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Metis as a Pedagogical Framework for Approaching Alternative Writing Assessment

Embracing Neurodiversity Through Adaptation

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Abstract: In recent years, *metis*, which refers to "the rhetorical concept of cunning and adaptive intelligence" (Dolmage, 2014, p. 5), has been utilized as a framework for theorizing approaches to writing anxiety (Wood, 2020), examining adaptive literacy practices (Kamperman, 2020), and reimagining pedagogy in the rhetoric and writing classroom (Selznick, 2020). While prior scholarship has done critical work positioning *metis* as a framework for challenging normative approaches to writing pedagogy, little has been written to tie this concept to alternative writing assessment itself. In this article, I offer *metis* as a pedagogical framework for conceptualizing accessible alternative writing assessment practices grounded in adaptation. I argue that using *metis* as a framework encourages writing teachers to embrace neurodiversity through flexible writing assessment tactics that center students' nonnormative, embodied composition processes.

Keywords: neurodiversity, *metis*, accessibility, alternative assessment, disability

When I first read the call for proposals for the *Journal of Writing Assessment*'s special issue on neurodivergence, disability, and alternative writing assessment, I was in the process of crafting my syllabi for the Fall 2024 semester. As a first-year tenure-track assistant professor committed to social justice and accessibility, I was eager to implement more equitable grading practices in my role as a faculty member. Such a commitment stems from a deeply held belief that higher education is built on a culture of academic ableism (Dolmage, 2017; Price, 2011) that prioritizes "normate" bodies and minds (Garland-Thomson, 1996, p. 8). This culture is upheld through a model of "academic accommodation" in which students with disabilities must "catalogue their deficits" to be "granted access through a finite range of legally and institutionally sanctioned accommodations" (Dolmage, 2017, p. 61). Using disability studies as a guiding methodology (Dolmage, 2014; Schalk, 2022), I then turned to alternative writing assessment as a core component of my own anti-ableist pedagogical praxis.

Such a pedagogical praxis is grounded in *metis*, which has become an increasingly important concept in disability studies. As Jay Dolmage (2014) notes, *metis* refers to "the rhetorical concept of cunning and adaptive intelligence" (p. 5). A *metis*-infused pedagogy provides us with a useful lens for constructing anti-ableist assessment practices through its emphasis on rhetorical embodiment, which I have previously defined as "knowledge broadly cultivated through bodily attunement and being in the world" (Hizer, 2024, p. 9). In recent years, *metis* has been utilized as a framework for theorizing approaches to writing anxiety (Wood, 2020), examining adaptive literacy practices (Kamperman, 2020), and reimagining pedagogy in the rhetoric and writing classroom (Selznick, 2020). While this scholarship has done critical work in foregrounding *metis* as "backwards or sideways movement" (Dolmage, 2020, para. 10) that can challenge normative approaches to writing pedagogy by making room for embodied and alternative composing processes, little has been written to tie this concept to alternative writing assessment itself. In this article, I expand on such previous scholarship to offer *metis* as a pedagogical framework for conceptualizing accessible alternative writing assessment tactics.

A *metis*-infused pedagogical framework is grounded in adaptation. Too often, disabled and neurodivergent students are asked to adapt to the normative standards embedded in higher education (Price, 2024). What happens, then, when we actively embrace neurodiversity in our classrooms by adopting a pedagogical praxis that can be adapted to the needs of our students? A *metis* pedagogy recognizes that neurodivergent learners often embody nonlinear or "sideways" approaches to writing (Dolmage, 2014, p. 7). Similar to scholars such as Inoue (2015, 2023), I recognize that alternative writing assessment plays a critical role in disrupting racist and heteropatriarchal practices in the writing classroom. I offer *metis* as a pedagogical framework that foregrounds multimodality, temporal flexibility, and reflection as core components of alternative writing assessment.

I begin by tracing a brief history of neurodiversity and alternative writing assessment before exploring *metis* as a useful pedagogical framework that emphasizes adaptation and flexibility in the writing classroom. Ultimately, I challenge writing teachers to approach alternative writing assessment through a *metis* framework that can support the nonlinear writing processes of neurodivergent writers. Such a pedagogical framework moves alternative writing assessment discourse beyond its traditional focus on labor-based grading contracts. Instead, a *metis* framework opens the door to alternative assessment practices that constitute a vast world of ungrading (e.g., Blum, 2020). In other words, I argue that *metis* can be a useful lens for crafting alternative

assessment practices that can adapt to the embodied composition processes of neurodivergent writers.

Crucially, this *metis* framework attends to adaptive intelligence as it operates across multiple directions in the writing classroom: the embodied *metis* that neurodivergent students employ in their composing processes and the pedagogical *metis* that instructors must cultivate in designing and implementing assessment practices. Student *metis* manifests through nonlinear organizational strategies, fluctuating productivity patterns, and alternative ways of engaging with writing tasks. In turn, instructor *metis* requires developing the flexibility to recognize these diverse composing practices and to construct assessment structures that can adapt throughout the semester to honor students' shifting access needs.

As a neurodivergent and multiply disabled teacher-scholar at a public regional university in the south, I offer autoethnographic insights into my own use of alternative writing assessment, which is grounded in student-centered revision consultations. Teaching a 4/4 load that includes multiple sections of asynchronous technical and professional writing courses, I work within institutional constraints that require numerical grading while also serving students who often balance full-time employment with their studies. Throughout this article, I discuss pedagogical examples from my technical and professional writing courses that demonstrate *metis* in practice. These include my use of "soft deadlines" that provide structure while allowing for temporal flexibility, assessment practices that emphasize multimodality, student choice, reflection, and modified point values that adapt to student needs throughout the semester. While I aim to encourage writing teachers to embrace *metis* as a pedagogical framework for approaching alternative writing assessment, I do not mean to provide an all-encompassing solution to the inequities found amongst various types of assessment practices. Rather, I seek to theorize *metis* as a potential consideration for "cripping" (Inoue, 2023; Price, 2011) alternative writing assessment and for adapting to the rapidly shifting rhetorical terrain of collegiate writing.

Neurodiversity

The neurodiversity movement is complex. Walker's (2021) *Neuroqueer Heresies* provides a useful starting point for understanding various interconnected terms associated with the movement. Walker (2021) defines neurodiversity as

> the diversity among minds, the infinite variation in neurocognitive functioning within our species. On the other hand, 'neurodivergent, sometimes abbreviated as ND, means having a mind that functions in ways which diverge significantly from the dominant societal standards of 'normal.' (p. 34)

For neurodiversity scholars and activists such as Walker, neurodiversity emphasizes that the concept of a normal brain is socially constructed by society. At their core, terms such as *neurodivergent* and *neurodiverse* refer to "all whose brains position them as being somehow different from the neurotypical run of the mill" (Price, 2011, p. 16). This can include those on the autism spectrum, as well as those with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), bipolar disorder, and obsessive compulsive disorder, among other conditions that deviate from normative standards.

Traditionally, academic discourse on neurodiversity has primarily focused on ADHD and autism. As scholars and activists such as Price (2011, 2024) and Pryal (2017) note, the neurodiversity movement needs to be more inclusive of those with mental health conditions such as anxiety disorders, mood disorders, and personality disorders. Of course, even using the words

condition or *disorder* risks falling into what Walker (2021) refers to as the "pathology paradigm" in which "the neurotypical mind is enthroned as the 'normal' ideal against which all other types of minds are measured" (p. 6). I simply use this terminology to emphasize the importance of inclusivity in discussing neurodiversity.

I also want to emphasize that neurodiversity doesn't exist in a vacuum. Often, neurodivergent individuals represent multiple intersectional identities that can compound cultural ableism and stigma. As Yergeau (2018) notes, "the logics of ableism are intertwined with the logics of racism, classism, and heterosexism" (p. 5). This echoes the core intersectional ideals behind the disability justice movement (Invalid, 2016) and Schalk's (2022) methodology in *Black Disability Politics*, which envision a more inclusive future for disability activism. In highlighting the transformative potential of incorporating a *metis* framework into our discussions about alternative writing assessment, I aim to slowly build towards that future.

Alternative Writing Assessment and Neurodiversity

Given this understanding of neurodiversity, it's crucial to examine how our assessment practices either support or constrain neurodivergent ways of engaging with writing. While rhetoric and composition scholars such as Price (2011, 2024), Dolmage (2014, 2017), Yergeau (2018), Browning (2014), and Wood (2017) have addressed neurodiversity through a disability studies framework, little progress has been made to specifically address "the ways in which our pedagogies impact neurodivergent student populations" (Kryger & Zimmerman, 2020, p. 5). More specifically, neurodivergent students are often neglected in conversations about alternative assessment.

By design, alternative writing assessment practices are intended to be anti-oppressive. Even though scholars have attempted to address inequities in writing assessment practices since the early twentieth century (Cowan, 2020), labor-based grading contracts have dominated recent discourse on alternative writing assessment. Asao Inoue's monographs, *Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies* (2015) and *Labor Based Grading Contracts* (2019), brought the practice of labor-based contract grading to the forefront of writing studies discourse. Inoue (2015, 2019) argues that traditional, qualitative assessment ecologies privilege a "white habitus" grounded in standard academic English. In response, Inoue offers a model of contract grading in which time and labor are key components of assessment.

While Inoue's model of contract grading is meant to promote classroom equity, scholars such as Kryger and Zimmerman (2020) and Carillo (2021) argue that labor-based grading contracts can perpetuate harm against disabled and neurodivergent students. For Kryger and Zimmerman (2020), labor-based grading contracts create inequality for neurodivergent students by "disrupting the dynamics of the classroom activity system" and by not accounting for the "time/labor of adjusting to, putting trust into, and understanding this new activity system" (p. 7). More fundamentally, labor-based grading contracts assume that time and labor function similarly across all bodyminds. Consider a student experiencing a depressive episode who finds it impossible to track time accurately, making time-based labor calculations meaningless or harmful. Or picture a student with executive functioning differences who completes high-quality work in intense bursts followed by periods of necessary rest—patterns that don't align with steady, measurable labor expectations. These neurodivergent rhythms are not deficits to be accommodated, but alternative ways of engaging with intellectual work that deserve pedagogical recognition.

Such disruptions in classroom activity systems can be particularly challenging for neurodivergent students who often thrive on predictability and routine—something I myself understand as a neurodivergent learner. When I first introduced the concept of contract grading to my technical and professional writing class in Fall 2024, students expressed concern about calculating their final, university mandated grade in the course. This also caused a great deal of anxiety on my end as I navigated the learning management system (LMS) at my new institution. Recognizing that neurodivergent students often need clear structure and transparency to feel secure in new systems, I created a separate module in our classroom's LMS, as well as several videos, explaining the grading system in our class. I also invited students to discuss any questions about my grading system during individual consultations.

Ellen C. Carillo builds upon Kryger and Zimmerman's (2020) concerns in *The Hidden Inequities in Labor-Based Contract Grading* (2021), arguing that traditional labor-based grading contracts can disadvantage neurodivergent students who experience time and labor differently than their neurotypical peers. Drawing from Tara Wood's (2017) conception of "cripping time," Carillo suggests engagement-based contract grading systems that remove normative time expectations.

Inoue (2023) addresses many of Carillo's challenges in *Cripping Labor-Based Grading for More Equity in Literacy Courses*, suggesting modifications such as implementing an A-default grading system and emphasizing pedagogical flexibility. However, Inoue (2023) admits that these solutions are far from perfect, noting the "paradox" that "too often, the majority's decisions hurt or ignore the needs of the minority" (p. 40). While Inoue's suggestions for cripping labor-based grading contracts begin to address these concerns, it is important to remember that labor-based grading contracts are not the only type of alternative writing assessment. If flexibility is a central component of cripping labor-based grading, how can we account for all the necessary adaptations that must be made throughout a semester?

Suppose a student is diagnosed with bipolar disorder in the middle of the semester and is put on a heavy sedative medication that makes in-person classroom attendance difficult. If in-person classroom attendance has already been embedded in a classroom's assessment ecology, how much flexibility does labor-based grading allow? As a neurodivergent learner myself, I'm particularly attuned to these possible complications, which is why I foreground adaptive and flexible pedagogy in my classroom. Throughout the semester, a classroom ecology can drastically shift as students move through stages of neurodivergence or disability, and they may experience trauma, depression, and anxiety. This is why I turn next to ungrading as an expansive term that can be used to foreground accessibility in writing assessment. I focus here on *metis* pedagogy as one framework for creating more responsive learning environments—a type of ungrading practice that can help crip alternative assessment by making approaches more adaptive to student needs as they emerge throughout the semester.

Ungrading and Expanding Alternative Writing Assessment

These limitations of labor-based grading contracts point toward the need for more flexible, adaptive approaches to alternative assessment, which the ungrading movement offers. I use the term ungrading to denote a specific subset of alternative assessment practices—those that fundamentally question the role of grades themselves rather than simply modifying how grades are assigned. While labor-based grading contracts represent one important form of ungrading, the movement encompasses a much broader range of practices.

In their introduction to *Failing Sideways: Queer Possibilities for Writing Assessment,* West-Puckett, Caswell, and Banks (2023) urge scholars to "resist seeing assessment frameworks and the critiques writing practitioners have made of them as representing the simple binary of qualitative vs. quantitative" (p. 26). Too often, these conversations become trapped in debates between qualitative and quantitative approaches. However, the primary distinction lies not in what we assess, but in how we express that assessment: through descriptive feedback or numerical grades. I argue that the ungrading movement provides scholars with a useful framework for constructing alternative pedagogical practices by challenging the role grades should play in our classrooms and by "breaking out of linear or flattened thinking models" (West-Puckett et al., 2023, p. 27)—the very models that a *metis* pedagogy resists through its emphasis on sideways and backward movement.

Popularized by scholars such as Susan Blum (2020), ungrading denotes a movement to question the role of grades in educational settings. As Megan Von Bergen (2023) explains, ungrading refers to an "umbrella term" used to "capture a range of alternatives to the conventional practice of awarding points or letter grades to students work based on the perceived quality of that work" (p. 4). Ungrading scholars such as Blum (2020) and Von Bergen (2023) emphasize that teachers often remix multiple alternative assessment practices to meet their own pedagogical needs. For example, Moroz and Sarraf (2024) describe using a "hybrid" grading system that incorporates elements of both Inoue's model of contract grading (2015) and Danielewicz and Elbow's (2009) unilateral grading contracts.

The *metis* framework I employ emphasizes that "ungrading has the potential to be a more accessible assessment practice" (Ubbesen et al., 2024 p. 357). While labor-based grading contracts are an important component of the ungrading movement, it is important to remember that they don't represent the entirety of the movement. Similar to the authors of *Failing Sideways* (West-Puckett et al., 2023), I see alternative writing assessment as multi-faceted and more than the qualitative vs. quantitative binary debates. Moving forward, I encourage the field of writing studies to continually expand the parameters of alternative writing assessment research to include a wide array of ungrading practices that can be remixed and adapted across various classroom ecologies.

A more nuanced approach to alternative assessment embodies *metis* itself—the adaptive, sideways movement that responds to situational needs rather than adhering to predetermined formulas. Rather than committing wholly to labor-based contracts, a *metis* framework encourages writing teachers to move fluidly between approaches as classroom ecologies shift and student needs emerge. Such an approach recognizes that no single alternative assessment method can address the full spectrum of access needs that exist in our classrooms.

Metis and Rhetorical Embodiment

This adaptive, sideways movement that characterizes equitable alternative assessment practices aligns closely with the ancient concept of *metis*, a form of embodied intelligence that has particular relevance for supporting neurodivergent learners. The term *metis* has a rich and storied history. As Detienne and Vernant (1978) note in *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*, "metis is a type of intelligence and of thought, a way of knowing" that can be most readily applied "to situations which are transient, shifting, disconcerting, and ambiguous, situations which do not lend themselves to precise measurement, exact calculation, or rigorous logic" (p. 4). Such an alternative way of knowing and being in the world lends itself to a critical examination of disability and difference and allows us to reconceptualize how we assess student learning.

As Dolmage (2014) argues in his groundbreaking work *Disability Rhetoric*, *metis* can be viewed as an embodied sense of adaptive intelligence prone to "sideways and backwards movement" (p. 5). Such a conceptualization of *metis* is grounded in a disability studies perspective that "challenges the idea that disability is a deficit or defect that should be cured or remedied" (Dolmage, 2014, p. 20). Take the example of Hephaestus, the Greek god of fire and metallurgy who is often associated with *metis*. In many classical depictions, he is shown to have several physical disabilities, including crooked feet. While Hephaestus's disabilities could be considered deficits, Dolmage sees them as vital to the god's unconventional approach to metallurgy. To put it another way, Hephaestus works with his disabilities to hone his craft, much like how we might work with neurodivergent students' approaches to learning rather than against them in our assessment practices.

This situates *metis* as a component of reconstructive "disability historiography," which recognizes that "the body of history has been shaped to look like an idealized human body" (Dolmage 2014, p. 16). This type of history reconstructs dominant narratives—including conceptualizations of *metis*—to feature bodyminds that stray from normative subject positionalities. As Shannon Walters (2014) reminds us, "metis is both a cognitive and embodied practice ripe for the use of non-normative rhetors" (p. 122). In turn, *metis* is a generative concept for valuing the nonlinear rhetorical composing practices of neurodivergent writers.

What then separates *metis* from traditional iterations of flexibility and adaptation? The answer lies in its emphasis on rhetorical embodiment. As Debra Hawhee (2004) explains in *Bodily Arts: Rhetoric and Athletics in Ancient Greece*, multiple models of *metis* "suggest a modality of response" that returns "to the body as the place where *metis* becomes apparent." For scholars such as Hawhee and Dolmage, *metis* is inextricably tied to the body's way of knowing and being in the world. While *metis* can manifest itself in different forms, "as a kind of intelligence, *metis* cannot be thought separately from bodily state" (Hawhee, 2004, "Animal Tricksters" section).

The flexibility and adaptation I foreground centers the body's role in the writing process. For example, as a neurodivergent writer, I often feel intense sensations of warmth when I'm panicking about writing. This can signal that I'm in an unproductive state and need to adapt my writing goals for a particular day. Conversely, when I feel my body temperature lower to a tolerable state, I know that I'll be able to temporarily focus for long enough to have a productive writing session. Bringing this culture of productive adaptation, flexibility, and bodily awareness into our classrooms can make these spaces more welcoming for neurodivergent writers with non-normative writing processes and fluctuating periods of productivity.

Just as Hephaestus crafted his metalwork through adaptive intelligence that honored rather than overcame his embodied differences, a *metis*-informed assessment framework provides an embodied approach to reconstructing how we understand and evaluate student writing. This framework attends to *metis* as it operates across multiple directions: students employ *metis* through their nonlinear composing processes and alternative organizational strategies, while teachers must cultivate *metis* through flexible assessment structures that can adapt to honor students' fluctuating access needs. In other words, equitable assessment requires both recognizing the diverse forms of *metis* students bring to writing and developing the instructor's own capacity for adaptive, responsive pedagogy that works with—rather than against—the embodied ways students navigate their learning processes.

Autoethnography as Method: A Neurodivergent Positionality

Having theorized *metis* as an embodied framework for alternative assessment, I now turn to my own positionality to clarify how autoethnography functions as methodology in this work—not merely as personal narrative, but as a deliberate methodological choice that positions neurodivergent embodied knowledge as legitimate scholarly inquiry. My autoethnographic approach demonstrates *metis* in practice by foregrounding how my own sideways, adaptive composing process both informs and validates the assessment framework I offer here.

As a neurodivergent writer, I utilize autoethnographic methodology in much of my scholarship (Hizer, 2023). I'm indebted to scholars such as Christina Cedillo (2018), Logan Smilges (2021), Jo Hsu (2022), and many others who rely on autoethnographic positionality in their writings. Autoethnography has long served as a valuable research methodology in writing studies and has allowed writing teachers to more deeply connect with their students (Jackson & McKinney, 2022).

I share my own lived experiences as a neurodivergent teacher-scholar to begin thinking about what a *metis*-infused pedagogy might look like in a classroom ecology grounded in alternative assessment practices. My own approach to writing and scholarship is deeply tied to *metis*. Drew Holladay (2020) refers to "pieces of writing in which the author advocates for disability inclusion by narrating personal experiences of difference, discrimination, or exclusion in higher education" as "performances of *metis*" (para. 2). Of course, such performances of *metis* are inextricably tied to the complexities of disability disclosure (Kerschbaum et al., 2018), and multiply marginalized faculty and students are especially vulnerable when sharing their experiences.

Ultimately, performances of *metis* can range from personal narratives advocating for disability inclusion to adaptive learning practices. If we are to make our writing classrooms as inclusive as possible, it is imperative to value neurodivergent writers and their non-linear approaches to composing. This means crafting alternative assessment practices that are flexible enough to meet the needs of all students, especially those who struggle to produce writing that adheres to normative standards.

To illustrate what this means in practice, I turn now to my own neurodivergent writing process, which directly informs how I approach teaching and assessing writing. I know that a one-size-fits-all approach to writing instruction can be problematic and that we must create a "culture of access" in our classrooms (Brewer et al., 2014). This is why flexibility and adaptation are key components of my composition pedagogy.

As a neurodivergent writer, I often struggle to translate my thoughts to normative language. I can conduct research and write quickly. However, organizing my thoughts into an article or chapter can be difficult. It can feel embarrassing; I often ask myself why the actual process of composing a text takes far less time than organizing that text? When I approach a research project, I begin by crafting a reading list and then spend several weeks diving into this literature. Then, I create two separate documents: one for freewriting ideas and another for writing a literature review.

Often, I need to write myself into what I'm writing before I can even begin to conduct a literature review. By "writing myself," I mean reflecting on my own experiences and ideas about the texts that I've just read. If I'm in a stage of hyperfocus, I might transition to the literature review page. If my thoughts are scattered, I'll toggle back and forth between the two documents. The

actual writing itself only takes me a few days; however, the organizational elements—which means working to integrate my informal writing with my formal writing—can take me weeks on end.

More specifically, I struggle with genre expectations and can find myself spending hours reading through examples of various writing genres until I feel ready to even approach organization. While this might seem typical of the writing process, I want to highlight the ways in which my obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and ADHD interact with one another to make breaking my writing into coherent sections incredibly difficult. There are days in which my frustration surrounding organization will become so bad that I'll be unable to eat. I'll start repeating myself and reading over my manuscript for hours, only to end the session in tears.

Sometimes, my ADHD medication will wear off earlier than expected, and I'll experience debilitating depression for hours. I'll look at the computer screen and obsess how to perfectly organize a manuscript. I typically oscillate between accelerated periods of writing in a hyper-focused state, followed by hours of obsessing over the best order to present my ideas to a neurotypical audience. For example, after several months of intensive research, I wrote the content for this article in a matter of days. However, even though I spent weeks obsessing over the organization, I still struggled to organize my writing to fit the normative expectations—such as having clear transitions and section breaks—of an academic article. The perfectionism becomes a trap: the more I obsess over getting the structure exactly right, the more paralyzed I become. Essentially, I'm caught between my natural, nonlinear thinking patterns and the linear expectations of academic discourse.

This embodied experience of writing directly shapes how I approach assessment itself. When I assess student work, I cannot unsee the ways traditional assessment practices have punished my own writing process—penalizing me for "taking too long" to organize, for needing to write myself into understanding before producing "acceptable" academic prose, for the hours spent paralyzed by perfectionism that traditional rubrics would read as procrastination. Traditional assessment measures what I produce in a fixed timeframe against standardized criteria, but it cannot account for the oscillating productivity, the sensory overwhelm of organization, or the embodied toll of translating nonlinear thinking into linear academic discourse. This is precisely why *metis*—with its emphasis on adaptive, embodied intelligence—offers a more promising framework for evaluating neurodivergent writers. My assessment practices emerge directly from this understanding: if my own productive chaos deserves pedagogical respect rather than correction, then so do the varied composing processes of my students.

My own lived experience of fluctuating productivity and perfectionism is precisely why I feel such deep empathy for neurodivergent students who may be navigating similar challenges in their own writing processes. When I see a student struggling with organization or missing deadlines, I recognize that their difficulties might stem not from lack of effort, but from the same kind of oscillating patterns I experience—periods of intense productivity followed by stretches of decision paralysis, all while trying to translate their thoughts into forms that normative academic expectations will recognize as "successful."

I share my experiences as a neurodivergent writer to emphasize my adaptive approach to pedagogy, which is continually shifting in the currently contentious landscape of higher education. I believe that a *metis*-infused pedagogy can make us more attuned to the adaptations necessary for teaching a multiplicity of bodyminds, both neurodivergent and neurotypical alike. The assessment

framework I offer centers the diverse composing practices of neurodivergent writers and allows for maximum flexibility throughout the semester.

Metis Pedagogy

My emphasis on embodied approaches to assessment raises an important question: How then does a *metis* framework differ from Inoue's idea of "cripping" labor-based grading? In essence, a *metis* framework complements Inoue's work by foregrounding the importance of rhetorical embodiment in neurodivergent writing practices. Incorporating *metis* into our pedagogy allows writing teachers to build upon Inoue's work by further centering the body's role in deconstructing normative expectations in the writing classroom.

As Dolmage notes in his introduction to the 2020 special issue of *Disability Studies Quarterly* on the work of *metis* in the writing classroom, "metis provides a theory of embodiment that centers disability rather than marginalizing it" (Dolmage, 2020, para. 4). When applied to the writing classroom, *metis* provides a framework for crafting transformative pedagogical practices that challenge the idea that composition is a one size fits all endeavor. For Dolmage (2020), the "college classroom" is "a place where disembodiment, traditional logic, straight, binarized, and transactional pedagogies have held sway for far too long" (para. 20). In turn, *metis* provides a useful framework for conceptualizing alternative writing pedagogies that can adapt to the writing practices of neurodivergent students.

Several other short-form articles in the special issue (Kamperman 2020; Wood 2020) begin to illustrate what incorporating *metis* into the rhetoric and writing classroom can entail. For example, Hillary Selznick (2020) describes developing a "metis pedagogy" that centered around multimodality and embodied writing practices such as reflective writing. However, a *metis* pedagogy extends beyond mere reflection and multimodality to cultivate learning environments that encourage students to draw upon their own embodied knowledge, feelings, and thoughts that directly impact how they see the world. Rather than simply asking students to reflect on their writing processes or compose in multiple modes, *metis* pedagogy invites students to become participatory writers who engage their full embodied experience in meaning-making. Selznick (2020) continues, "to make writing crooked, instead of asking students to compose primarily traditional, straight, linear, alphabetic texts that privilege meaning-making through written discourse while remaining inaccessible to diverse users and audiences, they composed with multiple modes of mediums" (para.10). Such practices aim to challenge how we think about writing, productivity, and normativity by centering the embodied ways students experience and navigate the world through their composition processes.

In the same special issue, Tara Wood (2020) argues that a pedagogy grounded in *metis* can "help students identify what types of adaptations [are needed] in their own writing processes" (para. 13). For instance, Wood (2020) urges her students to actively think how they work through and with their writing anxiety. This approach allows writing teachers "to make deliberate room for [anxiety] to occur in our classrooms and to learn from our students who enact such performances" (Wood, 2020, para. 13). In other words, a *metis* pedagogy holds space for variations of embodied difference such as anxiety.

While these authors have done important work in theorizing the potential for using *metis* as a pedagogical framework, this framework has yet to be applied to alternative writing assessment. A *metis*-infused approach to alternative writing assessment allows us to account for the embodied,

sometimes chaotic, nature of writing that can be heightened for neurodivergent writers. As Hubrig and Barritt (2024) note, neurodivergent writers often stray from traditional notions of linear writing. Hubrig and Barritt (2024) draw from Griffin Keedy and Amy Vidali's (2016) concept of "productive chaos," which "means allowing and even anticipating writing not as a formulaic process but as a highly personal and productive, if sometimes painful creative act" (p. 26). Such periods of "productive chaos" are constantly in-flux and are tied to the multiplicity of embodied composing tactics neurodivergent writers utilize.

For example, I must prepare both my body and mind to write. As someone who has severe gastrointestinal issues that are exacerbated by anxiety, my writing often takes place near—or even in—a bathroom. To write, I must be carefully attuned to how my body is feeling on a particular day. I also must meticulously time my medicine to maximize my ability to focus for long periods of time. As I detail throughout this piece, my experience as a neurodivergent writer is inseparable from my disabled bodymind. In other words, my own orientation to "productive chaos" (Keedy & Vidali, 2016) always seeps into how I approach the teaching of writing, which is grounded in a commitment to equitable assessment.

Implementing *Metis*: Alternative Assessment in Practice

This embodied understanding of my own neurodivergent writing processes directly informs how I construct alternative assessment practices grounded in a *metis* framework. In what follows, I detail how *metis* principles—adaptation, flexibility, and embodied awareness—manifest in my actual grading policies and classroom interactions. Rather than treating these as separate considerations, I show how a *metis* framework integrates theory and practice, allowing assessment structures to remain responsive to the fluctuating access needs of students throughout the semester.

My experience implementing ungrading was filled with moments of adaptation. In my technical and professional writing classes, I continually revised my approach to grading after facilitating student feedback, especially during revision consultations with students. My own policy is situated at the intersection of unilateral contract grading (Danielewicz & Elbow, 2009) and the ungrading movement writ large (Von Bergen, 2023) and is experimental and continuously developing. The policy I put in the syllabus for my Fall 2024 asynchronous technical and professional writing course read:

> This course operates using a Contract Grading System. Students earn points for completing coursework on time and according to instructions; there are 100 possible points. Points are given as a cumulative total, not an average. You are guaranteed 80 points, or a "B" in the course for submitting earnest, plagiarism-free attempts at all Baseline Point (Required Assignments). In order to get higher than a "B" in the course, you'll need to complete some (or all) of the optional assignments. This will require you to meet with me during my office hours to discuss and mutually agree on how to revise and resubmit 1-2 of your Major Writing Assignments according to the highest standards of professional quality.

As the statement emphasizes, assignments are separated into "B" Baseline assignments and "A" Advancement assignments. Students who complete all "B" Baseline assignments are guaranteed 80 points in the class, or a "B" grade. To earn an "A" grade, students must book one or two revision consultation meetings with me and submit a significantly revised version of one of their major writing assignments. While each revision opportunity is worth up to 10 points, students aren't guaranteed all 10 points just for submitting the revisions.

Of course, I'm well-aware that my quantitative assessment of these revision assignments might seem to work against the principles of ungrading. As a first-year tenure-track assistant professor, I was worried about giving completion credit for every assignment since grade distributions are factored into faculty member's annual evaluations. So, I developed a system in which earning a "B" in the class was straightforward, yet earning an "A" was much more rigorous. However, as a scholar invested in institutional equity and accessibility, the idea of academic rigor has always given me pause. For Inoue (2023), the concept of "crip labor" provides a framework with which we can reevaluate our own grading ecologies. He notes:

> Crip labor can release us from thinking that any labor expectations (time on tasks, word counts, due dates, etc.) provided in a grading ecology define success, even as paradoxically they create a grand narrative about what success seems to look like that we need in order to resist it. (Inoue, 2023, p. 22)

This concept of crip labor directly challenges traditional notions of academic rigor that I've continually questioned as a scholar invested in institutional equity and accessibility. Inoue's insight reveals the fundamental paradox embedded in alternative assessment: even as we resist normative definitions of success (measured through time on tasks, word counts, due dates), we must acknowledge these metrics to meaningfully critique and move beyond them. In other words, we cannot simply ignore the "grand narrative" of what academic success looks like—we must actively resist it while recognizing its persistent influence on both students and teachers.

In my own practice, this paradox manifests constantly: I must assign point values to revision consultations in order to satisfy institutional grading requirements, even as I recognize that quantifying intellectual growth through points directly contradicts the principles of accessibility I'm trying to enact. The value of Inoue's (2023) concept of crip labor is that it acknowledges this tension rather than pretending we can escape it entirely. We cannot ignore that institutional structures demand measurable outcomes; we must work within and against these constraints simultaneously. This is where *metis* becomes crucial; it provides a framework for navigating these contradictions.

At the start of my first semester implementing alternative assessment, I primarily used word count as a quantitative metric to assign completion credit for the "B" Baseline assignments, a practice that reflects normative assumptions about measurable productivity and rigor. As the semester went on, I began to rely less and less on the word count itself and more on students' reflections about their process of writing the document. For instance, if a student wrote 400 words out of 500 required words on an assignment, I would turn to their reflection to see why they wrote what they did. If they explained their thinking, I would give them full credit. This shift recognizes that meaningful engagement with course material cannot be captured through arbitrary length requirements that privilege normative expectations of rigor.

This approach, while still imperfect, allowed me to be more flexible and to adapt to students' needs throughout the semester. For example, when a student informed me roughly a month into the semester that I'd incorrectly tabulated the point totals in the course—the "B" Baseline assignments were only worth 75 points, instead of 80—I seized this as a teaching moment. Rather than quietly correcting my error, I transparently added an additional discussion post worth 5 "A" Advancement points to our course schedule. I also uploaded an additional video to our course's homepage that disclosed my own embodied sense of "brain fog," acknowledging how this cognitive state had contributed to my calculation error. In this video, I encouraged students to be transparent with me

if they had any concerns or confusion about how I would assess this additional assignment or any other assignments. This disclosure represents another example of bringing embodied experiences into the classroom and demonstrates how *metis* factors into my course decisions regarding assessment. By modeling vulnerability about my own neurodivergent experiences, I created space for students to similarly honor their own embodied ways of knowing and learning.

This approach demonstrates how *metis* can guide our assessment decisions without eliminating structure entirely. Rather than abandoning all structure—which can create anxiety for neurodivergent students who thrive on predictability—this embodied approach to assessment allows us to maintain supportive frameworks while freeing ourselves and our students from arbitrary measures that privilege normative, abled ways of engaging with academic work. I share these examples of adaptation and failure to emphasize the importance of flexibility to alternative writing assessment. Instead of seeing failure as failure, I see such moments as "moving *sideways*" (West-Puckett et al., 2023, p. 34) across a shifting classroom ecology. As a teacher, I'm constantly adapting to my own fluctuating embodied awareness throughout the semester. For instance, when I first drafted my syllabus, my body was extremely tense and in an extreme state of anxiety as I worked to become comfortable at a new institution; however, as I became more comfortable at my new institution, I began to relax and hold more space for the adaptive classroom culture I aimed to cultivate.

My classroom culture of *metis*, which I aim to model for my students through flexibility, adaptation, and sideways movement, allowed me to use this instance as a moment of productive failure. In the previously mentioned video I posted shortly after I'd corrected the grading mistake, I acknowledged my own struggles with feelings of anxiety and emphasized the importance of cultivating a kind and flexible classroom environment. In other words, I wanted students to see a connection between my pedagogical policies and embodied awareness about working with anxiety. This commitment to transparency and adaptation represents the core of what I call a *metis* pedagogical framework—one that responds to the embodied realities of both teacher and students rather than adhering to predetermined assessment structures.

What then does a *metis* framework allow us to do? A *metis* framework gives us the flexibility to adapt to the constantly fluctuating needs and bodyminds of our students, moving to active responsiveness in real time. For example, in my technical and professional writing class, students are tasked with writing a "proposal for activism" that asks them to propose an activist strategy to address a local problem such as food waste or recycling on campus. When several students submitted their proposals in an essay format, instead of in a proposal format, I faced a choice: deduct points for not completing the assignment or adapt my assessment approach to meet students where they were. A *metis* framework guided me toward the latter. Instead of deducting points for this in my initial assessment, I simply encouraged students to make a revision appointment with me where we could discuss how to reformat their paper to look more like a professional proposal. In these meetings, I often shared how I struggled with formatting and organization myself as an undergraduate, especially within the time and space of a sixteen-week class. This disclosure of my neurodivergent writing process fosters a type of embodied solidarity, recognizing that what traditional pedagogy frames as writing 'problems' are actually different ways of engaging with composition that deserve pedagogical respect rather than correction.

This type of pedagogy allows us to "crip" writing instruction so that neurodivergent students who experience time and space differently can thrive. For Wood (2017), traditional writing

classrooms rely on "temporal conditions of production" that prioritize normative ways of thinking (p. 261). Instead, a *metis* pedagogy accounts for inherent differences amongst students and holds space for adapting our pedagogy throughout the semester. Inevitably, adapting the assignment requirements for the proposals changed how I assessed the revisions. More specifically, I focused less on formatting and document design when assessing the revisions. Instead, I assessed the revisions based on the conversations I had with students in their revision consultations regarding their academic and career goals. I also allowed students to submit multiple versions of their assignments until they received full credit.

If we can begin to more fully appreciate the alternative ways of knowing and being employed by our disabled and neurodivergent students, we can learn how to adjust our own pedagogical practices for a variety of learners. As Dolmage (2014) writes, "unlike the forward march of logic, *metis* is characterized by sideways and backward movement" (p. 5). A *metis* pedagogy is flexible enough to account for the nonlinear composition practices of neurodivergent writers while also detailed enough to provide a comprehensive framework for students who perform better with clear guidelines. Such a framework transforms how we approach assessment itself, creating space for both adaptive flexibility and structural support.

Even so, I want to note that my pedagogy isn't perfect by any means; I also don't aim to suggest that the ways in which the field has implemented alternative writing assessment in the past have been wrong or misguided. Rather, I want to emphasize the importance of using *metis* as a guiding heuristic moving forward as we continue to craft our ungrading practices. A *metis* pedagogical framework for alternative assessment foregrounds multimodality, temporal flexibility, and reflective writing. Each characteristic falls under a larger umbrella of pedagogical adaptation, which I define as the willingness to adjust one's pedagogical practices throughout the semester to make a class more accessible.

Below, I illustrate three components of a *metis*-infused pedagogy that can be generative in crafting our alternative writing assessment policies. I offer several narrative-based autoethnographic insights detailing how I rely on a *metis* pedagogy to develop the ungrading practices in my classroom ecology. The components below are not meant to be all-inclusive; rather, they are meant to further demonstrate how the concept of *metis* can allow writing teachers to think more critically about the multiplicity of composing practices that exist in our classrooms.

Three Components of *Metis* Pedagogy: Multimodality, Temporal Flexibility, and Reflective Writing

To illustrate how *metis* functions in practice, I detail three interconnected components that characterize this pedagogical approach: multimodality, temporal flexibility, and reflective writing. Each component emerges from the adaptive, embodied intelligence that *metis* represents. In practice, a *metis* pedagogy foregrounds accessibility by making space for adaptation. Meaning, a *metis* pedagogy is designed to meet students where they are at, even if it means adjusting assessment expectations or assignment criteria. As a neurodivergent writer myself, I understand when medication side effects make it too difficult to concentrate or when thoughts don't appear in a linear, normative fashion. In turn, I bring this sense of embodied empathy into the writing classroom.

The Midterm Presentation assignment I use in my asynchronous technical and professional writing classes is a useful example for illustrating what it means to make space for pedagogical adaptation (see supplemental materials). This assignment asks students to complete a 10–15-minute presentation demonstrating their understanding of at least two course topics, with the choice to compose a video presentation, podcast, or other creative medium. Categorized as a "B" Baseline assignment, students who complete the assignment automatically receive full credit. While the presentation is technically due during Week 8 of a 16-week semester, I allow students to submit the presentation up until the final day of classes, honoring both the need for structure and the reality of fluctuating access needs that characterize a *metis*-infused ungrading pedagogy.

Multimodality

Multimodality is an essential element of a *metis* pedagogy. However, it is important to first recognize that writing can take place across a variety of contexts and spaces. Scholars in the field of rhetoric and composition (Dolmage, 2017; Shipka 2011; Yergeau et al., 2013) have long argued for the importance of multimodality in the writing classroom. As a key component of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), multimodality encourages students to compose across a variety of mediums. Allison Hitt (2021) notes, "multimodal pedagogies that encourage the use of technology to compose and learn can create opportunities for students who do not engage with normative teaching and composing practices" (p. 46). In my classes, I emphasize that writing exists across a variety of mediums and modalities. In turn, I want students to know that the way I assess their writing—which includes digital composition projects such as the midterm—respects a multiplicity of composing practices.

The assessment criteria I use for the midterm assignment is intentionally flexible; as long as students complete the assignment, they receive full credit. The four evaluation criteria demonstrate this flexibility in action: while I specify that presentations must "focus on at least two course themes" and be "at least 10 minutes long," I deliberately avoid defining what constitutes "detailed understanding" or what "standards of professional excellence" should look like. Rather than creating rigid rubrics that privilege particular modes of expression or normative approaches to demonstrating one's knowledge, these broad criteria allow students to work with their embodied strengths and adaptive intelligence. The emphasis on completion over perfection acknowledges that the learning process itself—the sideways movement of exploration and multimodal experimentation—is more valuable than adherence to predetermined standards of academic performance.

The variety of students' multimodal presentations allowed them to draw from their own embodied knowledge in diverse ways. For example, some students created podcasts that incorporated personal narratives, and others developed interactive videos that demonstrated technical concepts. Many crafted detailed PowerPoint presentations with voice overs that reflected their professional presentation skills, and several conducted interviews with friends or family members to explore workplace communication dynamics. These presentations reinforced students' technical communication skills alongside their ability to embody their understanding of the course material.

The multimodal midterm assignment embraced the flexibility that alternative assessment provides by allowing students to creatively demonstrate what they'd learned in the first half of the class. In constructing my own ungrading assessment practices, I aim to give students ample

opportunities to draw from their innate cognitive abilities and to be aware of their thoughts and feelings throughout the writing process. While the written assignment instructions do specify that videos and/or podcasts should be 10-15 minutes in length, I encouraged students to be creative and reach out if they'd like to discuss using a different creative medium such as a musical performance or painting. Such a pedagogical praxis emphasizes embodied awareness, which is essential in a classroom culture that prioritizes *metis*. In turn, both neurodivergent and neurotypical students alike are given the opportunity to demonstrate what they've learned in a modality in which they're comfortable.

Temporal Flexibility

Temporal flexibility, or flexibility that follows the principles of "crip time" and rejects normative timeframes, is also a critical component of a *metis* pedagogy that can shape our assessment practices. In particular, I allow students to resubmit any "B" Baseline assignment—including the midterm—until the final day of classes. My classroom operates on "crip time" (Price, 2011) and follows the flexibility of "crip labor" that "is meant to be wide, broad, open-ended, and dynamic, ever evolving over a semester as we learn more about ourselves and each other" (Inoue, 2023, p. 22). However, I've learned that many neurodivergent students find completely flexible deadline policies to be too unstructured, since they often thrive on predictability and routine—something I understand from my own embodied experiences as a neurodivergent learner, writer, and teacher. My personal need for structure and predictability, combined with my understanding of how anxiety can be triggered by too much uncertainty, directly informs this pedagogical choice. To address this, I implement soft deadlines that provide structure while maintaining accessibility. The assignments still have due dates listed in Canvas, which helps students who need clear temporal boundaries to organize their work. However, I work individually with students when they need extensions, creating a system that honors both the need for structure and the reality of fluctuating access needs.

Reflective Writing

A *metis* pedagogy also foregrounds reflection as a tool for embodied awareness and adaptive learning that can be used to assess student writing. In my classes, reflection assignments serve not merely as completion requirements but as opportunities for students to articulate their own composing processes, access needs, and embodied ways of engaging with course material. While I do provide a set of qualitative assessment criteria for each assignment, grades on "B" Baseline assignments are based on completion, which almost always includes a significant student reflection component. If a student submits an assignment that doesn't include a reflection component, I'll typically email the student encouraging them to resubmit the assignment with this component. This ever-evolving, yet admittedly imperfect, approach to assessment is grounded in my commitment to accessible, flexible, and easily adaptable pedagogy situated within an embodied *metis* framework. It ultimately means working with students to adapt to their ever-changing access needs throughout the semester and meeting students where they are.

This aligns with *metis*'s emphasis on adaptive intelligence that responds to shifting circumstances and embodied knowledge. As I mentioned earlier, when I shifted from rigid word count requirements to prioritizing student reflection, I recognized that meaningful engagement

with course material cannot be captured through arbitrary length requirements that privilege normative expectations of rigor.

Student reflections consistently reveal insights that inform my pedagogical adaptations mid-semester, embodying the responsive, sideways movement that characterizes *metis*. Through these reflections, I've learned that some students experience sensory overwhelm from too many assignment details, while others need extensive scaffolding to feel secure in new genres or formats. Some students describe writing most effectively during specific times of day due to medication schedules or family obligations, while others reveal creative composing processes that involve voice-to-text software, collaborative brainstorming with friends, or drafting in non-traditional spaces.

By centering student reflection, I can adapt my instruction to honor these differences without requiring formal disclosure of disability status. This approach creates what I described earlier as embodied solidarity. Rather than viewing neurodivergent writing practices as "problems" to correct, this solidarity recognizes such practices as different ways of engaging with composition that deserve pedagogical respect. The reflection component becomes a space where students can advocate for their own learning needs, while helping me understand how to better support diverse bodyminds in the writing classroom. For instance, many students initially expressed confusion in their reflections about why reflection was necessary, with some writing reflections that were under the word count and lacked the depth I was seeking. Rather than deducting points when assessing these pieces of writing, I provided detailed feedback explaining the importance of thoughtful reflection and offered to meet with students individually if they had any questions. This approach was particularly important for creating space for neurodivergent writers who might not otherwise be comfortable or familiar with reflective writing practices.

Of course, I still occasionally received surface-level reflections, but for the most part, this helped students become more cognitively aware as writers and thinkers. This demonstrates that reflection itself requires practice and that students may need multiple opportunities to develop metacognitive awareness about their own learning processes. Such an approach embodies the *metis* principle of adaptation—responding to what students actually need rather than privileging rigid adherence to assessment criteria.

Future Directions

I want to emphasize that this article merely serves as a starting point for implementing a pedagogical framework grounded in *metis*. In the future, I aim to expand this framework by completing a study investigating student perceptions of ungrading policies across several semesters and sections of technical and professional writing at my university. Admittedly, the framework I've provided in this article is continually evolving. More research needs to be done on the experiences of neurodivergent writers. While this article primarily focused on my own experiences as a neurodivergent writer, I aim to expand this work in future projects. In her new manuscript *Crip Spacetime*, Margaret Price (2024) urges those in higher education to focus on "collective accountability" if we are to increase access for a variety of bodies and minds. As teachers of writing, I believe that we must participate in constant collective accountability if we are to make real change in higher education.

Such accountability denotes what it truly means to crip alternative writing assessment using a *metis* framework. It leaves us accountable as teachers for the harm that traditional assessment

has caused. It leaves us accountable for the ways in which the body is ignored in traditional writing instruction. It leaves us accountable for pushing the field of writing assessment to meet the needs of disabled and neurodivergent students. We still have a great deal of work to do, but my hope is that by bringing *metis* into the conversation about alternative writing assessment, we can continue to develop more equitable and accessible classroom ecologies.

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