

# **Pedagogical Uses of Fictional and Alternate Personae in Online Environments**

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**First the good news --**

**This is intended to be a 30 minute session...**

**Nancy-Laurel Pettersen, a.k.a.**

**-The Study Lady**

**-Miss Dibble**

**-Nerdine**

**-Baby Duh**

# Online Classes

The narrow-bandwidth written mode of communication is no one's dialect, and no one is sure how to behave at first.

# Online Classes

**-Caricatures: landmarks for appropriate behavior**

**-Parody**

**-meta-critical method**

**-humor**

**-insight**

**We use these techniques to**

- Give students behavioral landmarks**
- Encourage self-reflective thought  
in a 'safe' context**
- Lessen the degree of negative experience  
sometimes present in the teacher-student  
power relationship**

# Some examples

Topic : Introductions and Bios

Date : Thu Oct 06 18:35:50 EDT 2005

Subject : Hello from Dabney Copeland

Author : Copeland, Dabney

Hi--I'm Dabney Copeland, a figment of Harbort's imagination. I hang out in his online classes and serve as an example of how to do stuff right.

I was born in Enfield, NC, a tiny town on the NC-VA border. I attended school there and also in Lost Mountain after my family moved to Georgia. Currently I'm a junior at SPSU and I work in a law office in East Cobb. I work full time doing paralegal sort of stuff, and I think one day I might go to law school -- if I can ever graduate from college! I used to be a Civil major, but all the outdoor stuff like surveying and going on construction field trips got to me, so I switched to Construction.

I'm taking Math2254, IET3403, Engl2010, and this class.

See y'all in cyberspace!

Topic : Introductions and Bios

Date : Thu Oct 06 18:59:01 EDT 2005

Subject : Hello

Author : Snopes, Dud

I'm Dud Snopes, another figment of Harbort's imagination, escaped from a Faulkner novel to hang out here and illustrate how to be a slacker and a screwoff.

I came from Mississippi, and if I ever get out of this place I'm going back. Big city life ain't for me. I'm majoring in Fire Science -- I was one of the last folks admitted to that program before they killed it years ago.

I'm taking some history course or other, and I'm on my 5th try at calc I. Mostly I work at the bowling alley across 41. You can also find me at The Ranch on 2 for 1 margarita night.

I cain't figure out this stupid message editor!

# Ethical Considerations

-Students need to know of the charade up front

-Avoids embarrassment...most of the time

Topic : A -- Introductions and Initial Assessments  
EDT 2006

Date : Mon Aug 28 15:34:53

Subject : A little about me

Author : Copeland, Dabney

I'm a figment of Harbort's imagination -- the *\*smarter\** one of his two crash test dummies -- designed to show the *\*right\** way to behave online. I'm also used for outsiders to "lurk" in online classes and see what's going on. If you find yourself behaving mostly like me, you'll be in good shape.

I'm originally from Enfield, NC, right near the border with VA. I moved to Lost Mountain when I was in high school. I've been at SPSU 2 years, and this term I'm taking Math2254, Physics2211K, TCOM2010, and this class. I'm a CS major, and I work part time as a programmer at Kennestone Hospital.

--Mitch (that's my nickname, from my middle name "Mitchell")

Topic : A -- Introductions and Initial Assessments  
EDT 2006

Date : Tue Aug 29 10:29:33

Subject : Re:A little about me

Author : [redacted]

nice to meet you. i am taking cs1301 this semester and well i do not really understand it, but i have to take it for my degree, ill get through it.  
good luck this semester

# Or does it...

Topic : A -- Introductions and Initial Assessments  
2006

Date : Mon Aug 28 15:40:11 EDT

Subject : Another semester starts

Author : Snopes, Dud

I'm Dud Snopes, the other one of Harbort's crash test dummies. I'm here to illustrate what a slacker and screwup looks like online. You'll be in trouble if you behave the way I do. I'm from Mississippi, and came to Georgia a while back. I been at Southern Tech far too long. I'm majorin in Fire Science and takin my own sweet time about graduatin This term I'm taking Engl1101 for the fourth time, the Regents Remediation classes (again), and...dang -- I can't remember the other one.

Topic : A -- Introductions and Initial Assessments  
2006

Date : Tue Aug 29 10:27:08 EDT

Subject : Re:Another semester starts

Author : [redacted]

I feel like i am taking my own sweet time with my graduation as well, but i have never had to retake a class before. i hope you do well with your english and regents classes. although i had to take the reading part of the regents test three times before i was able to pass it. anyways good luck!!

Topic : A -- Introductions and Initial Assessments  
2006

Date : Tue Aug 29 21:35:43 EDT

Subject : Re:Another semester starts

Author : [redacted #2]

Welcome, i think im going to be at spsu for a long time too. Hopefully we will make it out before a crisis breaks out.

- I'm not the only one occupying an alternate ID**
- Other faculty 'visiting' the class**
- Teaching evaluators**
- Accreditation visitors**

# Student feedback, and a roll call of characters

Topic : A -- Introductions and Initial Assessments

Date : Sun Sep 03 11:37:02 EDT 2006

Subject : Re:Another semester starts

Author : [redacted #3]

Hey Dud,

Are you an automated bot or a real alternate personality? [These are good examples. It makes these discussion threads more interesting reads.](#) :)

Topic : A -- Introductions and Initial Assessments

Date : Sun Sep 03 12:22:29 EDT 2006

Subject : Re:Another semester starts

Author : Snopes, Dud

I'm not a bot. Harbort's in my face all the time so I reflect the stranger aspects of his personality.

He actually has a whole bunch of us, sometimes aided by other colleagues:

\*Michelle Foucault, headmistress of a Catholic Girls School in the midwest, bears a strong resemblance to Dr. Nancy Reichert (English prof & director of the Honors Program).

\*Higginbotham P. Worthmire, professor of mental chiropractic and film therapy at the University of California at San Quentin/Tamal, looks a lot like retired English professor John Tumlin.

\*Humberto H. Ego, professor of semiotics at the University of Linguine in Italy, doesn't look like anybody, but he has written extensively on problems of philosophical interpretation in popular culture (along with Dabney Copeland, who as you know masquerades as a student in Harbort's classes).

\*Manda Horton-Jones, noted feminist and professional lab experimentation subject at Ego's semiotics lab, closely resembles Dr. Nancy-Laurel Pettersen, a professor at CUNY and author or co-author of some of the materials used in this course.

\*Jeremy and Brunhilde Bland-Thorndyke appear sometimes by remote control. They don't look like anybody. They earn a living as guests on Southern California talk radio shows (like the late, great Phil Hendrie show).

\*Among the lesser beings around here are folks like Ben Dover and his cousin Stan Dupp (Ben is currently the crash test dummy in a dummy course being used by a CS capstone project team doing a WebCT-related project.), and their love interests Amanda Reckonwith and Sarah Bellum. I don't know much about either of the ladies except that they are from Lake Wobegon, MN.

--dud

# Future Direction

-Introducing students to alternate personae as a way of fostering more carefully controlled and self-reflective active learning

## Roles of the Reader

<b>What the Text Says</b> Author's Words / My Words	<b>How the Author Says It</b> <i>Thinking Strategies / Thinking Structure</i>	<b>The Text and Me</b> Thinking About Thinking
<p><b>6. Summing Up: ¶1-9</b></p> <p>Which of the following makes the best heading for this first section? Use one of the titles below to fill in the blank at the top of page 1.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Letters from Elijah Muhammed</li><li>• Transformation</li><li>• Praying to Allah</li></ul> <p>If you don't especially like any of those titles, you can make up your own.</p>	<p><b>7. Tools for Thinking: Comparison</b> <i>Authors often use the strategy of describing one thing by comparing it with another. In paragraph 9, Malcolm describes a drastic change in his way of thinking. What comparison does he use in describing that change?</i></p> <p><b>8. Tools for Thinking: Figure of Speech</b> <i>The comparison above is --</i></p> <p>_____ a metaphor      _____ a simile</p>	<p><b>9. Challenging the Text: Credibility</b> Think about people you know who have tried to change their lives – and about times when you have worked to change your own life. Does he make it sound too easy here?</p> <p>Can people really change so completely that they can be “startled to catch myself thinking in a remote way of my earlier self as another person”?</p> <p>(Your answer here can be just a few sentences. You will have more opportunity to discuss this question later.)</p>

**Questions or Comments?**