

## Agency and Positionality

*Writing instructors help students....*

### **Recognize lived experience as a source of authority in writing, reading, and discourse.**

**Lived Experience** is personal knowledge developed through being in and interacting directly with the world and can be significantly influenced by factors like race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and economic or social class. Lived experience is the lens through which individuals come to view, value, and understand their personal, academic, and professional contexts.

**Authority** is constructed and can be performed through writing. Various audiences and communities may recognize and value different types of authority in writing. Authority is also related to how credible an audience finds a piece of writing.

*Why is this objective important? For students, for the program?*

Writing, reading, and discourse are rhetorical approaches to ideas and actions. Lived experience cannot be separated from these acts. Gaining awareness of lived experience and the ways in which it impacts perception and communication helps students to develop agency while retaining their authentic identities across fluid spaces and contexts.

This objective helps students to think critically about identity and power as they consume and produce knowledge. To serve and lead as part of a community, students practice understanding context, evaluating credibility, navigating or problem-solving situations, and participating responsibly in conversations they care deeply about.

### **Example Learning Activities:**

**Reading Analysis or Compare + Contrast Activity:** What is the relationship between the writer and the subject? What is the relationship between the reader and the subject? What meaning is created by the reader's experience and insights? *Meta-analysis questions:* Why does this distinction matter? How does positionality impact credibility?

**Choosing** a research or essay topic they are passionate about that can apply to the ideas or concepts of the course. For example, in a course focusing on the big picture topic of "The Culture of Science: Facts, Fictions, and the Limits of Knowledge", students are asked to choose their own topic that is related to the course content. The goal is that students choose a topic that is interesting to them, relates to their knowledge, other courses, and experiences, and relates to the conversations we have been having in the class. This allows a student to have a stake and a sense of expertise on the subject matter. Another goal is that students anchor the more theoretical topic in the real world. Examples include a student who wrote about and

researched covid testing and vaccination requirements on the UO campus, a student who wrote about and researched violence against seals in the Columbia River basin where they are from, and a student who wrote about and researched how their TikTok “for you” feed affects their mental health.