research assistance hours differ from the building operating hours. For research assistance business hours, see [Ask A Librarian](#).

Special Openings & Closings

DATE	SPECIAL HOURS
	Fall Library Hours
	Monday – Thursday: 8 AM to 12 AM
	Friday: 8 AM to 6 PM
	Saturday: 10 AM to 6 PM
	Sunday: 11 AM to 12 AM
Saturday, 19 August to Friday, 15 December	

