

University of Hong Kong Seminar  
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# Toward an Integrated Approach to Writing Instruction

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# Major Approaches to L2 Writing

- Controlled & Guided Composition
- The Paragraph-Pattern Approach
- The Process Approach
- The Genre-Based Approach.

(Silva & Matsuda, 2002)

# History of Conflicts

- 1960s: Free vs. Controlled Composition
- 1970s: Controlled Composition vs. Process
- 1980s: Process vs. Genre
- 1990s-present: Post Process.

# Post Process?

- Post Process—the latest buzz word (Atkinson, 2003; Matsuda, 2003)
- In Composition Studies
  - The “social turn”
  - Post Expressivism
  - Post Cognitivism
  - Advanced Composition
- In L2 Writing
  - Post Raimes & Zamel
  - Victory of Genre over Process (Hyland, 2003)
  - Era of multiplicity (Matsuda, 2003) and *integration*

# Post Process as the Era of Multiplicity and Integration

L2 writing instruction needs to integrate both process and product, and put them in a larger sociocultural context.

# A Sociocultural Perspective on Writing

- A sociocultural perspective on writing suggests that...
  - Writing is not an isolated skill but a situated activity embedded in a sociocultural context
  - Literacy develops as a result of meaningful participation in the community of practice
  - Writing development happens incidentally as the learner engages in meaningful activities
  - Even advanced users of dominant varieties of English need to be socialized into specific communities of practice.

(Beaufort, 1999; Casanave, 1995, 2002; Dias, Freedman, Medway, & Paré, 1999; Freedman & Adam, 1996 ; Prior, 1995; Russell, 1995, 1999)

# The Problem

- General Skills Writing Instruction (GSWI) does not help students write in other contexts (Petraglia, 1995; Russell, 1995)
- Even domain specific writing instruction tend to have limited transferability because each writing context is different
- Sophisticated genre-based writing instruction is more effective for advanced students
- How do we teach writing to students who are not already participating in the community of practice? (Johns, 2007)

# In EFL and School Contexts

- Writing has long been neglected
- The dominance of English created the need for advanced academic and workplace English literacy
- But many still struggle to see how writing can be profitably taught in EFL contexts
- How can sociocultural perspectives be integrated into the teaching of writing?



# Common Assumptions

Writing instruction is sometimes delayed or even avoided. . .

- Because it is considered to be the most difficult of the “four-skills”;
- Because some teachers try to “protect” students from engaging in writing activities too early—before they are “ready” linguistically and cognitively;
- Because it takes time to read and “correct” students’ texts; and
- Because students’ texts are often not interesting to read.

# Let's Face It

## Too difficult?

Students who are literate in L1 can benefit from writing activities.

Integrating spoken and written language can facilitate the development of all four skills.

(Harklau, 2002; Weissberg, 1994)

# Let's Face It

## Too early?

Student at any age or language proficiency can and should engage in realistic writing activities because real learning takes place as learning participants participate in those activities.

(Harklau, 2002; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Russell, 1997)

# Let's Face It

## Too time consuming?

The teacher doesn't have to "correct" everything; students can grow on their own or help one another if the teacher can provide appropriate guidance.

(Stanley, 1992; Berg, 1999; Zhu, 1995, 2001)

# Let's Face It

Too boring?

If students' texts are not interesting to read, it may have something to do with the way assignments are constructed in the first place.

# The Question

“How can we assign these tasks so that they are interesting and stimulating for both students and teachers?”

# The Challenge

Traditional approaches to writing instruction see assignments as isolated prompts far removed from the context and the process of writing.

# Decontextualized Assignments...

- Describe a task—a topic to write about or a type of text to reproduce—but not much else;
- Ask students to write for its own sake;
- May ask students to consider audience, genre and purpose but don't explain what it means to “consider” them or how; and
- Invite students to see writing assignments merely as exercises or busy work rather than exciting opportunities to engage in written communication.



## An Example of Decontextualized Assignment

“Write about someone you admire. You can choose someone you know very well, such as a family member, a friend, or a teacher, or you can choose a famous person, such as a national leader, a scientist, or an artist.”

—from an L2 writing textbook  
for low-intermediate students

## A Student's Reactions to the Decontextualized Assignment

“Write about someone you admire. You can choose someone you know very well, such as a family member, a friend, or a teacher, or you can choose a famous person, such as a national leader, a scientist, or an artist.”

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## Genre

# Student's Reactions to the Personalized Assignment

Write what? An essay?  
How many paragraphs?  
Can I use "I"?

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Genre

Write what? An essay?  
How many paragraphs?  
Can I use "I"?

Audience

To whom?  
The teacher?  
Why would you want  
to know that?

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To whom?  
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"Write about someone you admire. You can choose someone you know very well, such as a family member, a friend, or a teacher, or you can choose a famous person, such as a national leader, a scientist, or an artist."

For what? To show that I can write error-free sentences?  
To impress the teacher?

Purpose

Genre

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How many paragraphs?  
Can I use "I"?

Audience

To whom?  
The teacher?  
Why would you want  
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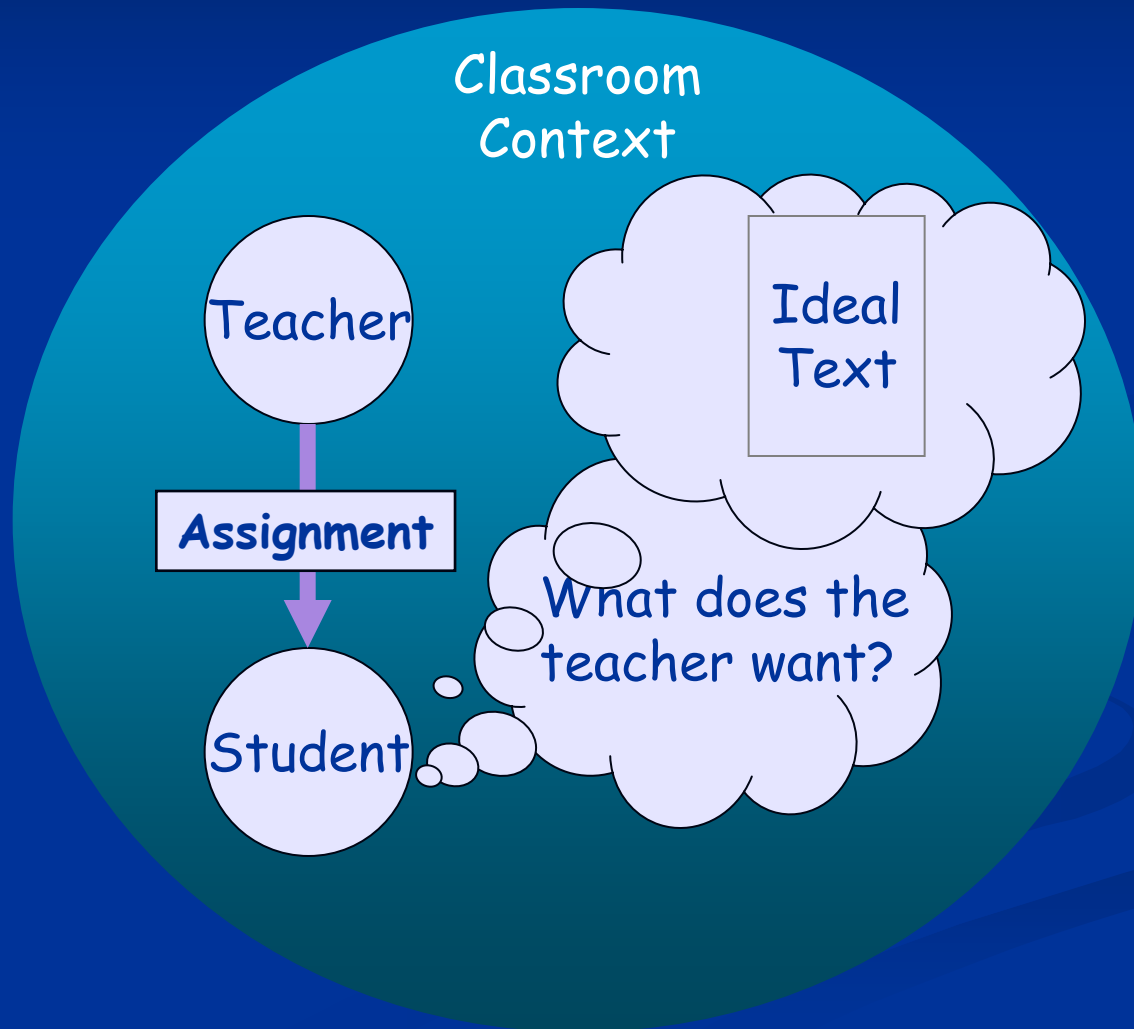
"Write about someone you admire. You can choose someone you know very well, such as a family member, a friend, or a teacher, or you can choose a famous person, such as a national leader, a scientist, or an artist."

What does the  
teacher really want?

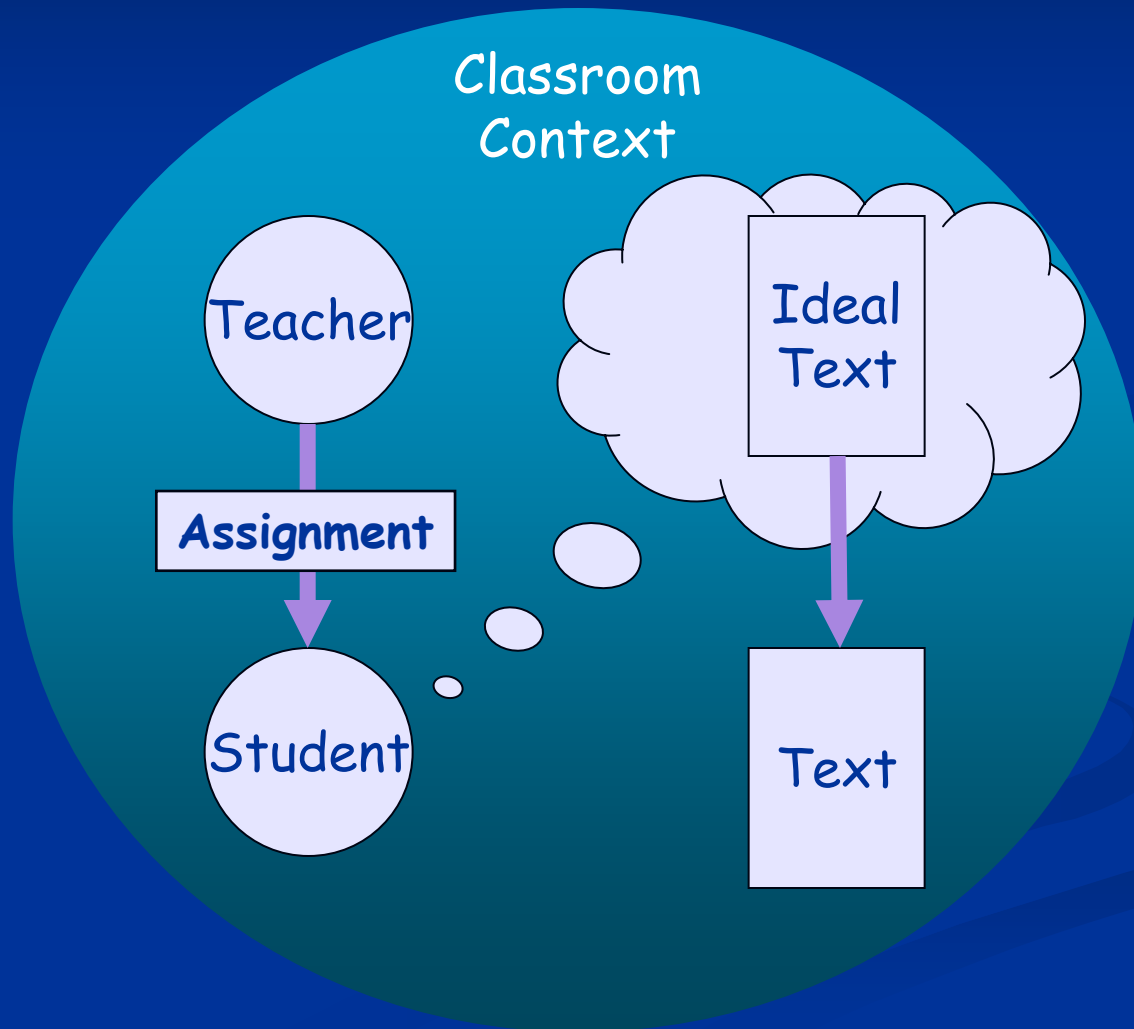
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Purpose

# Decontextualized Assignments

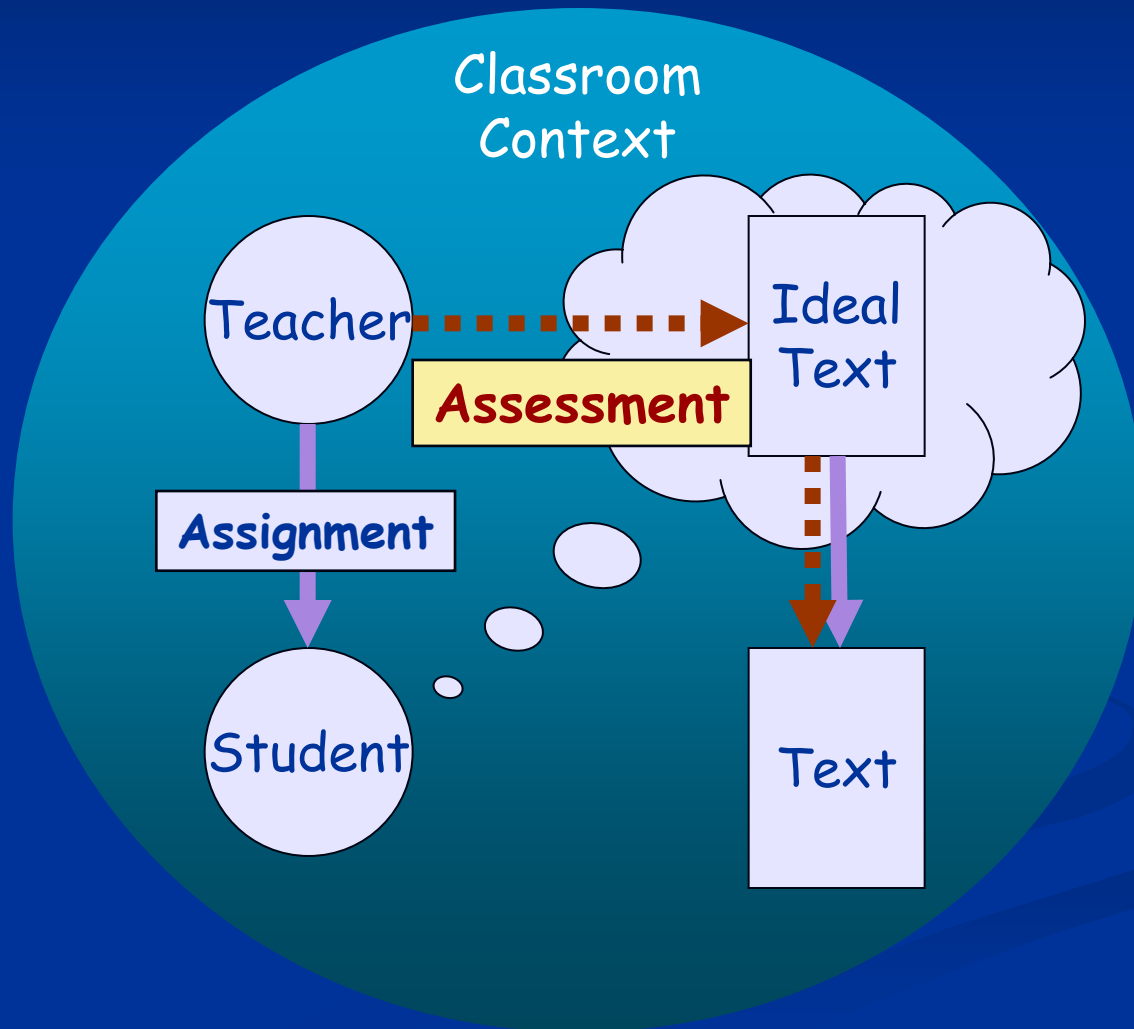


# Decontextualized Assignments

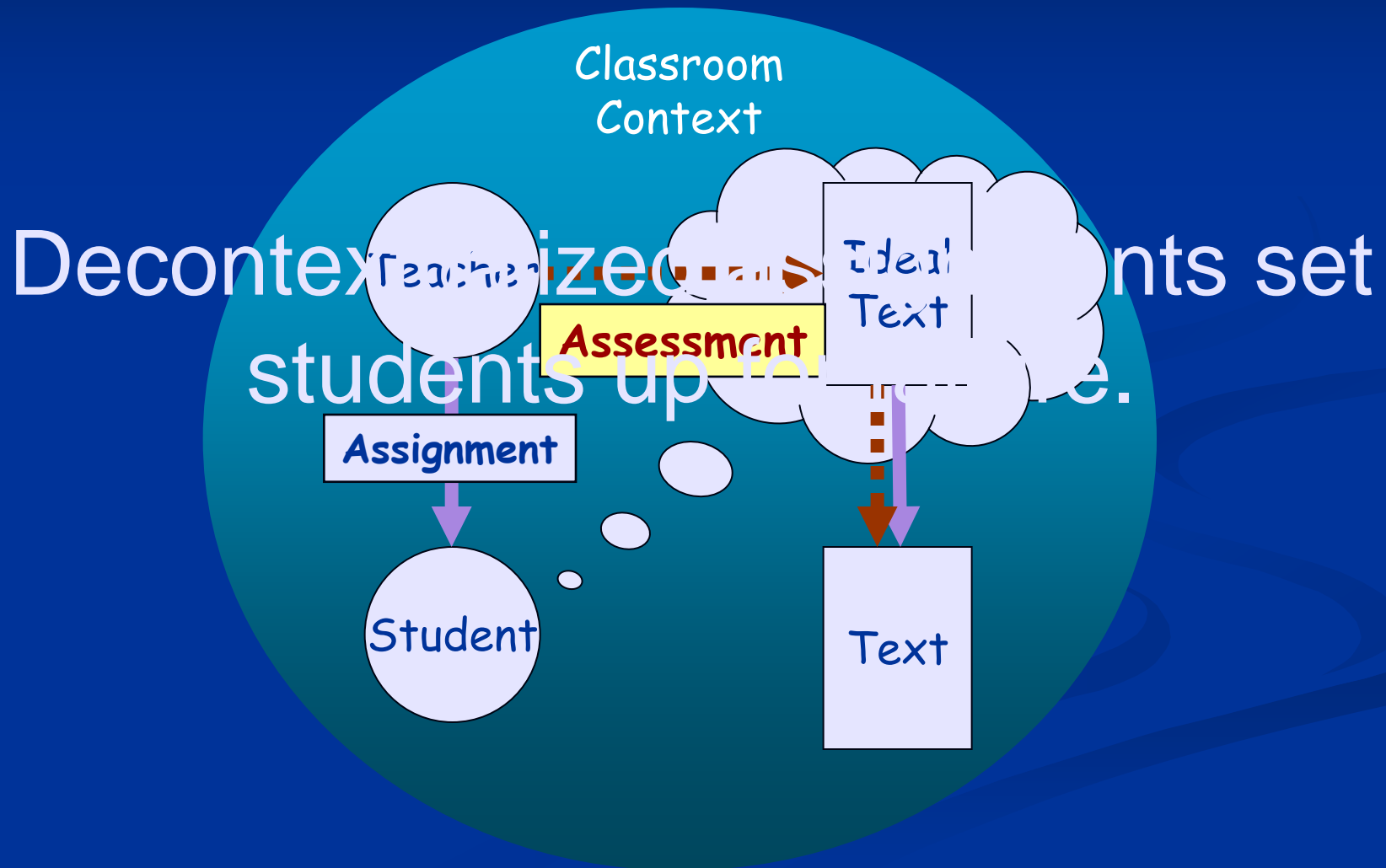




# Decontextualized Assignments



# Decontextualized Assignments



# Problems of Decontextualized Assignments

Because students' focus is on reproducing the ideal text that they imagine is in the teacher's head, their texts often lack...

- authenticity
- audience awareness (other than "teacher-evaluator")
- originality
- enthusiasm
- desire to communicate
- and many other qualities of "good writing."

Those texts are often not interesting to read!

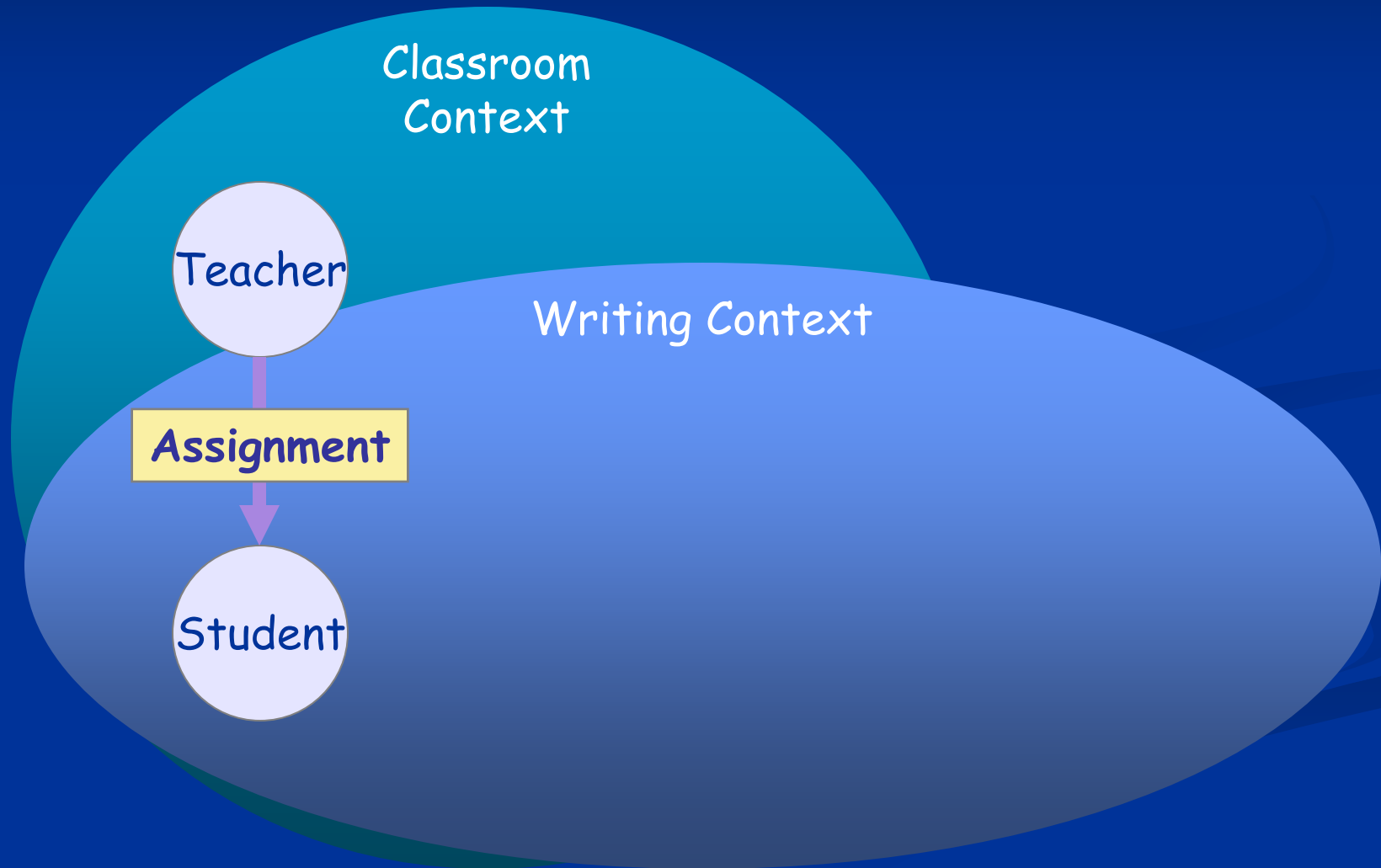
**How can we make writing assignments  
more interesting for both  
students and teachers?**

# The Context of Writing

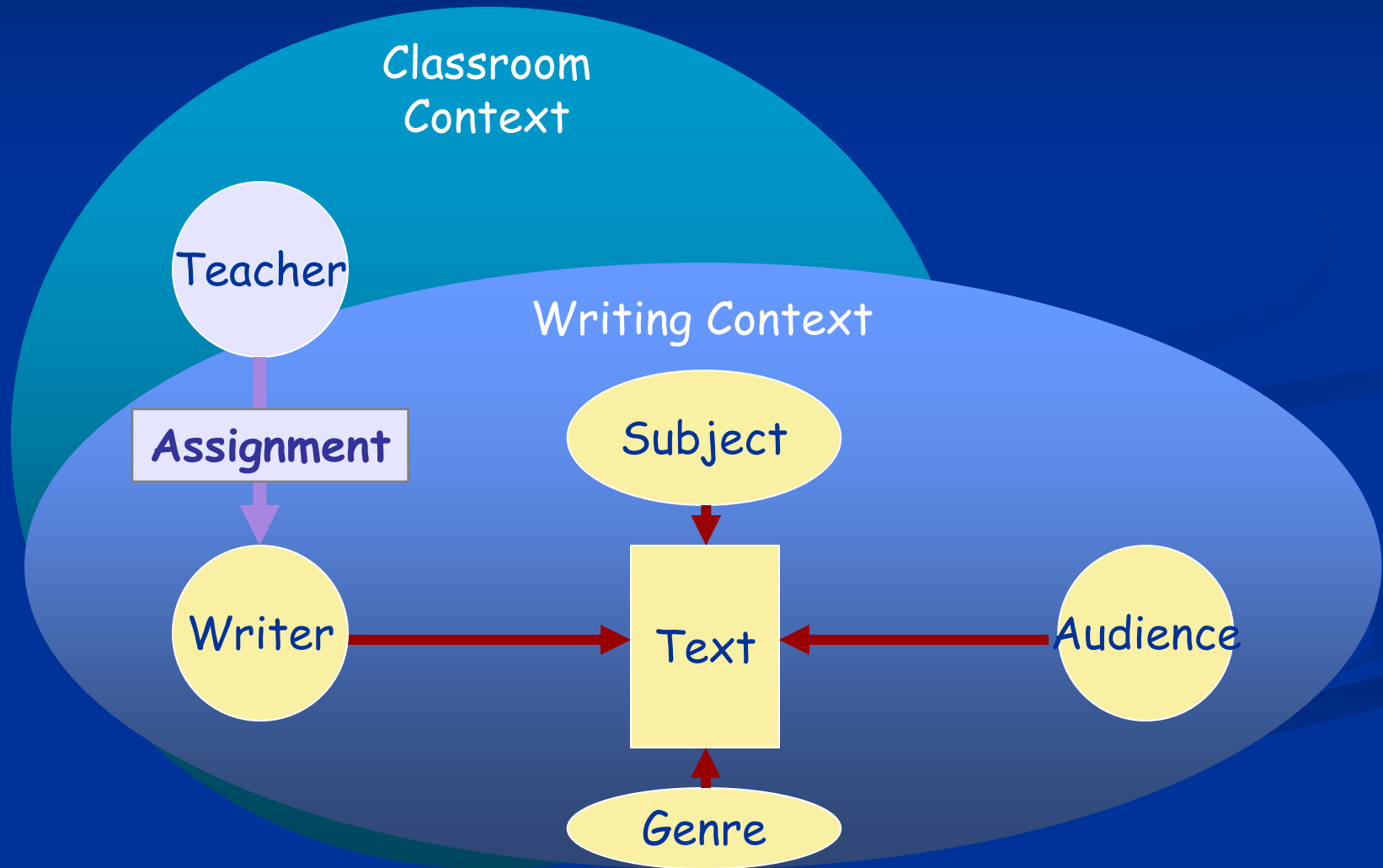
An effective writing assignment puts the writing task in a realistic context of writing, including:

- **Writer** (writer's position in a community of literate people);
- **Subject** (what writer knows about or want to know more about);
- **Audience** (readers who have a real reason to read what the writer has to say);
- **Genre** (socially available repertoire of text types).

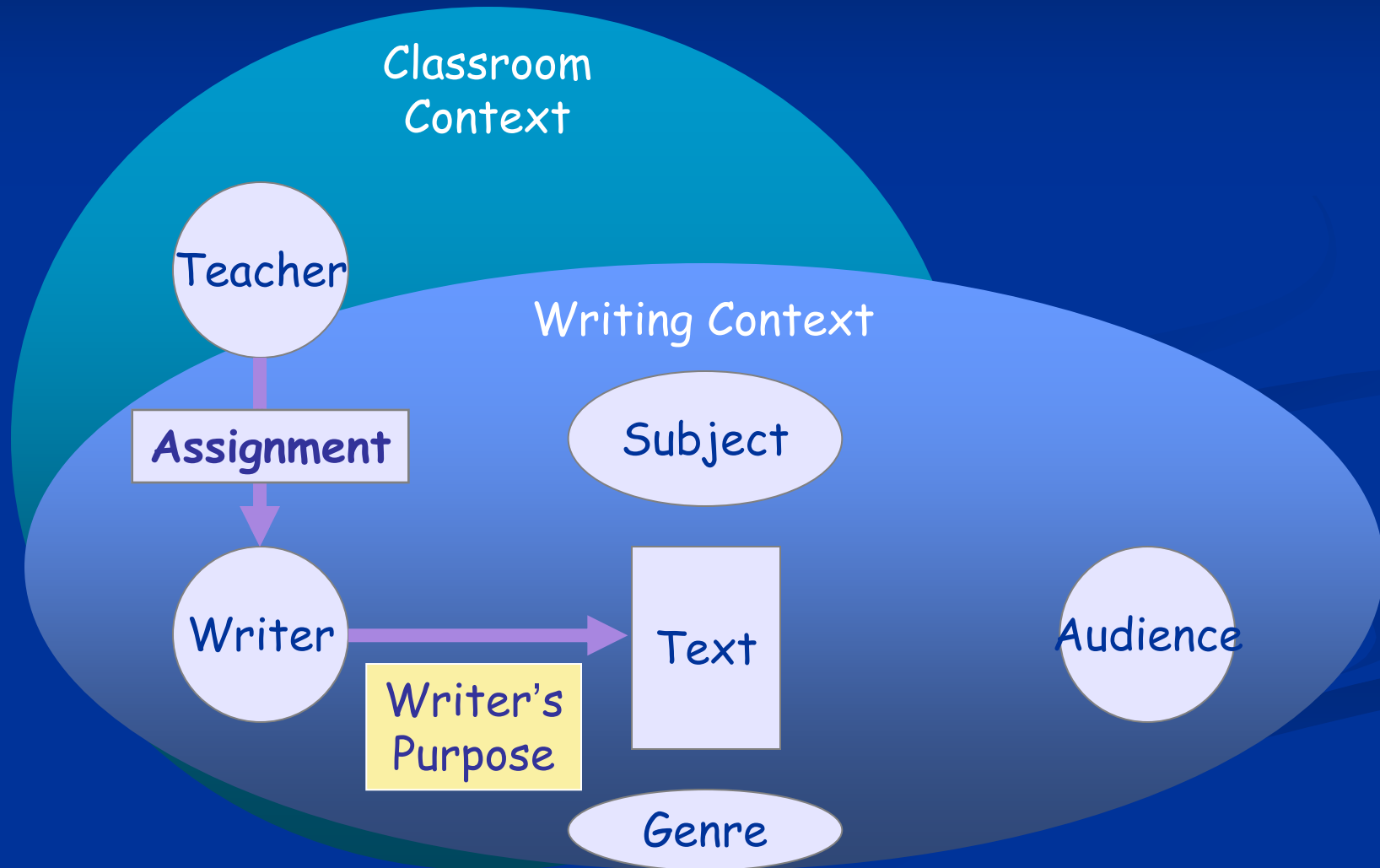
# Contextualized Assignments



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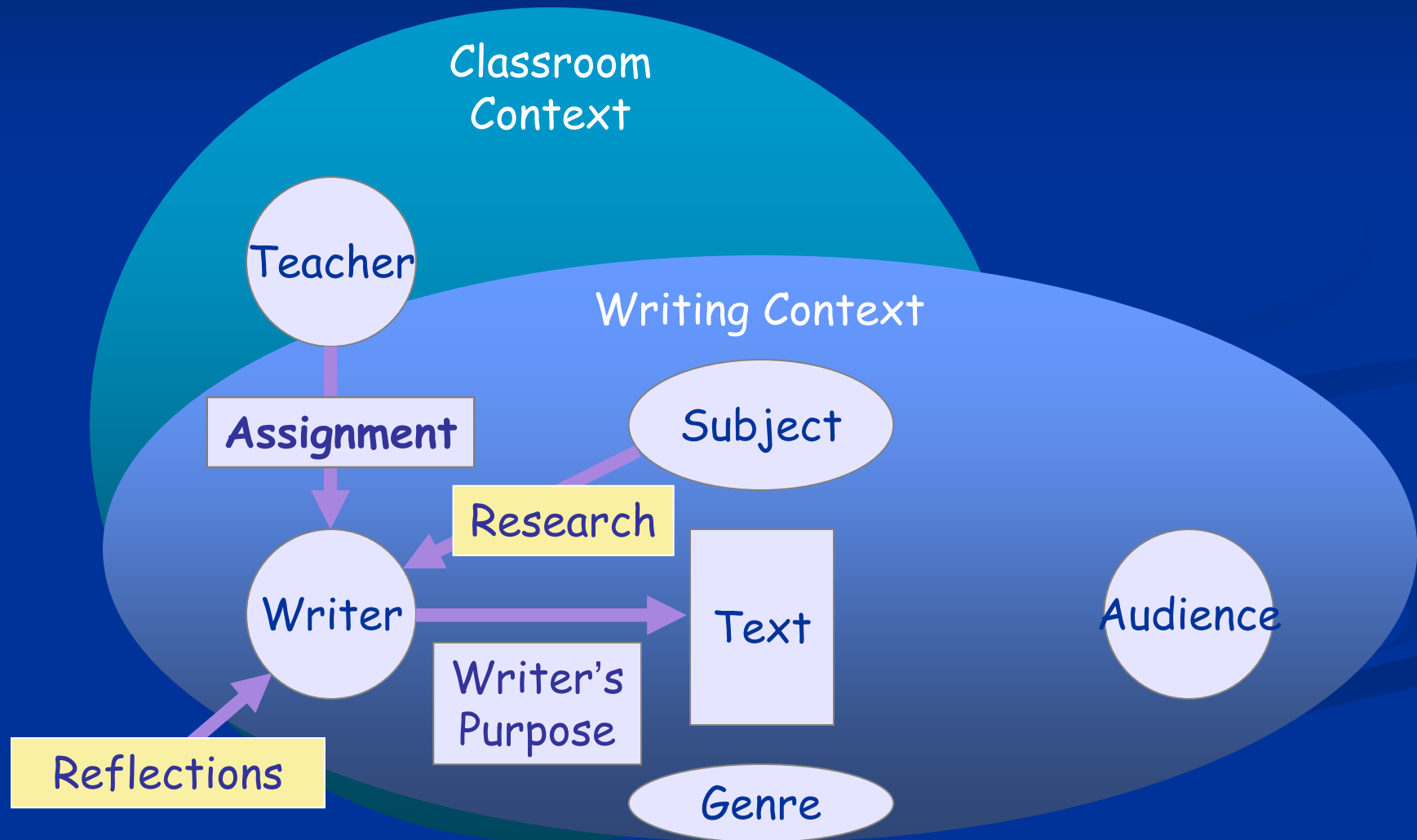


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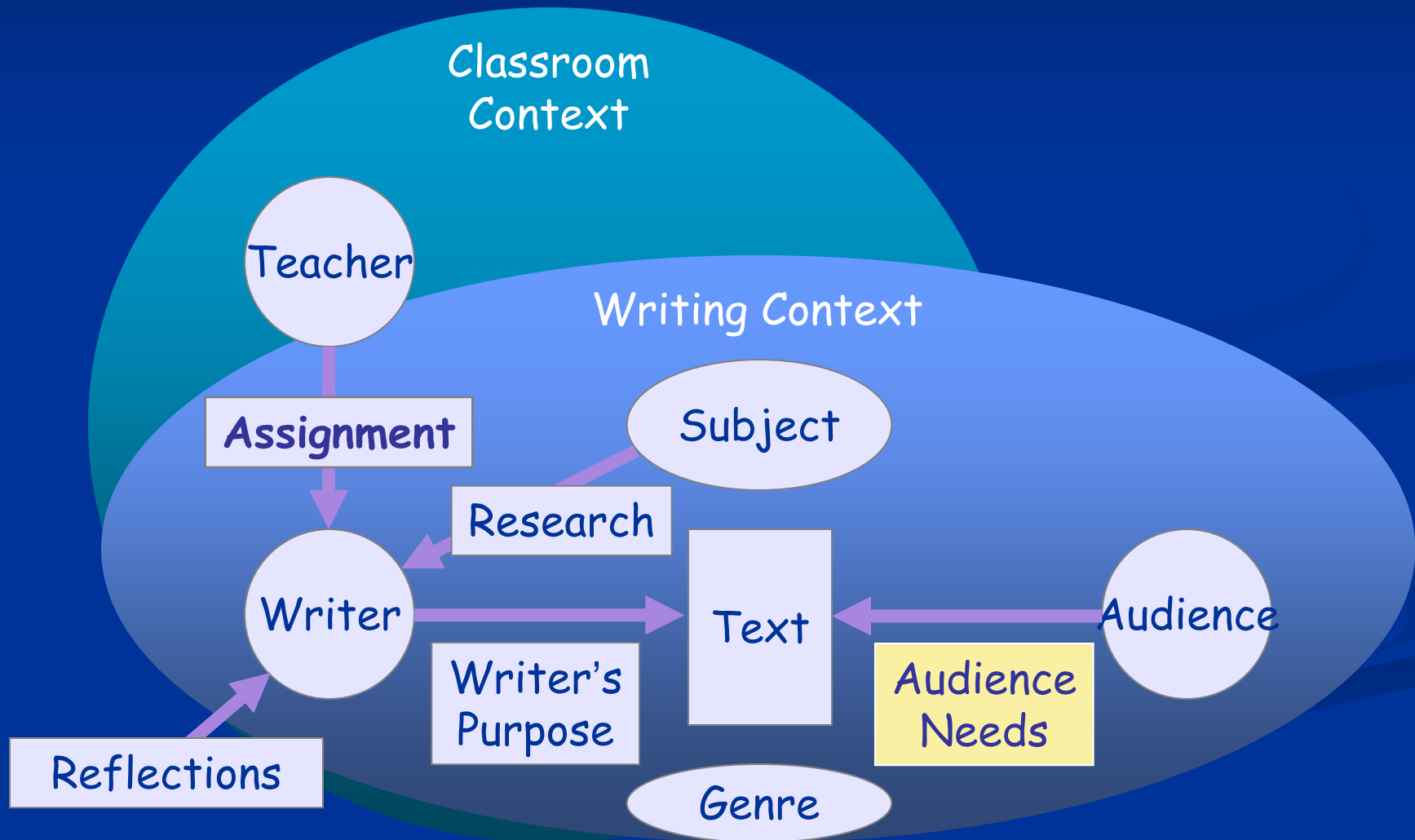




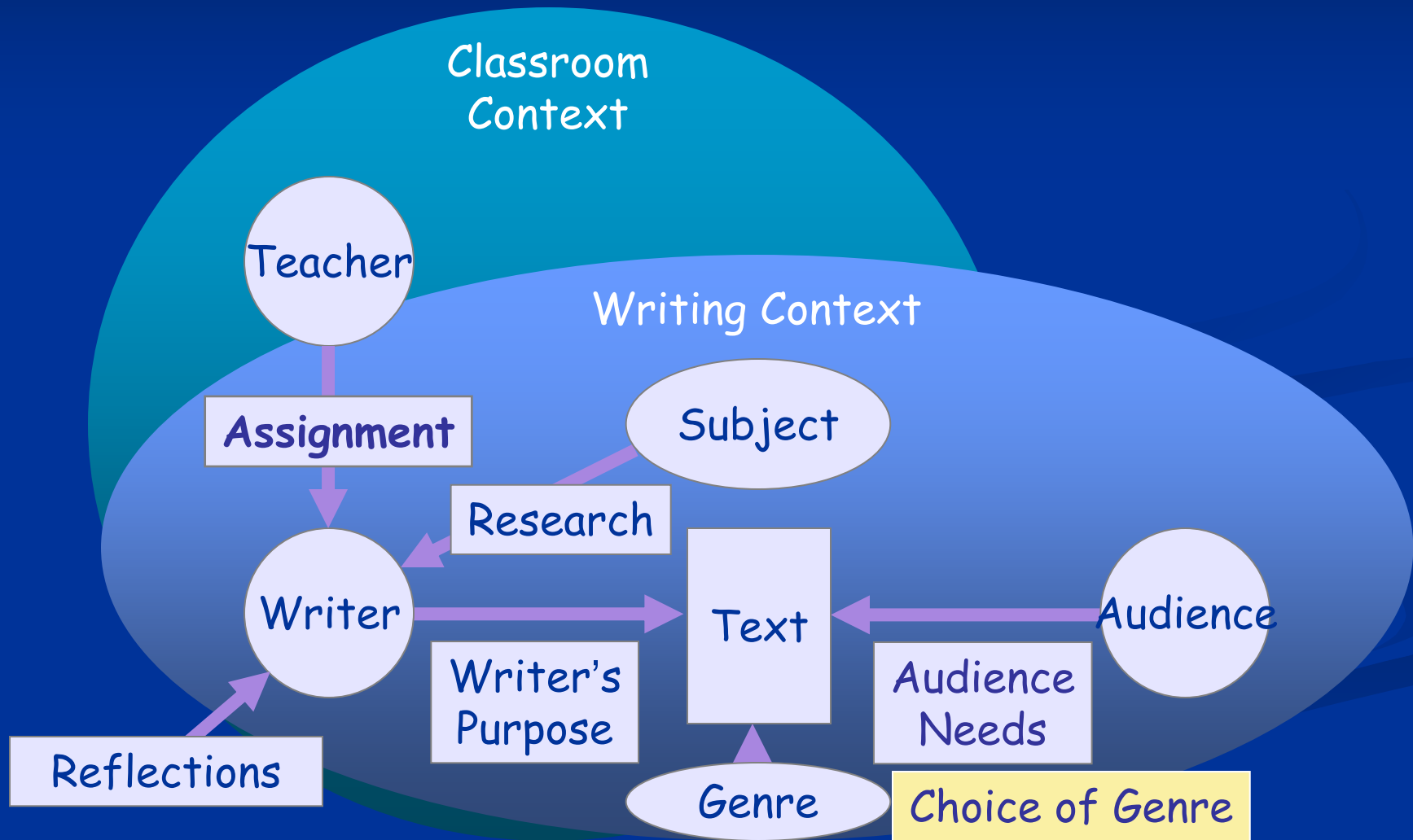
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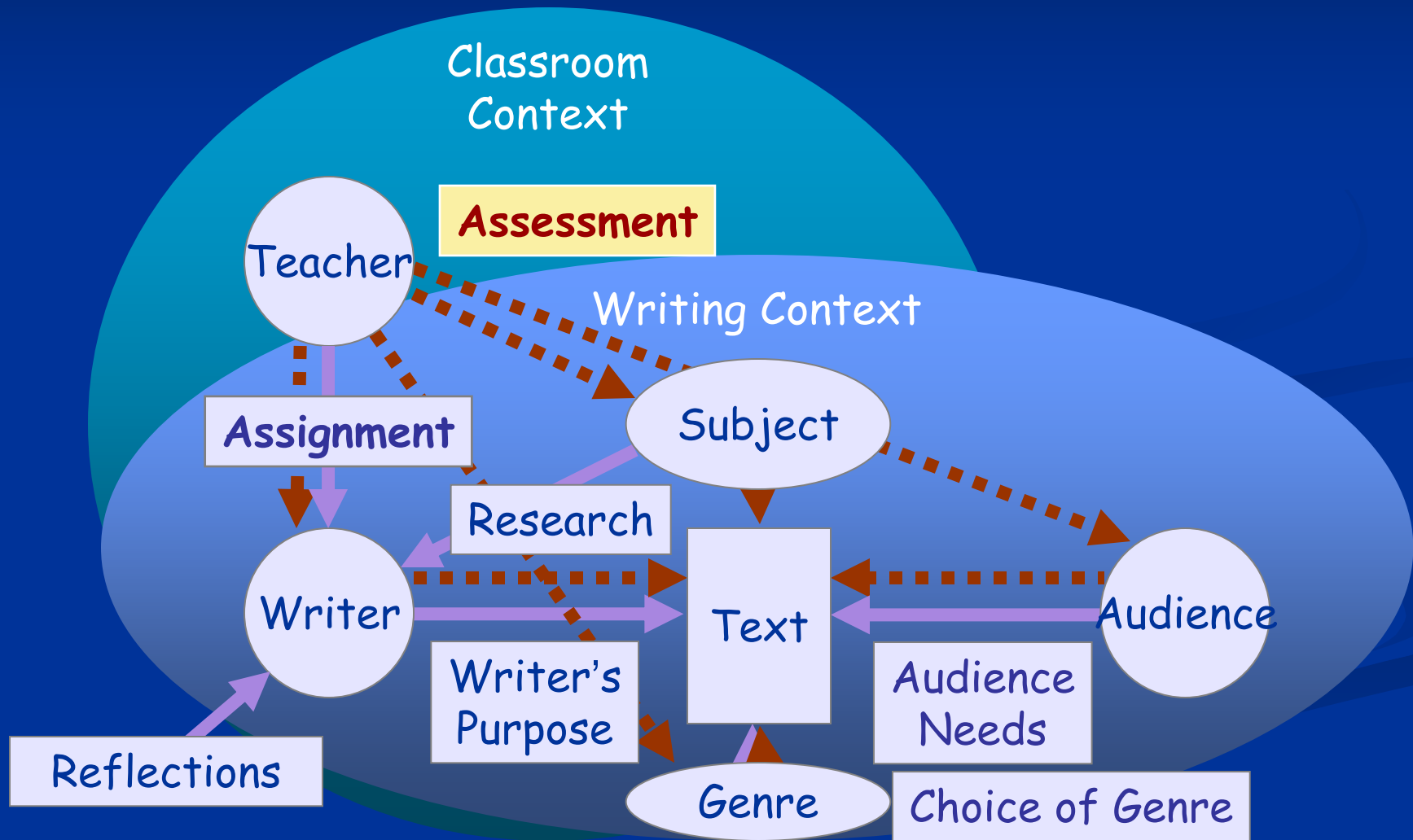
# Contextualized Assignments



# Contextualized Assignments



# Contextualized Assignments



Does this seem too complicated?

Let's take a look at a concrete example.

## Contextualizing a Decontextualized Assignment

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—from an ESL writing textbook  
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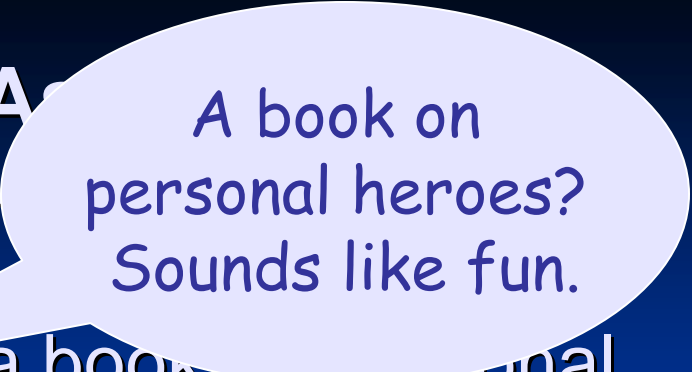
# Contextualized Assignment: Personal Heroes

We are going to develop a book on personal heroes. Each of you will contribute a short chapter (1-2 pages) that describes someone you admire and explains why you admire the person.

You can choose someone you know very well, such as a family member, a friend, or a teacher, or you can choose a famous person, such as a national leader, a scientist, or an artist.

When finished, we will share the book with other classes, teachers and parents.

## Contextualized Activities Personal Heroes



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# Contextualized Activities Personal Heroes

Subject,  
Motivation

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So, I will write something short and sweet.

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**Genre**

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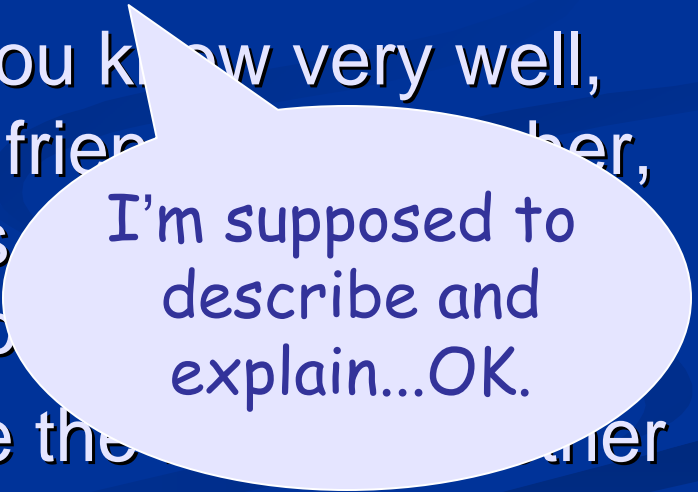
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describe and  
explain...OK.

**Genre,  
Task**

# Contextualized Assignment: Personal Heroes

We are going to develop a book on personal heroes. Each of you will contribute a short chapter (2-3 pages) that describes someone you

admire. Explain why you admire the person.

Choose someone you know very well, such as a family member, a friend, or a teacher, or you can choose a famous person, such as a national leader, a scientist, or an artist.

When finished, we will share the book with other classes, teachers and parents.

*Wow, everyone's going to read this. I have to do a good job.*

# Contextualized Assignment: Personal Heroes

**Audience,  
Motivation**

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heroes. Each of you will contribute a short

(2-3 pages) that describes someone you

admire and explain why you admire the person.

*Wow, everyone's  
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*I have to do a good job.*

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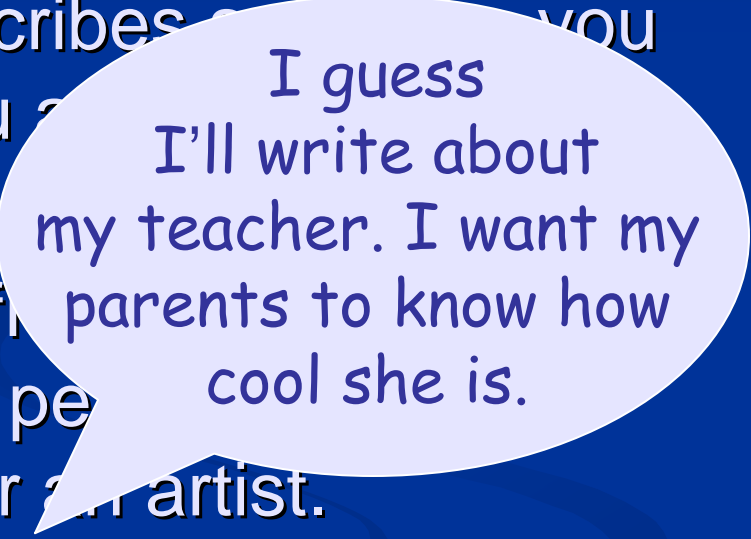
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**Subject,  
Audience,  
Purpose**

I guess  
I'll write about  
**my teacher. I want my  
parents to know how  
cool she is.**

# Contextualizing the Assignment

For younger or less advanced students:

- Specify the writer's role, genre, audience and purpose;
- Choose a local and familiar audience, genre and purpose;
- Provide genre examples and explain the context.

# Contextualizing the Assignment

For more mature or advanced students:

- Give students more freedom in choosing the audience, genre and purpose;
- Move toward abstract and less familiar audience, genre and purpose;
- Ask students to identify examples of the genre of their choice and to analyze the context.

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