

Putting writing to work:

Designing authentic and effective
assignments

WAC+ Science
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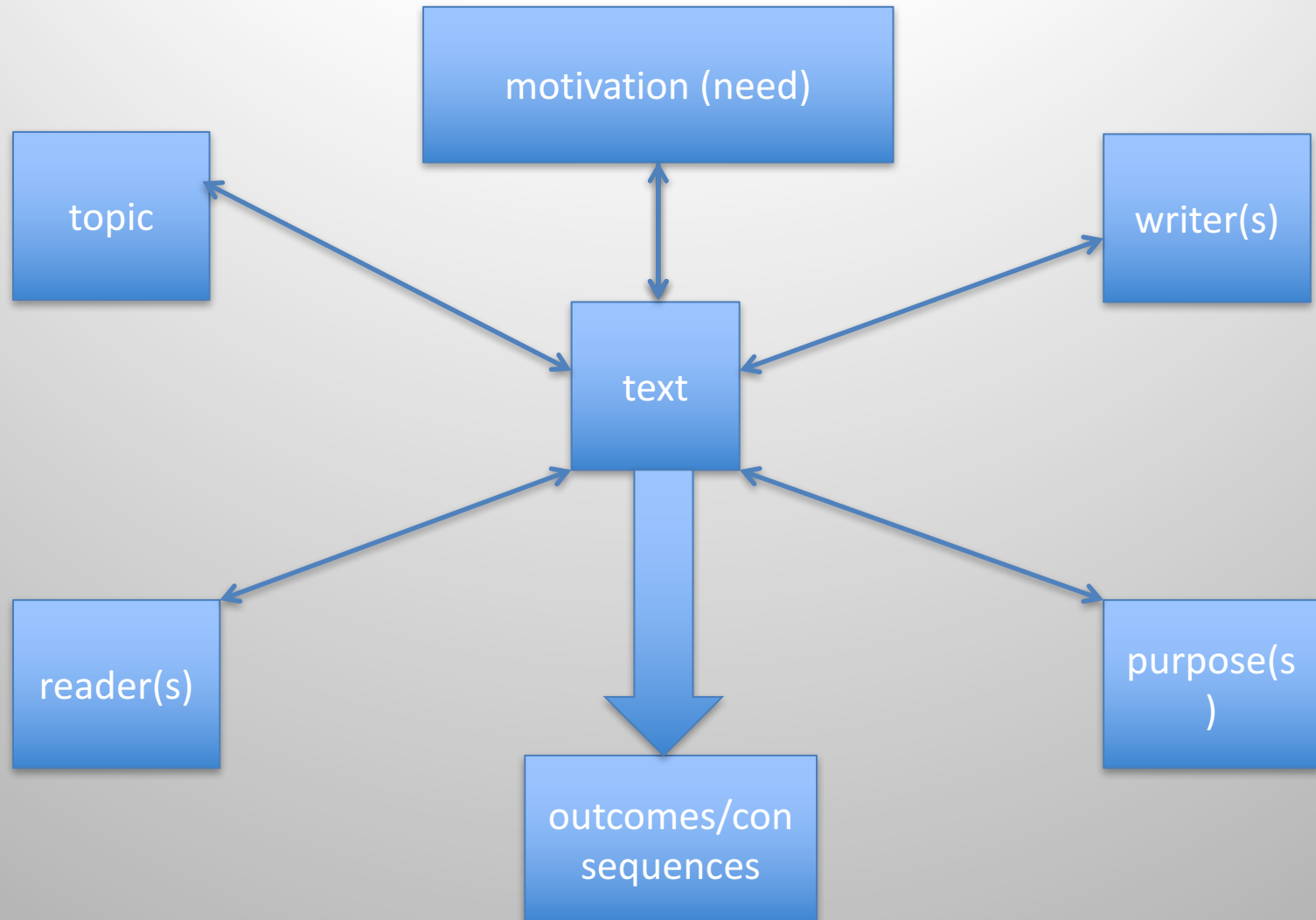
A writing task

- write a quick grocery list
- revise it: add, delete, reorder, change
- what logic or pattern underlies the 1st list?
- how/why did you revise it? add anything?
- revise it so someone else can use it
- why/how did you change it?

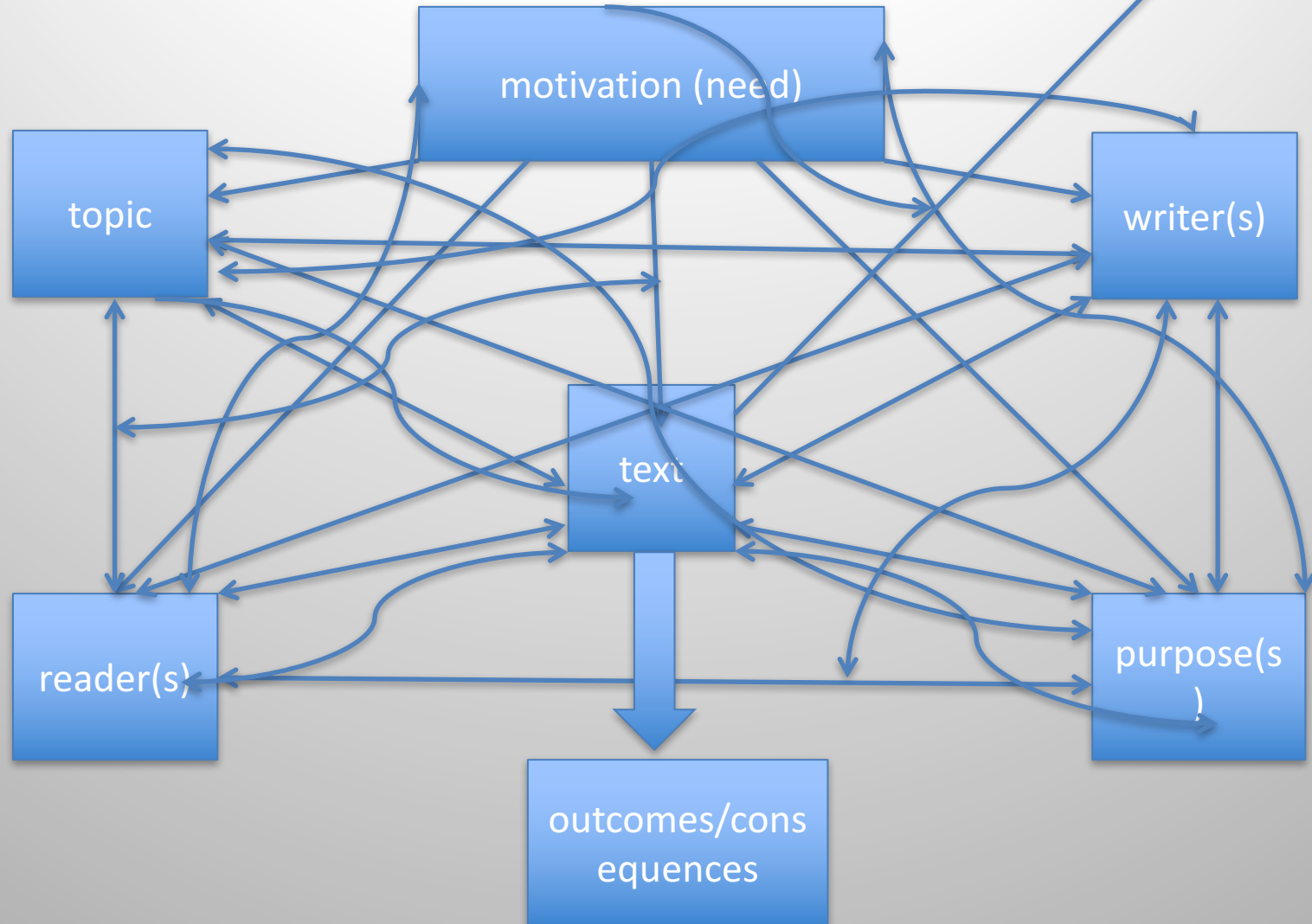
What is writing?

- symbolic representation: ideas ---> words
- heuristic, generative, exploratory
- intra- and interpersonal
- structured, sequenced shaped
- expressive and transactional
- specialised/tailored for use, rhetorical
- developed over time (composed)
- a process, a product, and a message
- a set of sub-processes

The writing situation



The writing situation



A sample assignment

- think of an assignment you give to students
 - what is their motivation? why do they write?
 - what is your motivation? why ask them to write?
 - what is the topic? what is the text about?
 - who is/are the reader/s? why do they read?
 - what is the writer's goal? what do they hope to do?
 - what text type/genre is it?
 - what is the outcome/consequence of the text?

Sample assignment, revised

- how might that assignment change if...
 - the students had a different motivation?
 - you had a different motivation?
 - there were different reader/s? different reason for reading?
 - there was a different goal/purpose?
 - you asked for a different text type/genre?
- how would the outcome/consequence change?

Britton *et al*: Functions of language

- Transactional: Language to get things done; language of the world's work; public and professional writing: articles, essays, reports, blogs, web pages.
- Expressive: Language close to the self; language close to talk; language in a shared context: diaries, journals, email, messages, tweets, letters; the “seed bed” of ideas.
- Poetic: Language as art; “a verbal construct”: novels, short stories, plays, poems, songs, chants, spoken word.

Changing purposes: What does writing do?

...explores, proposes, explains, argues, orders, challenges, convinces, describes, outlines, implies, summarizes, amuses, directs, speculates, recommends, advises, suggests, illustrates, portrays, expresses, encourages, persuades, assures, dissuades, influences, advocates, exposes, intimidates, counsels, opposes, endorses, conveys, states, questions, demands, imagines, delights, misleads, provokes, reviews, attacks, consoles, reports, narrates, berates, mediates, delegates, delineates, ameliorates, records, enlightens, identifies, elaborates....

Changing readers: Who reads and why?

- self, friends, family
- peers in class: co-authors, collaborators
- peers through publication (e.g., pen pals)
- non-experts, those in need
- authorities, policy makers
- general publics
- instructor as real reader, fellow learner
- instructor (and others) as assessor

Creating assignments

- do your assignments vary these elements:
 - motivation/need, reason to write?
 - writer's purposes/goals?
 - readers? types of reading?
 - text types/genres?
 - writer's role or stance?
- take a moment to (re)design some assignments

Changing texts: The universe of discourse

- logs, journals, notes-to-self/others
- letters, emails, informal reports
- progression: from conversation to presentation to draft to paper
- teaching others: peers, parents, students
- policy docs, op-ed pieces, popular articles
- children's books, fictional letters/diaries, stories
- teaching materials, visuals
- collaborations, co-authorships, jigsaw model
- paper airplane exercise; shoe tying; etc.

Why write?

- is writing the most appropriate mode?
- what work (social, cognitive, rhetorical) will it do?
- what will students gain from doing it?
- who will read it? why? how?
- what would make it an effective text? what criteria or standards are at play?
- what type of feedback will the text receive? from?
- what activity will come before and after the writing?
- will the text be a one-off or linked to other work/texts?

Thanks

anthony.pare@ubc.ca