



# **The BIG 6 Theories in Writing Studies Education\***

\*according to me

Phil Shaw, Rochester Institute of Technology, 2023

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What is meant by “theory”

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### “Big 6” Theories

You can describe the topic of the section here

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As an evolving and maturing (?) discipline

## 04

### Discussion

Review and Q&A



# 01

# Introduction

What is meant by theory?

# Two Definitions of Theory

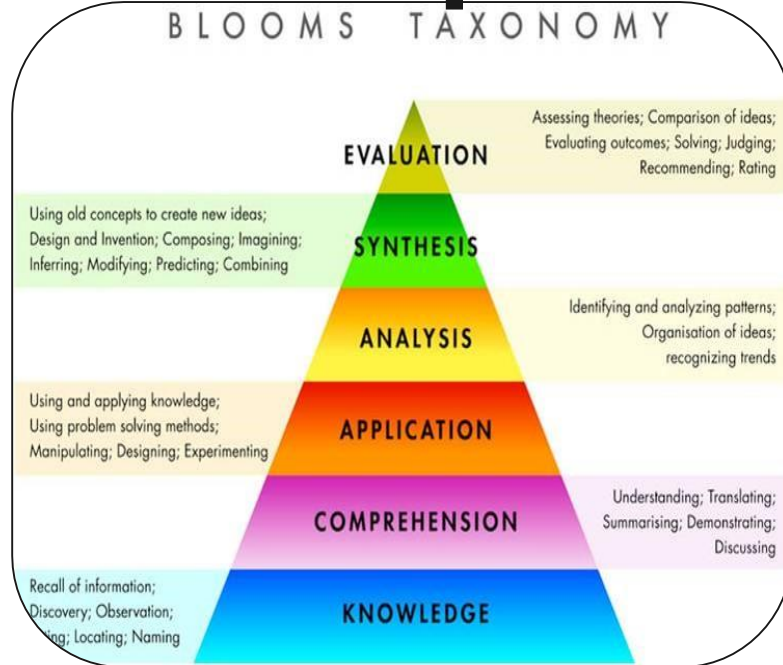
(Oxford Languages, 2023)

1. A set of principles on which the practice of an activity is based.
2. A [series of] idea[s] used to account for a situation or justify a course of action.

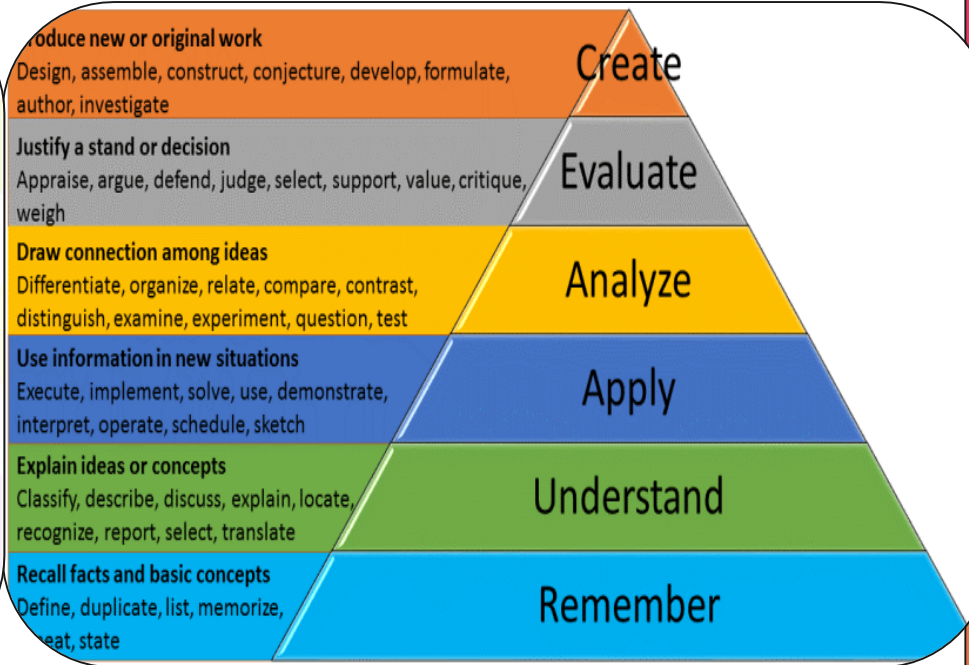


# For example...

## BLOOMS TAXONOMY



**Bloom's Taxonomy**  
(Bloom, 1956)



**Revised Bloom's Taxonomy**  
(Krathwohl, 2001)

# For example...



## Criteria

Transformative  
Irreversible  
Troublesome  
Integrative  
Bounded  
Discursive  
Reconstitutive

## Threshold Concept Theory

(Meyer & Land, 2003)

# Theoretical Commitments

Researchers, educators, and scholars have beliefs about which theories are “true” or apply in a specific context

Understanding a person’s theoretical commitment can help you understand their ethos as well as why they do the things they do in the way they do them\*

These beliefs are not always explicitly stated

A person’s theoretical commitment is reconstitutive



# 02

## **Rhetoric and Composition**

English class, right?



# What Rhet/Comp is not...



## **Not English**

Literary forms,  
analysis, and social  
histories



## **Not Linguistics**

Scientific study of  
language, its rules  
and structures



## **Not Communication**

Sociocultural study  
of human  
communication  
and behavior

# Rhetoric and Composition



## d/Discourse

Language in use ("d"),  
and communities that  
use language ("D")



## Multidisciplinary

Culture, writing in the  
disciplines



## Higher Education

First-year writing,  
pedagogy



## Activist

Students' rights, civic  
engagement



# 03

## "Big 6" Theories\*

\*there are more but these are enough

# Theories in Rhetoric and Composition



## Classical Rhetoric

Oratory, social function, and citizenship



## Positivism

Correctness, facts, and deliberate frameworks



## Process

Stages, discovery, and portfolios



## Cognitive

Knowledge types, recursion, and monitoring



## Expressivist

Voice, authenticity, and assessment



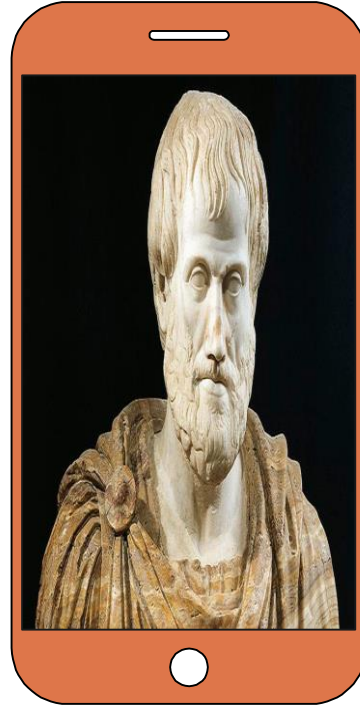
## Socioepistemic

Identity, power, and constructivism

# Classical Rhetoric

Sorted discourse forms by  
social function – political, legal,  
and ceremonial

Five stages of composition:  
Invention, Arrangement, Style,  
Memory, & Delivery





**120**

Lessons per year

**25**

Learned poems

**250**

Studied poets

# Positivist

Writing is a social good and  
should be widely taught

Clear and scientific  
frameworks for learning

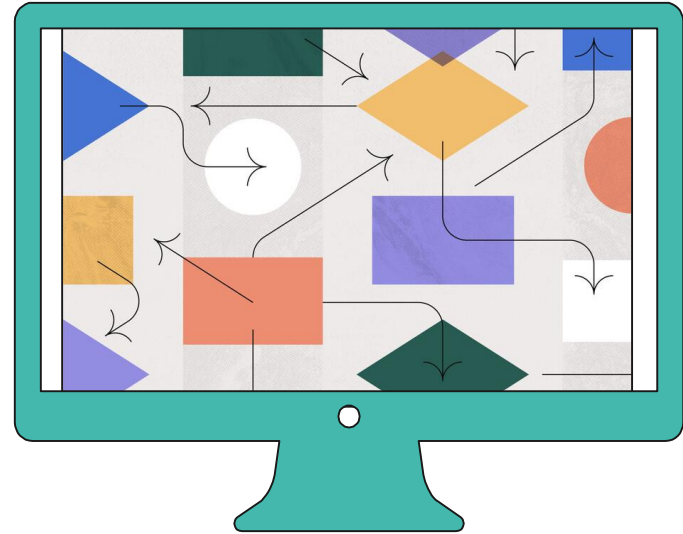
Repetition to hone writing  
skills

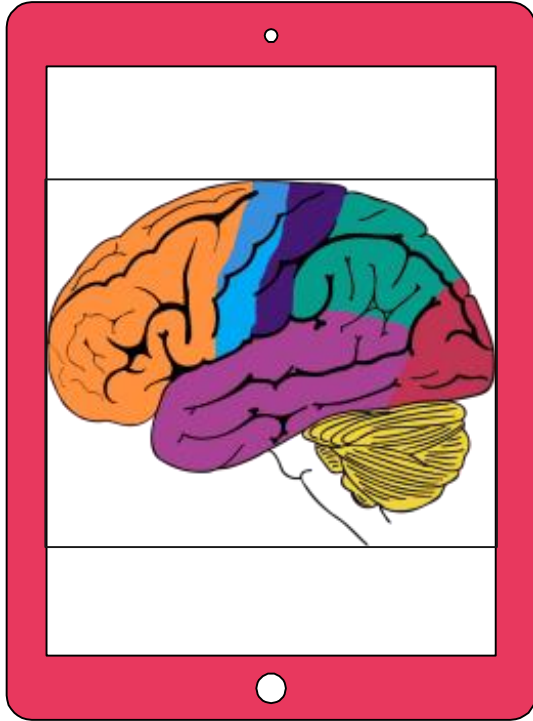
# Process

Teach and assess the whole process, not just the final product

Pre-writing, drafting, revising, and editing

Write-to-learn <-> Learn-to-write





# Cognitivist

Recursive thought cycles  
through Planning, Translating,  
and Reviewing

Scientific tools and research

Types of writing knowledge:  
factual, conceptual,  
procedural, and  
metacognitive



# Expressivist

Voices: Original, Primary, and Acquired

The writer matters more than the audience or genre conventions

Authenticity through honest expression



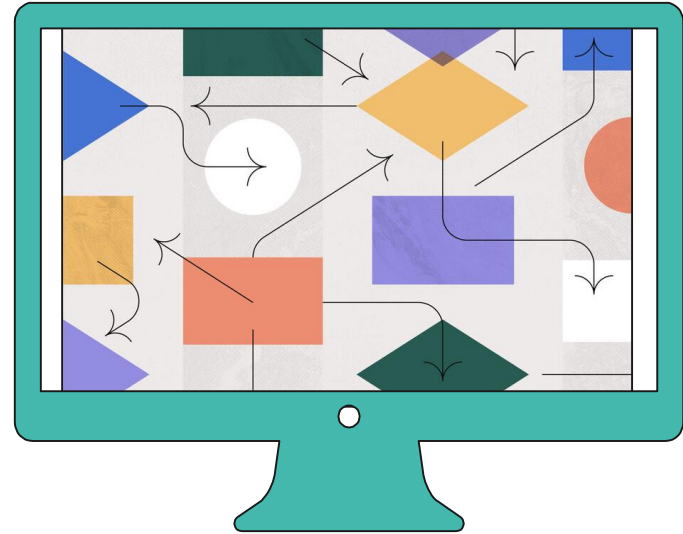
# Socioepistemic

Knowledge is constructed and distributed through writing

Power is pervasive and systemic

Progressive education goals

Writers should address social issues



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# 04

## Discussion

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# Two activities



## Identify

Which of the big six theories do you most identify with? Why?



## Trouble

Which of the theories do you believe might be problematic?  
In what context?



# End.

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