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Editorial: Acronyms Repurposed

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Acronyms Repurposed

In my FYC classes, I've started to repurpose familiar acronyms for emphasis:

WTF: I use WTF in class as a somewhat-more-sedate expostulation than is usually the case after we've completed a mini-lesson. I'll conclude by flashing the acronym on the classroom screen, pause while the students gasp, and then flash the explanation: "What's This For?" I then explain how the mini-lesson will prove useful in the near future. I encourage students to ask WTF—in my more genteel version—regularly about mini-lessons as a guarantee that I explain their purpose.

RPM: I have several anecdotes that I trot out at appropriate times to make a point (about the social construction of error or the pitfalls of careless documentation). After telling one of these corny anecdotes, which often lead to groans from the class—my intention—I share this acronym, pause, and show its new explanation: "Remember Please Mucho." My hope is that they'll remember the point of the silly little story.

BYO: I now consistently exhort students to go BYO in writing their papers—"Beyond Your Obvious." Sometimes they change "obvious" to "ordinary," but they get the point: think outside the box, push the envelope, extend themselves beyond the minimum. BYO is language that the students start to adopt. One student decided to rewrite a draft from a different point of view instead of her own. In her Writer's Memo, written to accompany her submission of the revision, she wrote, "I started to think 'beyond the obvious,' as you would say, saw that this could be a better way to present my ideas. I believe that is what a writing course does—it makes students begin to think out of the box." The mantra "Beyond your obvious" has led some students to find additional sources beyond those required and others to present data in the form of tables to make the readers' comprehension task easier. BYO has also led to design changes, using images or Web links.

Next? I plan to offer BFF (Best Foot Forward to exhort students to proof-read more carefully) and TGIF (Thank Goodness, It's Freewriting) to precede a discovery draft workshop. My AIM in all of this is to create mnemonics for emphasis (AIM = Acronyms Is Memory).

—J.S.