The Muse: Misunderstandings and Their Remedies

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ENGL 1010: Expository Writing

ERIC DETWEILER; PAUL EVANS; AMY FANT; AMY HARRIS-ABER; NICH KRAUSE; CAROLINE LAPLUE; CANDIE MOONSHOWER; KATE PANTELIDES; AND JENNIFER WILSON

Contents

The Muse: Misunderstandings and Their Remedies

In *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1936), I.A. Richards posits that rhetoric "should be a study of misunderstanding and its remedies."

In this book, we adopt this exploratory orientation to communication, inviting you too to consider writing across contexts, its many consequent misunderstandings, and satisfying moments of remedy.

Collaborative Authorship

This book is a remix/mash-up of some of the best open-access and Creative Commons licensed texts that address composition. We have included material from *Bad Ideas About Writing* edited by Cheryl E. Ball and Drew M. Loewe; *Try This: Research Methods For Writers* by Jennifer Clary-Lemon, Derek Mueller, and Kate Pantelides; *Writing Spaces* edited by Dana Driscoll, Mary K. Stewart, and Matthew Vetter; and the *Bad Ideas About Writing Podcast* by Kyle Stedman. New content has been created for this text by Kate Pantelides. And this particular mashup was curated by Eric Detweiler, Paul Evans, Amy Fant, Amy Harris-Aber, Caroline LaPlue, Nicholas Krause, Candie Moonshower, Kate Pantelides, Erica Stone, and Jennifer Wilson, with generous support from the MTSU Provost's Office the Tennessee Board of Regents, and the Tenessee Higher Education Council. We wish to extend our sincerest gratitude to all contributors, curators, and donors.

Our Philosophy

Author listings are alphabetical, with the exception of new content developed for this textbook. For new content, we alternate author order to demonstrate the equal nature of our collaboration. One of the central philosophies behind Open Access and Open Educational Resources is the need for and importance of collaboration, as well as the sharing and "remixing" of the best available content. Our text was not written by one or even two authors; rather, it is a collection of a diverse array of viewpoints and writing styles, which, to us, exemplifies one of the many ways that our book is different from a traditional, print, academic textbook. The inclusion of work by multiple authors can also provide a starting point for conversations

in writing class about how writing "actually works in the real world" (Wardle and Downs). In sum, we envision this text as a collection that allows instructors and students to use it in any way that complements their local programs and classrooms.

A Note About Citations

This text was written in and chapters have been edited to reflect the 8th edition of MLA.

About the Authors

Eric Detweiler is an associate professor who's worked and taught at MTSU since 2016. He also directs MTSU's Public Writing and Rhetoric program. He studies, teaches, and writes about the rhetoric and writing education, podcasting, and video games.

Paul Evans is a lecturer at MTSU who teaches dual-enrollment, first-year writing courses. He earned his M.Ed. and M.A. in English degrees at Belmont University. Paul also serves as Director of the Blakney Foundation, a private organization concerned with emergent and early literacy.

Amy Fant began teaching at MTSU in the Fall of 2016. She earned her M.F.A. in Creative Writing at Emerson College, and has taught English in K-12 schools and higher education since 2007.

Amy Harris-Aber specializes in cultural rhetorics with a concentration in the rhetoric of foodways as cultural discourse. In 2020, she earned her doctorate from MTSU.

Caroline LaPlue joined the English Ph.D. program at MTSU in 2021. She received her M.A. from Aberystwyth University in Wales, and has taught English at the high school and collegiate levels. She serves as a graduate student instructor at MTSU and teaches

courses in first-year writing. Caroline's research interests include Victorian literature, linguistics, and writing and literature pedagogy.

Nich Krause joined the Ph.D. program at MTSU in the Fall of 2020. He was born and raised in the mountainous terrain of Colorado, and he received both his B.A. and M.A. in Philosophy at Colorado State University. Nich is a graduate student instructor who spends much of his time expanding his mind in his primary areas of research, which include film theory, feminist pragmatism, and 20th-century American literature.

Candie Moonshower began as a student at MTSU in 1979 and now enjoys teaching there as a Master Instructor in English. She holds B.A. degrees in English and Philosophy and an M.A. in English Literature from MTSU, and an M.F.A. in Writing from Seton Hill University. She has published books for children and is a frequent contributor to local and national publications, including a recent chapter, "Using Structural Examples to Promote Creativity and Engagement," for the pedagogical textbook *Better Practices.* Her research interests include the Vietnam War era and the modern romance genre.

Kate Pantelides is an associate professor at Middle Tennessee State University and served as the Director of General Education English for seven years. She teaches writing, rhetoric, and research classes for undergraduate and graduate students. Her scholarship addresses research methods, feminist rhetorics, and writing program administration. Dr. Pantelides' work has been published in *College Composition and Communication*, *Composition Studies*, *Computers and Composition: An International Journal*, and *Composition Forum*, among other venues. She is the co-author of *Try This: Research Methods For Writers* with Jennifer Clary-Lemon and Derek Mueller.

Erica Stone works at the intersection of technical communication, public rhetoric, and community organizing. Erica's writing can be found in *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy*; *Spark: A 4C4Equality Journal*; *Community Literacy Journal*; *Teaching English in the Two Year College*; *Basic Writing Electronic*

(*BWe*) *Journal*; and various edited collections. In her 2016 TED talk, she urges academics to engage with popular media, publish in open access spaces, and include communities in their research. Read more about her community-based work at www.ericamstone.com.

Jennifer Wilson began teaching English at MTSU in 2006. Prior to joining the English Department, she taught developmental writing as an adjunct. She has an M.A. in English and an M.S. in information systems from MTSU. Currently, she is a doctoral candidate in the Instructional Design and Technology Department at University of Memphis. She teaches first-year writing and sophomore literature courses.

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GETTING STARTED

1. First-Year Writing at MTSU

On behalf of the English Department at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU), WELCOME to English 1010: Expository Writing! MTSU's two-semester, first-year writing (FYW) sequence is designed to support your growth as a reader, writer, and communicator. This course textbook is an Open Educational Resource (**OER**) designed to be accessible to students and faculty and to reduce the overall cost of course materials. This OER was made possible with the generous support of the MTSU Provost's Office, the Tennessee Board of Regents, and the Tennessee Higher Education Council. It includes specific information about writing at MTSU as well as peer-reviewed articles about the writing process.

MTSU FYW Program Outcomes and Learning Objectives

Program Outcomes and Learning Objectives are the foundation for the first-year writing sequence (see Figure 1) at MTSU. Our first-year writing courses have a rhetorical foundation that draws attention to the questions we should ask when **composing** as well as the **conventions**, norms, and expectations of different **genres**. We approach learning about the writing process this way instead of trying to prepare you for each individual genre you will encounter in your academic and professional life because writing contexts are always changing! The genres you're writing in today will likely not be the ones most important to your careers, and you may be composing in totally different genres in the near future, but learning about the thinking, situations, processes, habits, and practices

associated with effective writing will **transfer** to your future writing opportunities. The class is specifically designed to support students writing across the curriculum.

View a copy of our Program Outcomes and Learning Objectives for First-Year Writing Courses at MTSU here.

Figure 1: MTSU FYW Course Sequence

ENGL 1010: Expository Writing focuses on writing processes and ensures that you become a **flexible, rhetorical writer.**

ENGL 1020: Research and Argumentative Writing focuses on research processes and ensures that you become a **responsible, ethical researcher.**
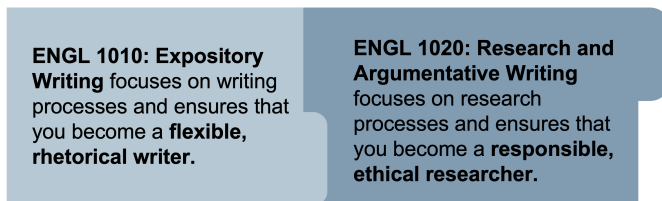
Figure 1: Defining statements for MTSU FYW Course Sequence

Writing in ENGL 1010

The first-year writing sequence at Middle Tennessee State University takes a rhetorical approach to writing. This means that you'll be asked to consider how "good" writing is situational. There are no hard and fast "rules" for writing. Instead, there are conventions or norms and expectations specific to particular contexts. In **ENGL 1010: Expository Writing**, you will practice identifying writing conventions across modes and contexts. In particular, you'll consider your own literacy, practice primary research, key in on different genres or writing situations, and reflect on how to craft effective content for these different opportunities. We hope that by the end of ENGL 1010 you are a confident, flexible writer, ready to take on the challenges of secondary research and information literacy in **ENGL 1020: Research and Argumentative Writing**. The course is designed to help you be a more effective

writer in your selected major, in your future career, and in your personal life.

Writing with a Growth Mindset

Writing with a growth mindset (i.e. seeing challenges as an opportunity for growth instead of failure) is imperative to your success in ENGL 1010. The key is to become flexible and mindful about writing situations and how effective writing changes, depending on the context.

   In the broadest sense, learning how to approach writing situations effectively and how to make the most of our writing experiences is the purpose of the MTSU writing course sequence. One of the most important keys for success in ENGL 1010 and ENGL 1020—as well as for your development as a writer outside of the classroom—is to adopt a growth mindset by grappling with areas of difficulty instead of turning away from challenges. English Studies scholar Kelly Gallagher believes that exploring confusion by determining what accounts for it and discerning how to work through it is what leads to learning. Ultimately, what sets successful readers and writers apart is not an innate ability, but rather the willingness to acknowledge confusion and persevere until an understanding is reached. During your writing and research experiences in ENGL 1020, we encourage you to be open to new ideas and to experiment with your writing. You might be surprised to learn how much you can accomplish and how well you can write when you push yourself to work hard and use the resources designed to support your growth.

Considering the English Major or Minor

You may be wondering if an English major or minor is right for you. If you enjoy ENGL 1010 and 1020 and think that you might want more, there are lots of reasons to pursue a major or minor in English, and there are lots of empirical studies that prove that a major in the liberal arts paves the way for success after graduation (Moody). In general, employers are less concerned with specific majors and more interested in an individual's ability to make independent decisions and communicate effectively. By exploring avenues of inquiry that support their growth as readers, writers, and thinkers, English majors develop their abilities to compete in a market that is, as scholars such as Deborah Brandt remind us, characterized by changing workplace realities.

The English Major Experience

- The major consists of 30 – 36 hours out of the 120 required for graduation. Students have more than 100 courses in the English department from which to choose.
- Upon declaring English as their major, students are matched with a faculty advisor with whom they work closely throughout their tenure as MTSU students.
- English classes are small (15 – 25 seats), so students and teachers get to know each other and can work collaboratively.
- Students have the opportunity to participate in seminars, lectures, internships, study abroad offerings, and online classes.
- Students study more than words on a page. English majors are invited to read and respond to diverse texts, films, images, and audio recordings.
- Peck Hall, the English department home, is located on the historic side of campus, and students often carry conversations from the classroom out into the shade of Walnut

Grove.

2. Guide for Instructors: How To Use This Resource

This open educational resource (**OER**) was originally compiled for use in ENGL 1010 – Expository Writing, the first of Middle Tennessee State University's two first-year writing courses. This brief guide is meant to introduce MTSU writing instructors to this OER, particularly how it is organized and how to navigate it. That said, we realize this resource may prove useful to instructors beyond MTSU, and we hope this guide will be helpful for that audience as well. This book is made for instructors and students, and the content cannot be put behind a paywall or on a website that charges for its use.

This OER is divided into five main sections, all of which are designed with ENGL 1010's course objectives in mind. Each of these sections contains a number of readings related to the section's topic, with many of those readings curated from other open-access texts. Readers are provided with an abstract of the piece, a link to a PDF of the piece (and sometimes a podcast), and then the full text. In addition to the rhetorical chapters, faculty are encouraged to share award-winning essays from the *GEWA Archive*. Beyond these excellent essays, this text does not include writing exemplars and models that you and your students might look to for inspiration in developing writing. You are encouraged to bring in your favorite readings to share with students, many of which can be found in the MTSU Library or through its databases. Because of the nature of OERs – free and open-access resources, such model texts by authors cannot be included.

The linked readings in this text come from different open-access, peer-reviewed collections: *Try This: Research Methods For Writers* by Jennifer Clary-Lemon, Derek Mueller, and Kate Pantelides; *Writing Spaces* edited by Dana Driscoll, Mary K. Stewart, and

Matthew Vetter; the *Bad Ideas About Writing Podcast* by Kyle Stedman; and *Bad Ideas About Writing*, edited by Cheryl E. Ball and Drew M. Loewe. Please note that the titles for all of the *Bad Ideas About Writing* essays are actually misleading myths about writing that circulate. It may be confusing, at first, to see these titles. And it is important to keep in mind the content of each essay dispels these popular beliefs about writing that can be found in the titles, by using research from the field.

   While we hope that the readings in sections I–IV will help students prepare for corresponding writing projects and pursue the course objectives, instructors are of course welcome to assign readings from this OER out of sequence, selecting pieces when and how they see fit given their own approach to ENGL 1010! The following describes the approach of each section and its curricular connection:

- **I. Rhetorical Reading and Composing**, is meant to provide students with an introduction to and vocabulary for the kinds of rhetorically oriented reading and writing they will be engaging in throughout the course. The next four sections loosely correspond to major writing projects that students create in many sections of ENGL 1010.
- **II. Literacy and Composing Processes**: Students often begin ENGL 1010 by reflecting on and writing about their own literacy experiences in the form of a literacy narrative. The readings in "Literacy and Composing Processes" are meant to prepare students to compose a literacy narrative, whether as a conventional written text or as a multimodal composition.
- **III. Primary Research and Ethical Research Practices**: From there, students often turn to a project in which they use primary research methods (e.g., observation, interviews) to analyze the literacy practices of others. The readings in "III. Primary Research and Ethical Research Practices" introduce students to the work of primary research itself, as well as strategies for writing up research findings.

- **IV. Genre and Methods of Analysis**: Next, students typically turn to a project focused on the networked forms of literacy that unfold in discourse communities, genres, and other, more socially distributed literate contexts. The readings in "IV. Genre and Methods of Analysis" introduce students to how genres and discourse communities function, providing students with strategies for analyzing and writing about how language works in these kinds of social and rhetorical arenas (and thinking about their own literacy practices in their respective discourse communities).
- **V. Reflection, Revision, and Transfer**: Students are encouraged to engage in reflective writing throughout ENGL 1010, thinking back on and learning from what they've read and composed in the course. Often, students end the course with an in-depth piece of such writing, which may frame a final writing portfolio or serve as a standalone piece that articulates and supplements what they've learned. The readings in "V. Reflection, Revision, and Transfer" prepare students for this kind of reflection and offer guidance of transferring what they've learned in ENGL 1010 to the writing they'll do in future courses, professional settings, and other extracurricular contexts.

These primary sections are followed by targeted resources about programmatic elements of first-year writing at MTSU (e.g., guided self-placement) and appendices that offer targeted support for citation, writing skills, and research development.

This collection includes a number of readings from *Writing Spaces*. Some of the PDF versions of those readings include teacher resources that you are welcome to consult. However, we have not included those resources in the student-facing versions of the readings reproduced in the collection.

3. Guide for Students: Getting Started with this Text

Welcome to ENGL 1010: Expository Writing!

This is an Open Education Resource (**OER**) textbook. Because this book functions differently than a print text, we encourage you to take a moment to familiarize yourself with the functionality. Also, if you'd like a print version of this text, you can print it using our optimized PDF (please keep in mind the length of the text). In developing this text, we focused on keeping it low cost and accessible.

The way to navigate this textbook is by using the "Content" drop-down menus on the left side of the textbook screen. You can also use the "Read Next Chapter" option, which is a hyperlink at the bottom right of the text screen. The text is divided into sections that address ENGL 1010: Expository Writing, Literacy and Composing Processes, Primary Research and Ethical Research Processes, Genre and Methods of Analysis, and Reflection, Metacognition, and Transfer.

Within each sections are chapters that we think you'll find both useful and engaging to read. Whenever an outside source is linked as a chapter, you'll see an abstract, links to the texts (sometimes there are podcast versions too!), keywords, and short bios for each author.

The linked readings in this text come from different open-access, peer-reviewed collections: *Try This: Research Methods For Writers* by Jennifer Clary-Lemon, Derek Mueller, and Kate Pantelides; *Writing Spaces* edited by Dana Driscoll, Mary K. Stewart, and Matthew Vetter; the *Bad Ideas About Writing Podcast* by Kyle

Stedman; and *Bad Ideas About Writing*, edited by Cheryl E. Ball and Drew M. Loewe.

Please note that the titles for all of the *Bad Ideas About Writing* essays are actually misleading myths about writing that circulate. It may be confusing, at first, to see these titles. And it is important to keep in mind the content of each essay dispels these popular beliefs about writing that can be found in the titles, by using research from the field.

Writing in ENGL 1010: Expository Writing

You have no doubt been composing your whole life – in school, in your personal life, in professional spaces, and in creative ways that you might not even think of as writing in a traditional sense. ENGL 1010: Expository Writing builds on the understanding of composition that you bring to the course and invites you to write in new ways, ways that demonstrate an understanding of **rhetoric**.

No class can teach you to write in every situation. Instead, we invite you to think about the situations in which a need for writing arises, the particular **exigencies** that invite certain **genres**. You make come across the following genres in Expository Writing:

Literacy Narratives

Literacy narratives tell stories about experiences building literacy. Literacy can refer to any sort of knowledge that you have; for instance, you can have game literacy, music literacy, exercise literacy, etc. However, in Expository Writing, we often want you to reflect on your alphabetic literacy, that is, the way that you developed your ability to read and write. Literacy narratives usually connect someone's reading and writing past with their reading and writing present, analyzing how previous literacy experiences impact individuals. We often begin the semester this way because it can be a useful reminder to a student about why they approach reading and writing the way that they do, and it can also be a useful introduction

of students to faculty. By better understanding student learning experiences, faculty can better meet their needs across the semester.

Primary Research Reports

Whereas literacy narratives ask students to consider their own literacy development, many faculty ask students to step outside of their own experiences for the second project of the semester. Primary research methods, such as interview, survey, ethnography, and site observation, allow insight into community literacies.

Genre Analyses

After considering your personal literacy, and the literacy experiences of others, many faculty ask you to consider how academic literacy is structured in our lives every day and mediated through the genres by which we communicate and function at the university. To understand genre rhetorically, Carolyn Miller reminds us that genres function as "social actions," not just as forms. If we look at genres this way, in that genres function as cultural artifacts and not just as categories, we can learn a lot about their social meaning and cultural use through analysis. Thus, by examining numerous instances of a genre, we can better understand its exigency, or the rhetorical situation that invites a particular genre; we can examine its conventions, or expected norms, and their implications, as well as the deviations writers choose to make when they write; and we can consider a genre's affordances and constraints, the things that some kinds of genres allow given their structure and expectations.

Reflections

Throughout your writing classes, you will be asked to reflect. Although reflection is ubiquitous, in that it is repeatedly recommended, it may at first feel awkward to reflect in the context of a writing class. The reason you're asked to reflect consistently is that this repeated rhetorical move – thinking about what and how you've composed a writing response, helps you build metacognitive awareness, that is – thinking about your thinking. The more you're able to do this, the more you're able to port what you learn from

what writing situation to another. You may find that reflection becomes second nature, and you may find yourself analyzing the way something is written – not just what it says – in places outside of your writing courses.

Informal Invention Exercises

In addition to your formal writing projects, you'll be asked to develop "invention work." These are informal writing opportunities – you might think of them as prewriting or brainstorming – designed to help you more easily and organically complete writing projects. Ideally, the invention writing you compose will "add up" to the formal projects, such that when you are asked to compose a literacy narrative, a genre analysis, a primary research report, or a reflection essay, they will simply be the sum of the informal writing you've developed across the semester. They will offer the opportunity to polish and revise ideas you've experimented with across the semester.

4. Guide for Dual Enrollment: Welcome to College English!

Welcome to Dual Enrollment English 1010: Expository Writing!

Welcome to Dual Enrollment ENGL 1010! If you are taking a dual enrollment course for the first time, you might feel a bit apprehensive and have some questions about how the class will work. Do not panic! This brief guide aims to help ensure you feel comfortable and confident as you begin your writing journey at MTSU. The first chapter, "How to Prepare for Dual Enrollment ENGL 1010," offers instructions on the steps needed to prepare for the first day of class.

What is dual enrollment?

In academia, the term *dual enrollment* refers to students being simultaneously enrolled at two different academic institutions. Dual enrollment programs allow students to participate in and earn credit for college-level courses while still attending high school. This concept is important to understand because you are being asked to be two things at once – a college student and a high school student – and straddle two different "worlds." Think of it like this: while in a classroom at your high school, you will be an MTSU student, taking an MTSU course, taught by an MTSU instructor, that follows the university's policies, guidelines, and calendar. As such, dual enrollment students and teachers are constantly balancing different expectations, schedules, rules, digital ecosystems, and

identities. Trying to exist in this mixed state of multiple origins is referred to as *hybridity*, and requires a heightened level of responsibility, accountability, mindfulness, and flexibility on everyone's part.

How do dual-enrollment courses differ from my other high school classes?

- <u>Calendar</u>: the MTSU and high school calendars do not align in some key areas. We do our best to mesh the two together, but it is critical you are aware of the discrepancies and remain flexible throughout the semester. The differences include, but are not limited to, the following:
    - MTSU is on a 15-week semester-based calendar, compared to the high school's 9-week Quarter calendar. Therefore, dual enrollment classes typically begin later than the start of your first quarter and end before your second quarter ends.
    - Each school's Fall Break and Spring Break take place during different weeks. Make sure you know your instructor's plans and expectations for breaks and holidays as work may be required.
    - Any class days interrupted by school-related activities or events may be moved online or require work to be completed via D2L.
- <u>Class Schedule</u>: dual enrollment course types include on-ground (all classes meet in the classroom), blended (a combination of in-person and online instruction), remote synchronous (classes meet online on a designated day and time), or online asynchronous (instruction is entirely online on D2L with no class meetings). Make sure you know which class type you have registered for so you know when, where, and how the class meets.

- Online Learning Management System: MTSU's online learning management system is called D2L. This is a website where your ENGL 1010 course lives and where you may access and submit assignments, monitor your grades, participate in discussions, complete surveys and quizzes, be notified of time-sensitive updates and schedule changes, and find various resources and materials necessary for the class. You will find detailed instructions for locating and logging into the site in the next chapter.
- Communication: MTSU instructors do not have access to your high school's online learning management system or your high school email address. As such, nearly all communication outside of class will be through your MTSU email (MTMail) and course D2L site. Instructions for setting up your email and accessing D2L are available below.
- Coursework: Depending on your course type, coursework may include a combination of in-class activities (lectures, discussions, abbreviated writing assignments, group work, reading assignments, workshops, etc.) and outside ventures (critical readings, longer writing projects, primary and secondary research, discussion posts, etc.). Two vital notes:
  - Much of the coursework will have specific due dates throughout the semester. You will not have the option of submitting cumulative assignments at the end of the semester. Developing and maintaining effective time management skills will be essential for your success.
  - You may be required to complete or submit work during breaks, holidays, or high school-related off days if they conflict with the MTSU calendar.
- Grades: Detailed information on grades and the grading system will be provided to you by your instructor. During the semester, you can manage and track your grades on D2L. Remember that MTSU requires you to earn a final grade of C- or better to receive college Gen Ed English credit.

What sets Dual Enrollment ENGL 1010 apart from my previous English classes?

Based on your prior English education experiences, you might assume ENGL 1010 involves literature review, five-paragraph essays, advanced lessons in grammar, or perhaps a focus on "correct" writing. To dispel these notions, I encourage you to return to the front part of this textbook and read "First-Year Writing at MTSU." You will discover that ENGL 1010 is all about understanding why and how writing is such an essential and powerful tool, and that in ENGL 1010 you will work hard to develop the concepts, questions, strategies, and rhetorical awareness necessary to effectively communicate in diverse genres of writing in and beyond college.

   Prior to the first day of class, you should set up your MTSU online account, MTMail account, and make sure you can access D2L and PipelineMT.

Setting up your MTSU online account

- Locate your M# – before logging in to MTSU for the first time, locate your MTSU ID, called an **M#** (it starts with the letter M followed by 8 numbers, such as M12345678). Your M# appears on the admissions letter that was sent to your high school email address. If you cannot find your M#, contact your counselor or the school office.
- Create a password and retrieve your username
    ◦ Go to MTSU's Manage Your Password page
    ◦ Enter your M# in the box
    ◦ Follow the prompts to create a password and retrieve your username (the username consists of your initials plus two or three additional numbers and letters, such as – abc8yz)
    ◦ Your username will be the prefix of your MTMail account,

such as abc8yz@mtmail.mtsu.edu

- <u>Set up 2-factor authentication</u> – During your first login, you will be guided through setting up 2-factor authentication. This authentication requires using a second device (mobile phone, tablet, laptop) and either establishing a text message or phone call verification -or- using the Microsoft Authenticator app. If you need help, go to the Multi-factor Authentication help page.

Setting up your MTMail account

- Go to mtsu.edu and click on the envelope icon in the top white menu bar
- Under "MTMail for Students," click on "Login"
- In the Microsoft pop-up box, enter your MTMail address (username@mtmail.mtsu.edu) and password
- Verify your sign-in with 2-factor authentication
- If you have trouble accessing your MTMail, go to MTMail FAQs for Students, which includes information for contacting the ITD Help Desk (phone: 615-898-5345; email help@mtsu.edu) and setting up MTMail on your mobile phone

Reminder: your MTMail account is the primary form of communication between you and your instructor. Your instructor does not have access to your high school email account. Therefore, it is imperative that you check your email at least once per day throughout the semester. To ensure timely reception of important or urgent communication, it is recommended you set up your MTMail account in an email app on your laptop or mobile device that provides immediate delivery and notification of messages.

Logging into D2L

MTSU employs a digital learning management system called D2L (Desire2Learn). Each class has a private designated website that hosts all of your course information, documents, calendar, assignments, grades, feedback, discussion forums, etc. You will be visiting D2L often, both inside and outside the classroom.

- Go to D2L
- In the Microsoft pop-up box, enter your MTSU username and password
- Verify your sign-in with 2-factor authentication
- Your D2L home page will show icons for any MTSU courses you are enrolled in.
- Click on the box titled "Expository Writing"
- You should now be on the ENGL 1010 homepage. You can explore the site using the menu bar at the top of the page.

Logging into PipelineMT

PipelineMT is where you can access your registration information, student records, midterm and final grades, financial aid, billing and payment, and other university resources.

- Go to mtsu.edu and click on "PipelineMT" in the top white menu bar
- In the Microsoft pop-up box, enter your MTSU username and password
- Verify your sign-in with 2-factor authentication
- You should now be on your PipelineMT homepage

An important technical note: because MTSU and many local high schools both use the Microsoft 365 online service, conflicts can

arise when trying to access one school's system while logged into another school's system. This means you may receive error messages when trying to log into MTSU sites such as D2L or MTMail. The two most common remedies for this situation are to:

- Logout of your high school Microsoft account and retry logging in to your MTSU Microsoft account
- Open a private or incognito browser window under the File menu in your browser and log in through that window

RHETORICAL READING AND COMPOSING

Section Overview

The chapters in this section invite you to consider composition in rhetorical terms. We take a flexible, rhetorical approach to understanding writing because there are no fixed, universal rules for writing. This doesn't mean that there aren't any rules. Instead, effective writing is contextual, and your relative success as a writer is dependent on your ability to understand how to craft appropriate compositions across situations, whether you're writing in your composition class, in your selected major, in your professional life, or in your personal life. You have likely already learned a lot about composition and rhetoric, although you may not have used some of the language we'll introduce. We invite you to build on your existing knowledge and add tools to your toolbox in the form of new questions you'll ask about writing situations, new understandings of how to organize writing effectively, and new ways of developing and filtering knowledge.

Many of the readings in this book, and certainly in this section include chapters from the book, *Bad Ideas About Writing.* It is important to note that *Bad Ideas About Writing* includes titles that can be misleading if you do not read the text itself. The titles for all of the *Bad Ideas About Writing* essays are actually misleading myths about writing that circulate. It may be confusing, at first, to see these titles. And it is important to keep in mind the content of each essay dispels these popular beliefs about writing that can be found in the titles, by using research from the field. Happily, there are

both written and audio versions available for each of these brief, engaging chapters.

The first three chapters in this section address the relationship between rhetoric and first-year writing as well as the purpose of first-year writing in education:

- Rhetoric is Synonymous with Empty Speech by Patricia Roberts-Miller (*Bad Ideas About Writing*) (Podcast)
- First-Year Composition Prepares Students for Academic Writing by Tyler S. Branson (*Bad Ideas About Writing*) (Podcast)
- First-Year Composition Should be Skipped by Paul G. Cook (*Bad Ideas About Writing*) (Podcast)

The next three chapters consider the relationship between reading and writing:

- "Developing a Repertoire of Reading Strategies" by Ellen C. Carillo
- Reading and Writing Are Not Connected by Ellen C. Carillo (*Bad Ideas About Writing*) (Podcast)
- How to Read Like a Writer by Michael Bunn

To provide a foundation for this work, consider how rhetorical analysis is always at work in communication. Whenever we speak, write, or listen, we're doing rhetorical work. By beginning our considerations of the rhetorical nature of communication with a focus on "Rhetorical Analysis" (below), we invite you to apply these skills throughout your work this semester. The following text, "Rhetorical Analysis," is an excerpt from *Try This: Research Methods For Writers*, (pp. 79-82) by Jennifer Clary-Lemon, Derek Mueller, and Kate Pantelides.

Rhetorical analysis helps demonstrate the significance of a text by carefully considering the **rhetorical situation** in which it develops and the ways that it supports its purpose. There are lots of definitions of rhetoric, and the definition that makes the

most sense to you and your understanding of communication will impact how you deploy rhetorical analysis. The following are a few definitions of rhetoric:

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>
> ## RHETORIC MAY BE DEFINED AS THE FACULTY OF OBSERVING IN ANY GIVEN CASE THE AVAILABLE MEANS OF PERSUASION.
>
> ARISTOTLE

- Ancient Greek rhetor **Aristotle**: "Rhetoric may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means

of persuasion."

- British rhetorician **I. A. Richards**: "Rhetoric...should be a study of misunderstanding and its remedies" (3).
- Contemporary American rhetors **Elizabeth Wardle and Doug Downs**: "Rhetoric is a field of study in which people examine how persuasion and communication work, and it is also the art of human interaction, communication, and persuasion" (366).
- Contemporary American genre theorist **Charles Bazerman**: "The study of how people use language and other symbols to realize human goals and carry out human activities. . . . ultimately a practical study offering people greater control over their symbolic activity" (6).

Try This: Defining Rhetoric (30 minutes)

Find a few alternative definitions of rhetoric on your own, and see which one is most appealing to you. Now, mush them together, paraphrase, and come up with a definition that resonates with your understanding of rhetoric.

PRACTICING RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

Rhetorical analysis helps us understand the various components that make a communicative act/artifact successful or not. A key component to effective rhetorical analysis is careful, active

attention to what the author and her text are trying to accomplish. Krista Ratcliffe calls such attention **rhetorical listening**.

Most people summarize rhetorical listening as an orientation of active openness toward communication, and Ratcliffe identifies multiple components for such a stance:

- "acknowledging the existence" of the other, their self, and discourse;
- listening for "(un)conscious presences, absences, and unknowns";
- and purposefully "integrating this information into our world views and decision making." (29)

Rhetorical listening often draws our attention to absences. Jacqueline Jones Royster's work on literacy practices, particularly of nineteenth century Black women, demonstrates how listening for and being curious about absences often leads us to understudied **rhetors**. Temptaous McCoy has coined the term amplification rhetorics (AR), a method of seeking out and amplifying rhetorical practices that may not have been effectively heard. She describes AR as a way of examining and celebrating the experiences and community rhetorics of Black and marginalized communities.

Try This: Analyzing Keywords (60 minutes)

Working with something you have recently written, assign keywords (one or two-word phrases) you believe would do well to convey its significance (don't count, just consider what you think is most important about the text). To do so, follow these steps:

- Identify five to seven keywords based on your sense of the text.

- Then, turn to a keyword generating tool, such as TagCrowd (tagcrowd.com) or the NGram Analyzer (guidetodatamining.com/ngramAnalyzer/). Copy and paste your writing into the platform and initiate the analysis with the aid of the keyword generating tool. Which words or phrases match (as in, you thought they were significant and they show up frequently in your text)? Which words or phrases appear in one list but not the other? What do you think explains the differences in the lists?

- Next, identify two keywords or phrases you believe are not sufficiently represented in either list. What are these keywords or phrases, and how are they significant to the work you are doing? Develop a one-page revision memo that accounts for how you could go about expanding the presence of these underrepresented words or phrases in your writing.

Another way of thinking of rhetorical listening in the context of texts is Peter Elbow's practice of "**The Believing Game**," in which he encourages audience members to suspend potential disbelief or critique of a text. Instead of starting with critique, he works to step into the authors' shoes and actually believe whatever they are suggesting. Complimentary to this practice is Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin's formulation of **invitational rhetoric**. They offer

invitational rhetoric as counter to understandings of rhetoric as primarily about persuasion, like Aristotle's definition of rhetoric. They see persuasion as ultimately about power, whereas invitational rhetoric instead works to develop equitable relationships. Like rhetorical listening, invitational rhetoric is a method for establishing understanding within relationships. They define such work as "an invitation to the audience to enter the rhetor's world and see it as the rhetor does" (5). Although these approaches all differ, what they have in common is using rhetorical awareness to invite understanding rather than arguing for one's own point of view or "winning" an argument.

> Rhetoric is "the study of how people use language and other symbols to realize human goals and carry out human activities. . . . ultimately a practical study offering people greater control over their symbolic activity."
>
> *Charles Bazerman*
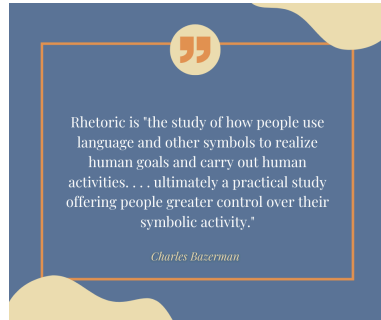
Try This: Rhetorical Analysis (60 minutes)

Practice rhetorical analysis. Select an article that interests you, perhaps one that you identified to work with in Chapter 3 or something you came across when you searched for potential corpora at the beginning of this chapter. Spend some time considering why this article is persuasive or appealing to you. The following questions may aid your consideration:

- Who is the audience? What evidence suggests this audience?

- What is the context in which it was written?

What evidence suggests this?

- What is its purpose? You might also identify the thesis or orienting principle and consider the larger relationship between the work's purpose and its stated argument or principle. What evidence leads you to this finding?

- Who is the author? Really—who is the author? Draw on your worknet findings (see *Try This* for a discussion of worknets) and consider the author's relationship to this rhetorical situation. What is the exigency, or reason, for writing this work? Or, you might return to considering the Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How of this article.

> "
> RHETORIC IS A FIELD OF STUDY IN WHICH PEOPLE EXAMINE HOW PERSUASION AND COMMUNICATION WORK, AND IT IS ALSO THE ART OF HUMAN INTERACTION, COMMUNICATION, AND PERSUASION.
>
> -ELIZABETH WARDLE AND DOUG DOWNS

There are many ways to practice rhetorical analysis, although it is often reduced to an equation rather than a tool for discovery of a text. Let rhetorical analysis be a method that opens up understanding and possibility rather than one that simply labels certain words or passages. Consider how identifying a particular rhetorical appeal adds depth and nuance to a text and connects you to it in complex ways. For instance, the previous "Try This" offered two approaches to rhetorical analysis. The next "Try This" offers two additional approaches. Consider which one resonates most with you. Which method helps you identify the significance and interest of a text?

Working with a text/genre/corpus of your choosing, develop responses to the following prompt. If you seek a text as the basis of your analysis, we recommend Captain Brett Crozier's letter to shipmates aboard the aircraft carrier Theodore Roosevelt during the 2020 COVID-19 outbreak.

In what ways does the author offer specific appeals to the audience? Consider particular instances of the following appeals in the text:

- Kairos, which refers to timeliness—indications of why the text is contemporarily relevant

- Ethos, which generally concerns the relative credibility of an author or argument

- Logos, which means demonstrating specific pieces of evidence that support the text's purpose

- Pathos, which relates to engaging the emotions

Practice rhetorical listening. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What is not here? Are there any notable absences? Things/people/ideas the author does not mention?

- Are there ideas or appeals that potentially challenge your acceptance of the author's work?

Although we have asked you to identify individual appeals, such rhetorical tools usually work together, and it can be hard to pull them apart. In identifying the various rhetorical components of a text, consider how they collaborate to make a text successful and persuasive . . . or not.

5. Bad Idea About Writing: "Rhetoric is Synonymous with Empty Speech"

PATRICIA ROBERTS-MILLER

Abstract

Patricia Roberts-Miller's essay refutes the popular notion that "Rhetoric is Synonymous With Empty Speech." Instead, she demonstrates the use (and periodic) abuse of rhetoric, an understanding which is central to effective communication. This text is the first chapter of *Bad Ideas About Writing*, and its placement is notable since the association of rhetoric and empty speech is so pervasive, since it is a prevalent bad idea with broad implications for reading and writing.

This reading is available below, as a PDF, and as a podcast.

Recently, I was at a meeting of faculty whose research and teaching interests concerned issues of environmentalism. A colleague from another department asked me what my area was. "Environmental rhetoric," I replied. He looked slightly shocked and then commented, "Good environmentalism doesn't have a rhetoric." I'm in a department of rhetoric, so I teach rhetoric, read scholarly

pieces on rhetoric, and attend conferences on rhetoric. However, I often forget that other faculty members' views on rhetoric might be different than mine.

A popular view of rhetoric is that it is a straightforward model of how communication should work: A person can speak the truth simply by using words that refer to true things in the world. If she chooses not to use sentences filled with words that refer to true things in the world, then she is engaged in rhetoric. Rhetoric, in this view, is something you add on to sentences (such as metaphor) that decorates and obscures communication. If I say, "The cat is on the mat," I am using language correctly. However, if I say, "The elegant feline languishes mournfully on the expensive carpet, waiting impatiently for what he sees as his lazy servants to open a can of salmon," then I have added rhetoric to the first sentence, or chosen rhetoric over clear communication.

For many people, the simpler, plainer version of the sentence is not just a stylistic choice, it's a moral one. Many people believe that the addition of more complicated words obscures the meaning of the sentence. Rhetoric, to them, is something that hides the truth. If you look at the two sentences, though, you can see that the elaborated, supposedly more rhetorical one communicates quite clearly. In fact, it communicates more effectively and precisely than "The cat is on the mat." It might, of course, be false—there might not be such a cat; it might not be elegant; it might not be thinking much of anything; it might be quite cheerful; it might not like salmon. But the same is true of the simpler sentence—there might not be a cat; it might not be on a mat. Thus, linguistic simplicity and truthfulness aren't necessarily connected, and linguistic complexity and truthfulness aren't necessarily opposed.

Or, to put it another way, for a long time, philosophers of language insisted that language works by sentences having propositional content—"the cat is on the mat"—which can be expressed in various ways. Rhetoric is what we layer onto the proposition. Or, as the old saying goes, "Rhetoric is clothing on

the idea." In an Edenic world, we would all wander around naked, and we would all simply and clearly speak our thoughts; rhetoric is something we must have in this fallen world.

People who believe that rhetoric hides meaning believe that we could return to Eden by using simple, plain, and rhetoric-free language. One of several underlying assumptions is that it's harder to lie in plain language, or that lies are more obvious when the language is less complicated. Therefore, we can trust plain language and should treat complicated language with suspicion. Oddly enough, this seemingly straightforward proposition isn't true. In other words, this simple belief shows that an idea can be untrue and persuasive at the same time. It is also interesting that the master deceivers have generally relied on simple, yet false, claims. It's quite likely that people believed their assertions were clear and plain and, therefore, assumed that they must be true.

The Edenic view isn't a helpful way to think about rhetoric. It isn't even how language works. While it's true that the same thing can be said in different ways, there is a way of saying that thing without rhetoric. "The cat is on the mat" is still a style—the simple style—with internal rhyming and prose rhythm. It's also structurally the rhetorical figure of chiasmus—the sentence begins and ends in an almost identical way. We can't get away from rhetoric, but we can choose its kind.

As in all interesting arguments, it's a question of how we're defining terms. And rhetoric has a variety of definitions. It was first used in Platonic dialogues with very little precision. It comes from the Greek word for a person with a certain role in the Athenian Assembly (rhetor). It is believed that it was Plato who added the -ic later.

He used rhetoric in terms of speech-making as opposed to arguing in small groups. Plato wasn't opposed to argumentation, and he wasn't even opposed to some verbal sleight of hand. After all, Socrates—often read as a kind of spokesman for Plato's views—relied heavily on some fairly dodgy logical moves in the dialogues. Plato's point seems to be that speech-making isn't a very useful skill

because making speeches to large groups (Athenian juries might have hundreds of people) is not very effective for getting to the truth. It might be effective for getting others to accept the truth one has already figured out (that seems to be the point that Socrates is making in the dialogue Phaedrus), but, if you want to find out what's true, argue with another individual. Do not make a speech.

Of course, Socrates makes a lot of speeches in Platonic dialogues. So, it is still murky whether or not Plato noticed the contradiction, was making a different point despite noticing the proposition, or didn't write the dialogues to get to the truth. In fact, Plato's overall attitude toward rhetoric is murky, even though his school, the Academy, did have rhetoric classes. They were taught by a man named Aristotle.

On the other hand, Aristotle, who was a teacher of rhetoric, neither defined rhetoric as style nor as something you add to language. He described it as a discipline and a skill that enables you to see the available means of persuasion. For Aristotle, rhetoric is about public speaking to large groups, and it is different from philosophy. So, he did share those two assumptions with Plato. But he didn't agree with Plato about rhetoric not getting us to the truth. He thought that it could get us to the truth, but that it could also be used to deceive. It depends on the motives of the person using it.

Aristotle loved syllogisms, and seems to have believed that all reasoning could be done through them. In philosophy, to get to the truth, you try to begin with a universally valid major premise (e.g., all men are mortal). Then you have a more specific proposition related to that premise (e.g., Socrates is a man) that enables you to draw a conclusion (e.g., Socrates is mortal). But Aristotle said that this kind of reasoning doesn't work in large assemblies for two reasons. First, during a speech, people don't have the time to reason from universally valid major premises—if you're arguing about whether Philip of Macedon represents a threat, it's useless to try to find universally valid premises about tyrants or war or people from Macedon. You don't have time. Second, the kind of things about which we make speeches—politics, ethics, military strategy,

guilt or innocence, honor and dishonor—aren't subject to certainty. There are no universally valid major premises about tyrants that will help us figure out what we need to do now and here to assess Philip. We must rely on what is probably true.

According to Aristotle, what you learn from rhetoric is how to approach political, ethical, and legal problems, how to come up with an argument when you can't be (or, at least, shouldn't be) certain that you're right. You also learn how to assess other people's arguments. Aristotle, unlike many other philosophers, doesn't present rhetoric as an inferior discipline to philosophy (he says it's a "counterpart"). It's just different. It's a pragmatic skill that helps us in decision-making.

Aristotle, being an astute observer, noticed that people argued about different things in similar ways. He came up with 28 approaches, called "lines of argument" (they're also sometimes called "formal topoi," which makes it seem as though they have long dresses and white ties). If I am making a speech trying to persuade people to become more active in politics, I might argue from precedent (listed as #11 of his 28 lines), or argue that the consequences of political activism are good (#13), or point out inconsistencies in the argument for political quietism (#22), and so on. Those different lines aren't ornaments I hang on the proposition that people should be politically active; they are all different ways of thinking about the situation.

Take, for instance, Aristotle's first line of argument: consideration of the opposite, a strategy that might structure my entire case. I might spend all my time trying to show that political activism is good because political quietism is bad. I might, however, make that just part of one speech, in which I move from how good it is to be politically active to a moving description of the tragedies associated with political quietism. Or, I might make it one paragraph, or one sentence. I might say, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." In other words, the forms—such as consideration of the opposite—can be used to structure a clause, sentence, paragraph, speech, or (in John

F. Kennedy's case) political philosophy. Rhetoric is a way of thinking. It is not just something added to a thought derived by other means.

Does that mean that rhetoric is always good? Of course not. Rhetoric is a contingent, pragmatic, and generally (but not always) verbal way of approaching problems we face as members of communities. It is the cause as well as the consequence of thought. If we tend to think in binaries and divide everything into this versus that, then we'll probably be drawn to the rhetorical figures that divide things into two. Continually presenting and interpreting issues in that divided way will reinforce our sense that things really are divided into two. We might then act in ways that divide things into two—we might believe that everyone is either an ally or an enemy, and thereby alienate neutral parties. Thinking and talking about everyone as ally or enemy might mean we are likely to end up in a world in which people end up treating us in that manner. Rhetoric isn't always good, and it isn't always bad, but it's rarely neutral.

For instance, we might be tempted to use metaphors of disease, infection, or contamination for those groups that we don't like. That might be a calculated decision to mislead an audience. We might not dislike the groups as vehemently as we project but we still perform for the audience to get votes, money, popularity, sales, sex, or something else. It is insincere. These types of people might make us feel unsettled and disgusted. They might even come across to us as dangerous. Thus, we call them slimy or a cancer on the body politic. We proclaim that they spread ideas, weaken our community, and threaten our children. Those metaphors and that rhetoric would feel accurate, and it would convey our meaning—it is not added on; it is not ornamentation. It is what we mean. And it can hurt us as a community because it can mean that we then interpret that group's actions through a lens of disease, threat, and danger. We can end up killing them or getting them killed because of the rhetoric we used. We can't get away from rhetoric, but we can choose the kind of rhetoric we use.

Further Reading

For further reading on rhetoric as more than "mere rhetoric," see especially Wayne Booth's *Rhetoric of Rhetoric*, which distinguishes between "rhetrickery" and rhetoric as an inclusive method of deliberation. Eugene Garver's *Aristotle's Rhetoric: An Art of Character* is an elegant introduction to Aristotle, and Debra Hawhee and Sharon Crowley's *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students*, though a textbook, explains classical and current conceptions of rhetoric usefully.

Keywords

conceptual metaphor, **deliberative rhetoric**, public argumentation, **rhetorical topoi**

Author Bio

Patricia Roberts-Miller is a professor in the Department of Rhetoric and Writing at the University of Texas at Austin, where she also directs the writing center. Her scholarly and teaching interests include the history and theory of public argumentation— as she likes to put it, she's a "scholar of

train wrecks in public deliberation." More about Trish can be found at patriciarobertsmiller.com.

6. Bad Idea About Writing: "First-Year Composition Prepares Students for Academic Writing"

TYLER BRANSON

Abstract

Tyler S. Branson's essay "First-Year Composition Prepares Students for Academic Writing" comes from the book *Bad Ideas About Writing*. In Branson's essay, he draws on research about the purpose of first-year writing to posit that first-year writing courses have the potential to foster students' understanding of how language is shaped by, and used in, social, political, and cultural contexts. To accomplish this goal, Branson argues that we need to shift the emphasis of first-year writing away from notions of correctness and grammar and toward empowering students to learn how to position themselves in public discourse.

This reading is available below, as a PDF, and as a podcast.

I have a memory that really sticks out in my mind when I think of

all the bad ideas about writing. I was at the dentist making small talk, and my dentist asked, "So what is it you teach at the university?" Squinting at the bright light above me, I responded, "I teach mostly first-year writing." "Uh oh!" he chuckled, looking back at the dental assistants behind him. "Better watch my grammar around you, huh?" He paused and said, thoughtfully, "You know, I should send my son to you. He can't spell to save his life!" To be fair, these sorts of comments are made innocently enough and, anecdotally, they tend to happen a lot. The reason for this, I think, is because of a particularly bad idea about writing and writing instruction, one that surprisingly hasn't let up in the past 40 years: that first-year writing is a basic course in language, grammar, and syntax that prepares students for something called *academic writing* in the more "legitimate" courses in the university; and that its teachers consist primarily of error-correctors and behavior-modifiers armed with red pens and elbow patches. However, such an antiquated view of what first-year writing *is* and *can be* only scratches the surface of the kinds of learning possible in a writing classroom.

My dentist understands first-year writing as remedial instruction in language, but this is an outdated description for this universal course in U.S. higher education. You can actually trace this back to the 1800s, when more and more men and women started attending college. At the time, first-year writing instructors decided that the best way to provide this new influx of middle-class professionals with the tools to succeed in written communication was to focus on correctness and efficiency. Writing instruction back then taught that good writing was correct writing, and that you can measure good writing by counting errors.

However, people in the field of composition have come to learn a lot about how writing works and how it is best taught in courses like first-year writing. As Seth Kahn has shown in this collection, researchers have known since the 1970s that teaching grammar and mechanics does not improve student writing. Andrea Lunsford and Karen Lunsford even recreated a famous study of errors in Freshman Composition essays and found that "the rate of student

error is not increasing precipitously but, in fact, has stayed stable for nearly 100 years." What they mean is that errors in writing are a fact of life. As writing teachers, the idea that errors are a fact of life has been quite helpful because it has allowed them to prioritize *higher order* issues in writing like *argument, analysis, audience, purpose, and context.* By having students focus more on argument and audience in their writing, the five-paragraph essay template becomes increasingly irrelevant because it doesn't resemble anything about how writing looks in the real world or what different audiences expect in different reading contexts. Writing isn't a set of formulas that you plug in to get different kinds of texts. Writing is a process of brainstorming, composing, revising, having your work read *by others*, and then revising again. This is a complex, in-depth process that goes way beyond correctness.

Yet, when first-year writing comes up in popular culture (or the dentist's office), people still recall the image of the red pen. In 1975, Merrill Sheils wrote in a *Newsweek* article, "Why Johnny Can't Write," lamenting students' "inadequate grounding in the basics of syntax, structure and style" and blamed it all on the "political activism" among English professors. This tradition of bashing what's being taught in first-year writing continues to this day, from bombastic authors like Stanley Fish who publish New York Times editorials lamenting how college graduates of today are "unable to write a clear and coherent English sentence," or popular books on higher education like Richard Arum and Josipa Roska's *Academically Adrift*, which claims that college graduates are vastly deficient in writing. They report that 80 percent of first-year college students and 50 percent of college seniors have never written a paper longer than 20 pages. For many educated, well-meaning folks interested in higher education, these popular portrayals of writing in the university only reinforce the idea that first-year writing is a course that trains students to churn out 20-page academic essays, or worse, that these are examples of intellectual rigor in first-year writing.

It's also important to note that a lot of folks have a vested

interest in keeping first-year writing courses tied to correctness and grammar. When writing instructors attempt to do otherwise, they are often met with opposition and charges of attempting to indoctrinate their students and politicize the classroom. Conservative website *Minding the Campus* describes this as little writing, but plenty of activism. When it appears that American students aren't writing well, it's easy to point to first-year writing and ask, well what are they teaching in there? In fact, first-year writing teachers are often scapegoats for political debates that extend beyond the writing classroom. So it is important to note that there are political dimensions to the debate about what first-year writing should teach, and ramifications for wanting to push the boundaries.

To be clear, though, I'm not saying that academic writing and correct writing are bad. On the contrary, courses in rhetoric and composition can be very helpful in allowing students to practice academic-level reading and writing in other disciplines, and this often helps students better understand the various kinds of writing they are bound to encounter in the university. And even in professional writing courses, it's important to teach students that making errors in your writing is often a way to turn off your audience, or worse, it impedes your audience's ability to understand what it is you're trying to say. However, the idea that first-year writing exists to train students to write correctly does everyone a disservice. It obscures all the other opportunities for learning in first-year writing that go way beyond the production of essays that are academic in nature.

For one, academic writing is context-dependent. As Elizabeth Wardle writes in this collection, "There is no such thing as writing in general. Writing is always in particular." The expectations in, say, Introduction to Sociology may differ wildly from what another instructor expects in Introduction to Film. Also, while first-year writing can teach students basic skills in conducting research or structuring arguments, it is quite limiting to say that these skills are only specific to academic writing *in general.*

In fact, we might be better off thinking of first-year writing as a course in the practice of citizenship than a course in writing academically. I would argue that society needs students skilled in civic discourse now more than ever. One only has to look to the so-called exemplars of civic discourse—our politicians and other public figures—as evidence. Talking heads on cable news showcase a malignant style of uncivil, boorish argumentation in which pundits unabashedly bend, distort, or even make up facts to advance their positions. And while this may make for good television (for some), it promotes a pernicious argumentative style that teaches students that winning a debate is more important than exploring their biases, increasing their empathy, and accepting differences. That is why it might be better to imagine first-year writing not as a remedial course in academic writing, but as a productive space for respectful argument. In fact, by having students practice making claims and offering counterarguments in a range of contexts, first-year writing works like no other course to promote empathy, ethics, and compassion in public discourse. First-year writing isn't just about preparing students for academic writing. It's about modeling and practicing writing as an act of citizenship.

First-year writing also works like no other course to push students to explore the possibilities of language, to work with new and uncomfortable ideas and genres, and to analyze important issues and how they are argued in the public sphere. Part of this means getting students to develop better methods of writing and reading in digital environments, which involves discerning what philosopher Harry Frankfurt has called bullshit. A recent survey found that 84% of American students indicated they would benefit from learning whether or not certain online sources are trustworthy. Another study reported that around 82% of middle-schoolers were unable to determine what was sponsored content and what was a real news story on a website. And being able to sift through the bullshit to find reliable sources, meaningful arguments, and a deeper intellectual exchange in public deliberation is a literacy skill developed specifically in first-year writing.

Getting smarter about the purpose of first-year writing means vanquishing one of the worst ideas about writing: that it consists of mechanical, prescribed, product-centered, decontextualized instruction in language. At its worst, first-year writing teaches students that good writing is correct writing, that the course is merely a hurdle, and that its content is mostly basic instruction without much depth or substance. At its highest potential, though, first-year writing gets at the political and cultural contexts of language use; it asks students to consider how those contexts work to inform their own positions on important public issues; and it pushes students to think about how they can ethically and persuasively position themselves in ongoing public conversations.

Further Reading

For more information about the purpose of first-year writing, see Linda Brodkey's *Writing Permitted in Designated Areas Only* (University of Minnesota Press), which is a series of essays detailing Brodkey's experiences in the 1990s incorporating a first-year writing course focused on difference at the University of Texas. Her ideas touched a cultural nerve, landing on the front pages of the *New York Times* amid charges of political indoctrination. Additionally, see Sharon Crowley's *Composition in the University* (University of Pittsburgh Press), which is a meticulously detailed examination of the first-year writing course in American colleges and universities. Crowley makes a spirited case that the universal requirement of first-year writing has severely limited both the course itself and the discipline of composition studies.

For more about first-year writing as teaching citizenship and participation in public discourse, see John Duffy's "Essay on the Value of First Year Writing Courses" in *Inside Higher Ed*, in addition to his chapter "Writing Involves Ethical Choices" in Linda Adler-

Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle's *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts in Writing Studies* (Utah State University Press).

Scholars in rhetoric and composition have also published excellent scholarship on the various paradigm shifts in the evolution of first-year writing. See for example James Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality* (Southern Illinois University Press), or Maxine Hairston's "Winds of Change" and Sean Zwagerman's "Local Examples and Master Narratives: Stanley Fish and the Public Appeal of Current Traditionalism," both in *College Composition and Communication*. These studies not only offer historical context for the evolution of first-year writing, but also discuss the relationship between first-year writing and its public reputation.

Keywords

citizenship, **current traditionalism**, first-year composition, **process theory**, **writing studies**

Author Bio

Tyler S. Branson is an assistant professor of English and associate director of composition at the University of Toledo. He teaches lower- and upper-division writing and rhetoric courses, including first-year writing, writing for

public discourse, and business writing. His research focuses primarily on the practice of rhetoric and writing in public contexts. He also has related interests in civic engagement, histories of rhetoric and composition, and writing pedagogy. He is currently working on a book project focusing on the role of what he calls problematic partnerships in the field of writing studies. He occasionally blogs at http://tylersbranson.wordpress.com and tweets @tylerbranson.

7. Bad Idea About Writing: "First-Year Composition Should be Skipped"

PAUL G. COOK

Abstract

Paul G. Cook's essay "First-Year Composition Should be Skipped" comes from *Bad Ideas About Writing*, and in it he argues for the relevance and necessity of first-year composition courses. Cook calls on personal experience and academic research to counter misconceptions about the value of freshman writing and positions first-year composition as "uniquely qualified" to help demonstrate to students that learning to write contributes to broader cognitive development and how language is a critical tool for making meaning, communicating effectively, exploring the world, and simply surviving.

This reading is available below, as a PDF, and as a podcast.

Whenever my dean cajoles me into attending our monthly 8:00am recruitment events for high school students, parents often ask me, "So, what does s/he [here they will nod in the general direction of their student] need to do to 'skip' freshman comp?"

I get it. These are anxious and expensive times. And if a college degree is just another product, as many believe, then it's damn near one's duty as an American to scrutinize every facet of the investment and save valuable credit hours whenever possible. But as the director of a writing program, I know the positive impact a well-crafted freshman composition course can have on a first-year student's college career, and it bugs me that first-year composition (FYC) gets lumped in as just another add-on to an already pricey purchase.

State legislators and policymakers, in their efforts to make higher education faster and more flexible, are busy touting MOOCs (massive open online courses) and dual-enrollment programs that allow students to take FYC in high school as an alternative to the traditional two-semester, two-course sequence. Most institu- tions offer incoming students a way to skip or test out of FYC if they perform well enough on a placement exam. These exams are usually timed, superficial in their assumptions about writing, and not considered an accurate measure of students' writing abilities, according to a great deal of research that examines how we assess the effectiveness or success of student writing.

Rather than indulging anxieties about having to take FYC, I try to explain to parents and students how useful the course can be for all incoming college students, regardless of majors or career plans. But I'm fighting a tough battle at this point. Everyone has heard of that kid down the street who skipped freshmen comp, or took it in high school or online, or tested out, or something else. So naturally, you have this seductive idea floating around that by avoiding FYC, one is somehow beating the house.

Second, writing is a curious and ancient technology. Our familiarity with writing and with the many important tasks it performs— from texting to Twitter—leads people to assume that writing is a basic skill they've already learned if not mastered. Most of us don't have the same misplaced confidence when it comes to college algebra. Then there's the simple fact that a four-year college degree is just too expensive. A degree of some kind is now essential

for most upwardly mobile Americans. According to *Bloomberg Business*, tuition has pole-vaulted some 1,225% since the 1970s, a rate that has vastly outpaced other essential costs like food and even health- care. Given the high cost of a four-year degree, it makes sense that parents and students—nearly 70% of whom will pay for school by taking out some sort of student loan—are looking for any opportu- nity to save a few bucks. All of this is to say that even though it may be a tempting one, for the majority of incoming college students, skipping FYC is a bad idea.

Here's why that idea needs to die: Writing and language are like screens between humans and what we (can) know about the world around us. Even that which we perceive as cold, hard facts are ultimately filtered through the words and symbols we use to make sense of...well, everything. Thus, the process of learning to write is a matter of broader intellectual development and survival-gear-for-living. Writing, in other words, embraces much more than relaying a preset message to a reader. As students learn how to approach the written word—how to read it, yes, but also how to read the many voices, ideas, moods, circumstances, and rhythms that influenced and shaped the words on the page—they begin to understand how language is an essential tool for learning and exploration. FYC is uniquely qualified to provide this experience for several reasons.

Students in FYC, whether in face-to-face (f2f) or online sections, benefit from the interactions they have with other writers, texts, and their teachers. College writing teachers consider it an article of faith and a hard-won point of research that texts, meaning, and knowledge are created through the complex social intersections that occur among humans. In other words, meaning does not exist outside of texts and language; even the words and symbols we use to express meaning—like the ones you're reading now—only *mean* (or signify) by virtue of their difference from other words on the page and from the virtual universe of words that might have been chosen but weren't. *Meaning*, many in rhetoric and composition believe, is an effect of language, a by-product, so to speak, rather than something that exists before or somehow outside

of language and what we call the rhetorical situation: reader, writer, purpose, medium, genre, and context.

According to reams of scholarship, rhetorical training is critical to students' growing awareness of their readers (audience), their ability to read situations (context, genre/medium, and purpose), and their developing identities as social and political beings (writers). In practical terms, possessing this capacity to do things with words means that a student can transfer the skills they've developed for one scenario—say, responding to an argument using evidence or even questioning the assumptions behind the argument itself—to other rhetorical situations and courses that require similar skills. Researchers who study this phenomenon, such as Linda S. Bergmann and Janet Zepernick, call this concept transfer, for obvious reasons.

This awareness of the essential social-*ness* of language is heightened through the training FYC students receive in the persuasive and purposeful uses of language. FYC is typically a student's first encounter with the ancient human practice known as rhetoric, the original being-together-through-language art of how to be persua- sive using words, symbols, and gestures. From the Greeks onward, rhetoric has been central to human affairs. Indeed, until the 19th century, rhetoric dominated formal education in Europe and the United States; now, it's found mainly in graduate programs in rhetoric and composition studies, speech communication, and in FYC.

Students in FYC also receive one-on-one coaching that they are not likely to get in other classes. FYC is often one of the few courses that a student can count on to be small—almost always 25 students or fewer—compared to the massive lecture halls or online courses that characterize one's early college years, especially at larger universities. FYC teachers get to know their students by name, lead discussions, coach students on writing-projects-in-progress, and provide crucial support both in the classroom and in one-on-one conferences. Together, students evaluate texts and explore the many facets of meaning and meaning-making. Crucially,

they are provided adequate time and space to do so. For these reasons and more, research shows that FYC encourages student engagement and helps retain students during and after their first year.

FYC provides a space in the all-important first year for students to nurture the habits necessary for effective writing, research, and inquiry into complex problems and questions. Data from large-scale research studies such as the Stanford Study of Writing and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) indicate that the ways of writing students practice in FYC—analyzing, synthesizing, integrating contradictory ideas from multiple sources—promote deep learning, which enables students to integrate what they are learning with what they already know. As we've discussed, writing is closely connected to exploration, to putting down on paper and seeing the limits of what we know. Writing in FYC allows students to expand those limits by relentlessly pushing back against the stubborn boundaries between the known and the new.

Students can—and often do—use their FYC experience to engage theretofore untapped interests and passions, thus unlocking possibilities for futures they perhaps were not even aware existed. FYC allows students to break out of their educational molds. They can (and sometimes do) fail the course altogether. And this, too, can be a good thing.

Several forces conspire against the continued success of FYC: decades of waning funding for higher education, bad ideas about writing and how it works, and unethically sourced, flexible labor. Recently, it has become something of an academic bloodsport to poke at FYC's relevance and what it can do. But FYC courses succeed in jogging first-year students out of their comfort zones and into the complex, messy realm of texts, meaning, intent, revision (literally "to see again"), and ultimately otherness. As John Duffy writes, "To make a claim in an argument is to propose a relationship between others and ourselves." When students seriously consider ideas, values, and opinions that they themselves do not share, they learn how to, as Duffy puts it, "sacrifice the consolations of certainty and

expose themselves to the doubts and contradictions that adhere to every worthwhile question." Even with its primary focus on writing effectively and learning how to enter an ongoing conversation, somewhat ironically, FYC's greatest gift to students may be that it teaches them how to listen.

Further Reading

For a short, timely discussion of what FYC can do for students that also considers the ethical dimensions of the teaching of writing, see John Duffy's article "Virtuous Arguments" (InsideHigherEd.com). And for a book that's equal parts art history, gallery tour, and head trip, check out Geoffrey Sirc's iconoclastic statement of composition's untapped creative potentials in *English Composition as a Happening* (Utah State University Press).

In a somewhat more traditional vein, Robert J. Connors's *Composition-Rhetoric: Backgrounds, Theory, and Pedagogy* (University of Pittsburgh Press) is a modern classic among standard histories of FYC; the book's introductory chapter alone provides a wide-angle focus on the history of writing instruction in American colleges and universities going back to the 18th century. For a somewhat more theoretical take on FYC's history and fortunes, David Russell's chapter "Institutionalizing English: Rhetoric on the Boundaries" in *Disciplining English: Alternative Histories, Critical Perspectives* (State University of New York Press) is terrific on the tangled political and curricular histories that continue to bind FYC to English departments at most U.S. institutions. James Slevin's edited collection *Introducing English: Essays in the Intellectual Work of Composition* (University of Pittsburgh Press) is an excellent overview of the disciplinary politics of composition and FYC (see especially Chapter 2).

Considered by many in the field to be one of the more trenchant and politicized statements on the university-as-social-

institution to appear in the last decade, Marc Bousquet's 2008 book *How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage Nation* (New York University Press) takes on such sacred cows as student employment, WPA "bosses," and FYC's complicity in the adjunctification of higher ed (see especially Chapter 5). But if you read one book in the course of your life about the university-as-idea and its role in contemporary Western societies, the late Bill Readings's *The University in Ruins* (Harvard University Press) is hands-down the one you should read.

Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee's *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students* (Pearson) is a hybrid rhetoric textbook/history-of-rhetoric tome that's been around for about as long as the Gutenberg Bible (not really, obviously), and it contains everything from artfully written histories of rhetorical theory to end-of-chapter exercises, some of which date back to the ancient Greeks (really!). For a much shorter, article-length articulation of how classical rhetorical principles can be adapted for today's undergraduates, David Fleming's "Rhetoric as a Course of Study" (College English) offers a curricular blueprint that is useful for implementing some of the ideas explored in this short chapter.

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Keywords

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rhetorical listening, contingent labor, deep learning, dual enrollment, ethics, first-year composition, literacy, rhetoric, writing pedagogy

Author bio

Paul Cook (@paulgeecook) teaches courses in writing, rhetoric, and new media theory at Indiana University Kokomo, where he also directs the writing program. He has been teaching and obsessing over FYC since 2002, despite having never taken the course himself, which he deeply regrets. He lives with his dog, Joni, and two annoying cats in Indianapolis, Indiana.

8. Developing a Repertoire of Reading Strategies

ELLEN C. CARILLO

Abstract

Ellen C. Carillo's essay "Developing a Repertoire of Reading Strategies" comes from her book A *Writer's Guide to Mindful Reading*. Her essay offers a collection of reading strategies designed to help students learn to engage in, understand, and respond to various kinds of texts.

This reading is available below and as a PDF.

What Is a Repertoire?

The previous chapter describes the importance of annotating—both as a means to understanding what you read and responding to it. This chapter includes additional strategies for engaging texts. Specifically, this chapter offers you a repertoire of reading strategies. A **repertoire** is like a collection or catalog, and this chapter shares with you a collection of reading strategies that you can begin to practice as you move through the chapters in this textbook. This chapter is intended to serve as a resource because it is the one place where all of the reading strategies are listed

and described. In Part Two you will have the opportunity to apply the reading strategies as you answer questions about and complete assignments related to each chapter's readings. The more of these strategies you practice and reflect on as you do so, the better prepared you will be to read the range of texts (broadly defined) you will encounter in this class, your other classes, and beyond school. Remember that these strategies may go by different names in different courses and contexts. More important than their names, though, are how they help you understand and respond to what you read. As the descriptions indicate, these strategies are useful across different genres or kinds of texts, as well as across media.

Ponder This

Think about what you read and how you read. How would you describe the types of texts you read for school, pleasure, your job? Do you find yourself using any strategies for doing so? How would you compare the experiences of reading these different texts?

Choosing a Reading Strategy: The Importance of Purpose

As you think about which strategy suits your particular needs, it would be wise to think about your purpose for reading. This is, perhaps, the most important question you must ask yourself. As you consider that question, consider other, related questions. For example:

- Are you reading to then write a summary of the text?
- Are you reading to compare that text to another one?
- Are you reading to see if the text can serve as a source in a research paper?
- Are you reading to design a multimodal project?
- Are you reading to imitate an author's style?

Determining why you are reading is crucial to choosing the most productive strategy. One strategy might help you understand a text's argument while another might be more useful in helping you determine a text's organization or design. Some strategies might work better when you read poetry while others work better with informational texts.

As you practice each strategy, you also need to reflect on it, to think about it. This is the crux of mindful reading—paying close, deliberate attention to how you are reading and how each strategy works. Tracking how well you are reading is not as easy as tracking your writing progress, which can be rather easily done by revising drafts into more polished pieces of writing. This is where annotation comes in. As you apply the reading strategies introduced in this chapter, you are expected to annotate your texts—digitally or by hand—so you can make the very act of reading visible. This will allow you to track your reading, as well as the connections between the practices of writing and reading. Your written annotations will show you what you were thinking and how you were constructing meaning as you were applying each strategy. You might think of your annotations as written drafts of your readings, evidence of preliminary understandings and responses to what you are reading while you are reading. As you apply different reading strategies to the same texts, your annotations will represent articulations of how you interact with the text across multiple experiences of reading.

The Reading Strategies – Previewing

Previewing is one strategy you probably already use, although unconsciously, when you approach both online and printed texts.

When you preview a text, you quickly scan it and all that surrounds and supports it. You notice its title, its author, its general design and whether there is an accompanying summary or abstract. You get a sense of its structure, including any subject headings, images, and hyperlinks it may contain. And, ultimately, you determine its **genre**, which means you decide what type of text it is. You might ask yourself: Is it an informational text or a literary text? Beyond that more general question, you might consider whether it is a piece of poetry, a play, a newspaper article, a blog entry, or a novel. If you determine that the text is a newspaper article, for example, you are going to read it differently than if it were a piece of poetry. In other words, you wouldn't get very far reading a newspaper article for symbolism and metaphors or reading a piece of poetry simply for information. That is how genre structures your reading.

When you pay attention to genre and these other elements while you are previewing a text, you are paying attention to **schemas**—elements or frameworks that structure or impact how you read. Schemas depend upon readers drawing on prior knowledge and experiences to help understand what and how the text means. For example, if you read a story that begins with "Once upon a time," you will—albeit probably unconsciously—recognize that you may be reading a fairy tale. From there, all of the prior knowledge of and experiences you have with fairy tales will kick in, and you will expect to see the elements of a fairy tale in the piece you are reading: the prince and princess; the castle; perhaps a dragon or some other ominous creature; and a happily-ever-after ending. You do a lot of this work unconsciously when you pick up a text or read online. The point is to become more aware of how reading works so you can use this information to make your reading more productive. Keep in mind, though, that it will likely be necessary to use previewing as a preliminary reading strategy and supplement it later with another one that will allow you to more deeply and comprehensively understand what you have read. You apply this strategy by annotating—by marking—the schemas of texts, the aspects that help you understand it.

To experience the power of a schema read the following paragraphs.

The procedure is actually quite simple. First you arrange things into different groups. Of course, one pile may be sufficient depending on how much there is to do. If you have to go somewhere else due to lack of facilities that is the next step, otherwise you are pretty well set. It is important not to overdo things. That is, it is better to do too few things at once than too many. In the short run this may not seem important but complications can easily arise. A mistake can be expensive as well. At first the whole procedure will seem complicated.

Soon, however, it will become just another facet of life. It is difficult to foresee any end to the necessity for this task in the immediate future, but then one never can tell. After the procedure is completed one arranges the materials into different groups again. Then they can be put into their appropriate places. Eventually they will be used once more and the whole cycle will then have to be repeated. However, that is part of life. (Bransford and Johnson 722)

Doesn't make much sense, does it? In the following example, the same paragraphs are inserted, but with a heading.

Laundry

The procedure is actually quite simple. First you arrange things into different groups. Of course, one pile may be sufficient depending on how much there is to do. If you have to go somewhere else due to lack of facilities that is the next step, otherwise you are pretty well set. It is important not to overdo things. That is, it is better to do too few things at once than too many. In the short run this may not seem important bu complications can easily arise. A mistake can be expensive as well. At first the whole procedure will seem complicated.

Soon, however, it will become just another facet of life. It is

difficult to foresee any end to the necessity for this task in the immediate future, but then one never can tell, After the procedure is completed one arranges the materials into different groups again. Then they can be put into their appropriate places. Eventually they will be used once more and the whole cycle will then have to be repeated. However, that is part of life. (Bransford and Johnson 722)

That heading, "Laundry," acts as a schema that allows you to understand the paragraphs. These excerpts were used in an experiment conducted by cognitive psychologists John D. Bransford and Marcia K. Johnson who found that without that heading as a schema, readers didn't understand or remember the paragraph. Was that your experience, too?

Practice Working with Schemas

Choose an excerpt from an online source and anticipate which schemas offer the most important clues about how to read and make sense of it; remove them. Share this version with a classmate. To what extent can your classmate make sense of it? Try adding the schemas back one at a time and giving your classmate additional tries at comprehending the excerpt. Which schema(s) ultimately proved the most important?

Skimming

You read right . . . skimming! You might be surprised that you are being encouraged to skim—read quickly—rather than to always read closely or deeply, but skimming is an important reading strategy and is the best reading strategy in some situations. You probably don't need much instruction in skimming as research shows that this is the most common approach to reading online. Skimming is a lot like previewing and is an appropriate reading practice when you do not need to develop (in your mind) or provide (via a writing assignment) a deep and detailed understanding of a text. Skimming can be a particularly useful practice in the early stages of research

when you are looking for sources that are relevant to your topic, but you do not yet need to work closely with them. When you are in the later stages of the writing process of a research essay, if you have determined that it is a useful piece of writing for your purposes, you will need to return and re-read the text using a different reading strategy so that you can work more closely with it in an essay. In other instances, you may not need to do more than skim. As you skim, you may want to annotate a piece by noticing the elements in the following list (some of which involve previewing since the practices are closely related) and marking them as they appear in the text.

1. The elements you notice by "previewing" the piece, such as its title; author; introductory mate- rial (e.g. an abstract); and general design and structure (e.g. subject headings, graphics, and hyperlinks). See you if you can determine its genre, which means you decide what type of text it is.
2. The introduction since introductions often (although not always) describe the piece as a whole.
3. The first sentence of each paragraph since first sentences are usually topic sentences and can give you an overall sense of the subject of the paragraph.
4. The conclusion or the final paragraph of the piece since conclusions often (although not always) summarize a piece.

Practice Skimming

1. **Choose** a page in one of your books or textbooks to skim. What would you notice if you were skimming it by using the techniques discussed above?
2. **Using the guidelines above, skim** three online movie reviews of films you would like to see (either older or current films). How much do you know about each film after skimming? What questions about the films have not be answered by skimming? Could you describe each film to someone else?

The Says/Does Approach

This approach to reading asks you to pay attention to two different elements of any given text. It asks you to notice what the text *says*—its content—and what the text *does*—how it functions. This approach is useful because it shifts attention away from content, which is often easier to figure out and toward how a text or sections of a text function. Being able to recognize both what a paragraph (or aspect of a multimodal project) says and what it does—and being able to recognize the difference between the two—can help you understand the piece as a whole. For example, a particularly difficult paragraph in a text you are reading may be addressing the mating habits of bees. That's the content, the "says" part. In an effort to figure out what that paragraph is doing, you may realize that it is presenting an opposing view that challenges the claim the author is making. In recognizing this, you have avoided the common mistake of attributing all of the ideas within an article to its author. In this case, by focusing on how that paragraph functions, on what it does, you realized that it is not the author speaking, but rather the author is *using the example to challenge his own claim.* That is what it is doing. This approach can help you determine how the different parts of a text work together to create meaning. When faced with a difficult or especially long text, you can annotate each paragraph by noting what it says and what it does. In the following example, annotations indicate what each paragraph says and does.

Addressing Students' Affective Responses to Conducting Online Research

In recent years, there have been studies that indicate that students are not particularly adept at conducting online research. Students' reliance on Wikipedia (Nicholas, Rowlands & Huntington, 2009), as well as Google-based searches, has been documented (Nicholas, Rowlands & Huntington, 2009; Purdy, 2012), as have their difficulties evaluating the credibility of the sources they find online (Ostenson, 2009; Hargittai, Fullerton, Menchen-Trevino, & Thomas, 2010). Studies have indicated that students choose sources based on their ease of use as opposed to the relevance to their subject (Purdy, 2012, p. 7) and that students—who quote primarily from the abstracts and first page of sources—may even lack the ability to understand what they are reading (Howard, Serviss, & Rodrigue, 2010, p. 189).

Says: Students are not that good at conducting online research.

Does: Introduces the subject of the piece, namely students' online research habits.

Certainly, instructors at all levels and across the disciplines have a significant amount of work to do in order to help students develop stronger information literacy skills and digital research practices. Part of that work must address the affective—or emotional—component of conducting digital research in an age with so much readily-accessible information. Conducting online research is understandably overwhelming for students. While studies of students' research practices often report students' feelings of frustration at various points in the research process (Head, 2007; Head and Eisenberg 2009, 2010; Kuhlthau, 2004) these important findings tend to be overshadowed by findings that provide insight into students' progress toward more intellectually productive research practices.

Says: People who teach students and study their research habits need to take into account the affective/emotional (rather than just the intellectual) aspects of conducting online research.

Does: Describes an otherwise neglected aspect of this research and argues for incorporating attention to it in studies.

Now that you have read the excerpt and its annotations, go back to the annotations to notice the specific verbs used to characterize what each paragraph "does." This is usually what separates the "says" from the "does" since the "does" is active while the "says" is more descriptive. Let's go paragraph by paragraph: The first paragraph *introduces* while the second *describes* and *argues*. These verbs—along with other verbs and verb phrases—such as *summarizes*, *challenges*, *argues*, *elaborates*; *supports*; *narrows the subject*; *defines*; *redefines*; *provides historical context*; *presents opposing evidence*; *provides new evidence*—will help you define what paragraphs do.

Practice the Says/Does Approach

1. **Choose** a reading from this textbook and annotate the first ten paragraphs using the says/does approach.

2. **Return** to your says/does annotations from question 1—and particularly to your "does" notes. Either in the form of a paragraph or an outline, develop an overview of the structure of those first 10 paragraphs by describing what each paragraph is doing.

Rhetorical Reading

Rhetorically reading involves reading a text with an eye toward the **rhetoric** of what you are reading. Rhetoric is the available means of persuasion at a writer's disposal. When you read something rhetorically you are paying particular attention to how certain elements of the text influence you as you read. By paying attention to those elements as you read, you become more aware of how a text persuades you or acts upon you. This awareness can also help you as a writer make choices about how you will use rhetoric to influence those who read your work, whether it is something you have written or a multimodal project you have created.

When reading rhetorically, there are at least four rhetorical elements to which you should pay attention by asking yourself the following questions about purpose, audience, claims, evidence, and appeals. As you read rhetorically, annotate a text by marking the parts of the piece that help you determine the following:

1. What is the author's purpose? Is the author arguing a point? Bringing awareness to a problem? Trying to make sense of an experience? Calling people to action?
2. Who is the intended audience? To whom does the author seem to be writing?
3. What are the author's claims? What claims and what kind of claims does the author make?
4. What kinds of evidence are used? Scientific data, anecdotes, personal experience?

Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle taught his own students that there are three specific types of appeals that orators might make in order to persuade their audiences. These appeals are still taught today as strategies that writers can use to persuade readers and appeals that readers can recognize as ways that texts persuade them. These three persuasive strategies make up the rhetorical triangle.

Ethos: Appeals to credibility. Notice how the author tries to persuade readers by establishing his/her credibility.

Logos: Appeals to logic. Notice how the author uses the logic of his argument or his claims to persuade readers.

Pathos: Appeals to emotions. Notice how the author tries to persuade readers by engaging their emotions.

LOGOS:
Logic, Reason, and Proof

ETHOS:
Credibility and Trust

PATHOS:
Emotions
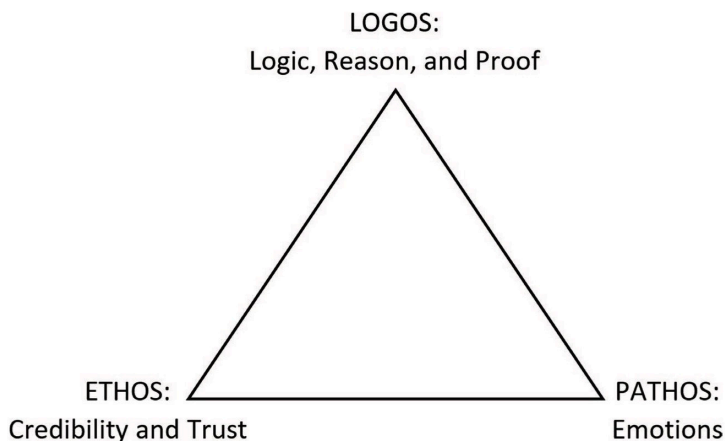
Practice Rhetorical Reading

1. **Choose** any piece of writing—digital or print. You might choose a blog entry, a newspaper, an excerpt from one of your textbooks, or even a piece of your own writing. Rhetorically read it by answering the four questions on the previous page.
2. **Think** of a cause that you believe in (e.g. civil rights; environmental issues; campus issues). Design two flyers advertising the meeting of a campus group that will support the cause. Maybe the cause is something as well-known as global warming or as localized as dorm curfews. The audience for

the first flyer is students who have already signed a petition indicating their commitment to the cause. The audience for the second flyer is new, first-year students who likely don't know about this group on campus. How do these different audiences affect the other rhetorical aspects of your flyers? Look back at the four questions for guidance to determine how the content and the design of the flyers might be impacted by these different audiences.

Reading Aloud to Paraphrase

This strategy really consists of two individual strategies combined into one, namely reading aloud and paraphrasing. You should feel free to separate them if that works better for you. The combination, though, brings together complementary approaches to reading: reading aloud highlights each word as the reader hears it and paraphrase requires that the reader not only hear each word but translate it in her own words. This reading approach, thus, fosters concentration in ways that some others may not, and it may be especially helpful when faced with particularly difficult paragraphs or sections of texts. Unfortunately, many students rarely read aloud beyond elementary school. You may come across a professor who requires you to read poetry aloud, but that is likely the extent of reading aloud in high school and college. Still, if you can recall a time when you heard poetry read aloud (either by yourself or a classmate) it likely made a lot more sense than when you read it on the page. As you read aloud to paraphrase, you need not paraphrase every single word, but you should stop every few sentences or so and annotate the text by writing, in your own words, what you just read.

Practice Reading Aloud to Paraphrase

1. Choose a reading from this textbook. Read it aloud, stopping regularly to paraphrase—in the form of annotations—what you are reading. To what extent do these annotations help you understand what you are reading?
2. Choose a short piece of nonfiction. First, read it to yourself, and when you are finished write a brief summary of what you have read. Now, read it again aloud, paraphrasing—in the form of annotation—as you read. How were the experiences different?
3. If you do not want to read aloud or have difficulty hearing, choose a reading from this textbook and read it to yourself stopping regularly to paraphrase—in the form of annotations—what you are reading. To what extent do these annotations help you understand what you are reading?

Mapping

Education scholar and optometrist Héctor C. Santiago, among others, have found that "visual tools may help . . . students develop better recall, comprehension and critical thinking skills" (137). Mapping is one of those visual tools that can be adapted to various reading purposes and helps readers visually organize information. When you map a text you present visually what the text says. You might map the text as a whole, you might choose a few pages to map, or you might choose a single element to map such as a text's argument. When you map a text, you become highly aware of the relationships among its different parts, and the visual representation often highlights aspects of the text that aren't otherwise visible.

Maps come in different shapes and sizes, and can be adjusted to suit your needs. Perhaps the most common is the web or radial map in which the main idea or concept is in the center while threads radiate from it to indicate the connections between the central

concept/idea and the other, less central ideas. From those threads come other threads and so on from there. Maps can be developed by hand or with digital, text mapping software. The most important element of any map is that it allows you to see how different elements of a text (e.g. its argument, evidence, characters) are related and structured. Often, these visual representations allow you to recognize relationships you hadn't noticed while reading.

Maps also underscore the importance of returning to and revising your reading as you visually represent, rank, and connect the different elements of the text since you will likely need to revise your map as you continue reading and re-reading. Annotating a text can help you map it because your annotations draw your attention to the various elements of a text you will need to represent visually. The radial map on the following page is based on Sarah Davis' "'The Blurred Lines' Effect: Popular Music and the Perpetuation of Rape Culture" (see Chapter 9 for the full text of Sarah Davis' essay). By placing the concept of rape culture at the center and related issues around it, the student can begin to visualize some of the ways that rape culture is perpetuated, as well as the challenges of recognizing these forces. It is worth noting that this is a very basic version of a map that would be added to over time as the student sought to further explore the connections among these ideas and others in the text.

Songs help perpetuate this culture

Robin Thicke as particpant in perpetuation

Hard to remove ourselves from the culture to recognize what perpetuates it

Rape Culture

Just as this reader would be expected to go back and revise this map in order to incorporate more details, you should imagine that your maps are open to revisions and additions as you read and reread the text you are mapping. Still, this initial map allows you to see how the reader is working toward figuring out what causes and perpetuates rape culture.

Practice Mapping

1. **Choose** a reading from this textbook and annotate its first two pages using a reading strategy of your choice. Then use your annotations to develop a map.

2. **Read** the next four pages of the same selection you read in question 1. Now that you have read a total of six pages, return to your map and make necessary revisions.

The Believing/Doubting Game

This strategy was developed by scholar and teacher Peter Elbow and

encourages you, the reader, to play two roles while reading. First, you read a text or engage a project as though you believe it. You annotate the text by marking the reasons why you (in your role as "believer") would believe these things. You might keep a list in or adjacent to the text and might even add other evidence to the list to further support the writer's position. Then, you take on the role of the "doubter." You go back to the text to cast doubt on it. Again, you annotate the text by keeping a running list of the problems or faults you find in the writer's position. This is an especially useful strategy when you need to figure out where you stand on an issue and what you truly believe in light of what a writer has said. This strategy also helps you understand why others believe what they do since you will have to "believe" a position you may truly doubt.

Practicing the Believing/Doubting Game

1. **Go online** to a website that supports a view of an issue that is opposed to your view. For example, if you support stronger gun control laws go to a website that publishes information on the opposing viewpoint such as the National Rifle Association (NRA) site. Spend some time reading the information on the site. Putting your true viewpoint aside and "believing" what the site says, write a letter to someone associated with the cause (e.g. a government official; an environmentalist; a news reporter) outlining your "beliefs" and their rationale.

2. **Reflect** on the letter completed in #1 by writing a paragraph about any new information you came across as you read the site. To what extent did this information affect where you truly stand on the subject? Have you changed your mind? Explain.

Reading Like a Writer (RLW)

In 1990, English professor Charles Moran published an essay encouraging students to read like writers. More recently, English professor Mike Bunn extended Moran's thinking by developing a series of steps that one can take in order to read like a writer, which he often abbreviates as "RLW." Bunn explains RLW as follows: "When you Read Like a Writer you work to identify some of the choices the author made so that you can better understand how

such choices might arise in your own writing. The idea is to carefully examine the things you read, looking at the writerly techniques in the text in order to decide if you might want to adopt similar (or the same) techniques in your writing" (72). Bunn uses the phrase "writerly techniques" to describe the ways that writers present their ideas and make their points. You might think about this as their style. Perhaps the author of the text you are reading has opened her piece with a quotation and concludes with a question. Maybe she switches between formal and informal language throughout. Perhaps she includes dialogue. The key to RLW is noticing these different techniques in order to determine whether you might try them in your own writing. Bunn further explains that this reading approach is not about learning or understanding the content of a reading. Instead, when you adopt this approach you do so to learn about writing. Bunn lists many questions one might ask while using this reading strategy, and he recommends keeping a pen or pencil nearby and marking—or annotating— moments in the text that reveal especially interesting choices that the writer has made. Bunn suggests answering the following central questions about each moment:

- What is the technique the author is using here?
- Is this technique effective?
- What would be the advantages and disadvantages if I tried this same technique in my writing? (81)

Note that these three questions are equally relevant to "reading" multimodal projects, although Bunn's focus is on print-based work. Keep in mind that while you may not be able to use the technical names all of the different techniques the writer is using, this strategy makes these techniques visible, and, therefore, they can still be imitated. This reading strategy might be especially useful if you are expected to use writing techniques or design techniques similar to those used by another author, as well as if you are looking for new techniques to try out in your own work.

Reading and Evaluating Online Sources

Reading online often involves using search engines and other tools on the internet to search for texts. Because there is so much information—so much to read—online and none of it is regulated in any way, reading online means being especially vigilant about the quality of what you encounter. This reading strategy, then, is not about helping you understand a text's content, but rather "reading" its credibility—determining whether it is worthy of being believed—so that you can make informed decisions about whether it is a text that will serve your purposes. When faced with online texts— whether digital texts that may have a printed, hardcopy counterpart or websites—evaluate the text by keeping the following questions in mind to gain insight into whether it is an appropriate source for your needs. You may use annotation as a tool for recording your answers.

1. Consider the differences among these domains. What kind of website does the text appear on? Is it a .com, .org, .gov, .edu?
2. Know the author. Who is the author, organization, or company that sponsors the website? Search for more information once you have this information. If there is no author, try looking up the website at WHOIS, which provides this information: https://whois.icann.org/en
3. Try to determine if the piece is peer-reviewed, which means

that it goes through an evaluation by other scholars in the field. If you are looking at a journal article, for example, notice the press that publishes the journal. Then search that press to find information about it.

4. Look to see if the text has a bibliography at the end. If so, what kinds of texts are cited?

5. Consider if any sources are cited in the piece. If so, what kinds?

Practice Reading and Evaluating Online Sources

1. **Choose** an online article or essay and annotate it by answering the five questions above.

2. **Look back** at the annotations you made in #1 and notice any gaps or questions that remain about your sources. Develop a plan for answering those questions and filling in those gaps.

For Further Reading

Bransford, John D. and Marcia K. Johnson. "Contextual Prerequisites for Understanding: Some Investigations of Comprehension and Recall." Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior, vol. 11, 1972, pp. 717-726.

Bunn, Mike. "How to Read Like a Writer." Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing, Volume 2, Parlor Press, 2011, pp. 71-86. http://www.parlorpress.com/pdf/bunn–how-to-read.pdf

Moran, Charles. "Reading Like a Writer." Vital Signs 1, edited by James L. Collins, Boynton/Cook, 1990, pp. 60-69.

Santiago, Héctor C. "Visual Mapping to Enhance Learning and Critical Thinking Skills." Optometric Education, vol. 36, no. 3, 2011, pp. 125-195.

Author Bio

Ellen C. Carillo is Associate Professor of English at the University of Connecticut and the Writing Coordinator at its Waterbury Campus. Dr. Carillo is author of *Securing a Place for Reading in Composition: The Importance of Teaching for Transfer* (Utah State UP, 2015) and her scholarship on reading has appeared in *Rhetoric Review*; *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture*; *Reader: Essays in Reader-Oriented Theory, Criticism, and Pedagogy*; *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship*; *The Writing Center Journal*; and *Currents in Teaching and Learning*; as well as in several edited collections. She has also guest-edited a special issue of *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship* on the role of reading in writing centers. Dr. Carillo is co-founder of the Role of Reading in Composition Studies Special Interest Group of the Conference on College Composition and Communication and regularly

presents her scholarship at regional and national conferences. She has been awarded grants from NeMLA, CCCC, and the Council of Writing Program Administrators.

9. Bad Idea About Writing: "Reading and Writing Are Not Connected"

ELLEN C. CARILLO

Abstract

In this essay from *Bad Ideas About Writing*, Ellen C. Carillo uses research to disprove the belief that "Reading and Writing are not Connected." Instead, Carillo demonstrates how students in writing classes can benefit from thinking and practices that consider the relationships between these two activities.

This reading is available below, as a PDF, and as a podcast.

Since the 1950s we have been hearing that Johnny can't read. In 1975, *Newsweek* informed us that Johnny can't write, either. Over the years, a range of reasons for Johnny's illiteracy have been offered. Most recently, technology has been named one of the culprits. Johnny spends too much time on the computer and not enough time reading books. He spends so much time texting and tweeting that he has forgotten how to write correctly, how to spell, how to develop ideas in more than 140 characters. Public outcries about literacy (or lack thereof) often lead to a closer look at the education

system. The public raises questions surrounding why colleges and universities in particular—where Johnny would be expected to gain in-depth and comprehensive literacy skills— are not doing a better job. What is often neglected in these public debates about the best way to teach literacy at the college level is that reading and writing are connected practices and, as such, the best way to teach them is together. It is a bad idea to continue privileging writing at the expense of reading.

This problematic separation of the connected practices of reading and writing is no longer an issue in students' early schooling, where they are taught reading and writing simultaneously. Although it took decades for elementary school teachers and curricula developers to realize that young children need not learn how to read before they learned how to write, language arts instructors now teach reading and writing alongside each other. They do so because research has shown that students learn to read and write better when they are instructed in both simultaneously. This research, for example, shows that students' phonic skills are rein- forced when children practice both reading and writing the same words. As they get a little older, students begin to develop an awareness of genres or types of text, which, like the study of phonics, is also further reinforced by a concurrent focus on reading and writing. As students read (or are read to) they learn to recognize typical elements of fiction, which they then imitate in their own writing and stories. Even a two-year-old who has been read to consistently will recognize that "once upon a time" indicates the beginning of a story, and will often begin that same way when asked to make up his or her own.

By the time students arrive in college, stories beginning with "once upon a time" are long gone, and in their place are difficult and dense texts—often multimedia texts—from a range of fields each with its own set of conventions. Instead of drawing on models of early literacy education that focus on teaching reading and writing simultaneously, college and universities largely privilege writing over reading. This hierarchy is evidenced by the universal first-

year writing requirement in American colleges and universities, as well as by writing across the curriculum programs. The integrated approach to teaching reading and writing falls away to students' peril and causes great frustration in the professors who often attribute students' struggles in their courses to poor writing ability, when these problems are often related to students' reading difficulties. While students' eyes may make their way over every word, that does not mean that students have comprehended a text or that they are prepared to successfully complete the writing tasks associated with the reading, which often involve summary, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation.

More importantly, if students are not given the opportunity to continue working on their reading throughout their college careers, they may struggle analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating all that surrounds them since comprehension is a crucial step toward these more advanced interpretive practices. Students may lack the ability to read the world around them because they do not have the tools to recognize the values and assumptions that inform the images, advertisements, news stories, political campaigns, and ideas with which they come into contact on a daily basis. By not focusing on reading as an equally creative and active enterprise as writing—very much writing's counterpart in the creation of meaning—colleges and universities are potentially producing students, or citizens, who think reading is passive. These students might blindly accept whatever comes their way rather than actively engaging ideas, asking questions, and seeking out multiple perspectives.

 Although writing is more often thought of as a creative act, reading is just as creative. When one writes, one is creating meaning by putting words and ideas together. When one reads, the same thing is happening. Although someone else has already put the words and ideas together, the reader interacts with those and creates meaning by bringing her perspective, personal experiences, and background to what literary scholar Louise Rosenblatt has called the transaction between the text and reader. This is why a few people might read the same novel but each take something different

from it. That personal transaction with the text has affected how each reader creates meaning. When reading and writing are taught alongside each other in the college-level classroom, students can gain practice experiencing and relishing in opportunities to create meaning not just through writing, but through reading everything from print texts to art to websites to national news events, all of which they will continue to engage beyond school. Focusing on active reading approaches, including everything from comprehension strategies to ways of determining something's inherent values and biases to productive methods of responding, is crucial if students are going to leave postsecondary institutions prepared to be informed, aware, and engaged citizens.

Unfortunately, there is still a great deal of work to be done since recent studies such as The Citation Project, a multi-institutional, and empirical research project show that students' reading abilities are largely underdeveloped. This research seeks to understand how students read sources and use them in their writing. With less than 10% of students using summary in their writing (as opposed to paraphrasing, copying, and citing), scholar Rebecca Moore Howard and her colleagues noted that their findings raise questions about students' abilities to understand what they are reading. Recent studies from Education Testing Services have corroborated these findings as did findings from studies conducted by ACT, Inc. and the Pew Charitable Trust, which found that close to half of the college students in their samples did not meet minimum benchmarks for literacy or lacked reading proficiency. These deficiencies are major problems particularly in this digital age for, as literacy scholar Donald Leu and his colleagues have pointed out, foundational literacies such as reading and writing print text will continue to play a crucial role—and maybe even a more essential role—in this digital age because of the proliferation of information.

Because there is so much at stake, educators and the public must keep the connections between reading and writing in mind as we continue to engage in debates about the best practices for teaching literacy. The value of literacy undoubtedly extends far

beyond school. To read and to write is to create, to interpret. If education is, in fact, a means to preparing citizens to function and participate within a democracy then reading and writing—and the interpretive skills they inculcate—are crucial. As research has shown, teaching them alongside each other reinforces both skills.

Even if we want to be a bit cynical and argue that postsecondary education has become nothing more than a necessary, but burdensome, step to gaining employment, both reading and writing are still just as important. A 2011 survey found that 86% of corporate recruiters said strong communication skills were a priority—well ahead of the next skill. In a 2013 survey of 318 employers published by the Association of American Colleges and Universities, 80% of employers said colleges should focus more on written and oral communication. In these and similar studies, communication is defined by reading and writing abilities. Employers want to hire people who can communicate effectively, and despite our culture's recent celebration of all things STEM, many employers continue to vocalize the importance of effective communication skills. Teaching reading and writing together will help students become more proficient in both.

Developing those communication skills means that those of us within education should look at the curricula we teach and/or administer and ask ourselves if we have fallen into the trap of compartmentalizing reading and writing to the detriment of our students. If we have, we must ask ourselves: how might we better integrate attention to both reading and writing in order to enrich the literacy education we are providing? We must not assume that simply exposing students to texts of all kinds and across all media will automatically result in comprehension. Instructors must deliberately teach students how to actively read the words and images and, by extension, the world around them. Instructors must do so not only so students can succeed in their courses, but so that students can be prepared to actively engage in the complex interpretive work that is expected of citizens in an information-rich culture.

We are all encountering more text and visual images than ever before. There is a great deal at stake if we don't take the opportunity to teach active reading alongside writing. Instructors need to teach students different strategies for reading the complex texts they will encounter throughout their academic careers and in the world. One of these strategies might be rhetorical reading wherein readers pay particular attention to how a text is working on them, persuading them. A better understanding of this as a reader can also support students' writing as they develop their own arguments. Instructors might also provide a strategy such as reading like a writer, wherein readers notice the choices a writer has made and understands the relevance of those choices to their own writing. Without explicit attention to reading and the relationship between reading and writing, students will not have strategies for making sense of new or difficult texts, arguments, images, and ideas they encounter. Denying students the richness of an education that considers reading and writing alongside each other means denying them the opportunity to become as proficient as possible in these connected practices and, therefore, experience and practice the interpretive work that is specifically human.

Further Reading

For the media's contemporary coverage of the ongoing literacy crisis, see Sofia Westin's "Social Media Eroding Skills?" (*The Philadelphia Inquirer*), the *Bloomberg News* report "U.S. Teens Report Decline in Writing Skills," and Michael Rosenwald's "Serious Reading Takes a Hit from Online Scanning and Skimming" (*The Washington Post*). For historical coverage of this phenomenon see Rudolf Fleisch's *Why Can't Johnny Read?* and Merrill Sheils's "Why Johnny Can't Write" (*Newsweek*).

For contemporary, scholarly approaches that emphasize the importance of simultaneous instruction in reading and writing,

particularly at the postsecondary level, see Robert Scholes's "The Transition to College Reading," Linda Adler-Kassner and Heidi Estrem's "Reading Practices in the Writing Classroom," Alice S. Horning and Elizabeth Kraemer's *Reconnecting Reading and Writing*, David Jolliffe's "Learning to Read as Continuing Education," David Jolliffe and Allison Harl's "Studying the 'Reading Transition' from High School to College: What Are Our Students Reading and Why?," and Mike Bunn's "Motivation and Connection: Teaching Reading (and Writing) in the Composition Classroom."

Author Bio

Ellen C. Carillo is associate professor of English at the University of Connecticut and the writing program administrator at its Waterbury campus. She is the author of Securing a Place for Reading in Composition: The Importance of Teaching for Transfer, as well as articles and chapters on the place of reading in the teaching of writing. Ellen has earned grants to conduct research on

reading–writing connections in the classroom and regularly presents her findings and scholarship at national conferences. She is also a founding member and co-leader of "The Role of Reading in Composition Studies" special interest group, which meets at the Conference on College Composition and Communication's annual convention.

10. How to Read Like a Writer

MIKE BUNN

Abstract

Michael Bunn's essay "How to Read Like a Writer" comes from the book *Writing Spaces*. The book offers the following abstract for the text: "Learning to 'read like a writer' can be a great benefit to students. […] Students will find this chapter useful for expanding their writing strategies by helping them learn to identify key moments in texts, moments when the author uses an innovative technique, which they might employ in their own writing."

This reading is available below and as a PDF.

In 1997, I was a recent college graduate living in London for six months and working at the Palace Theatre owned by Andrew Lloyd Webber. The Palace was a beautiful red brick, four-story theatre in the heart of London's famous West End, and eight times a week it housed a three-hour performance of the musical *Les Miserables*. Because of antiquated fire-safety laws, every theatre in the city was required to have a certain number of staff members inside watching the performance in case of an emergency.

My job (in addition to wearing a red tuxedo jacket) was to sit inside the dark theater with the patrons and make sure nothing

went wrong. It didn't seem to matter to my supervisor that I had no training in security and no idea where we kept the fire extinguishers. I was pretty sure that if there *was* any trouble I'd be running down the back stairs, leaving the patrons to fend for themselves. I had no intention of dying in a bright red tuxedo.

There was a Red Coat stationed on each of the theater's four floors, and we all passed the time by sitting quietly in the back, reading books with tiny flashlights. It's not easy trying to read in the dim light of a theatre—flashlight or no flashlight—and it's even tougher with shrieks and shouts and gunshots coming from the stage. I had to focus intently on each and every word, often rereading a single sentence several times. Sometimes I got distracted and had to re-read entire paragraphs. As I struggled to read in this environment, I began to realize that the way I was reading—one word at a time—was exactly the same way that the author had written the text. I realized writing is a word-by-word, sentence-by-sentence process. The intense concentra- tion required to read in the theater helped me recognize some of the interesting ways that authors string words into phrases into paragraphs into entire books.

I came to realize that all writing consists of a series of choices.

I was an English major in college, but I don't think I ever thought much about reading. I read all the time. I read for my classes and on the computer and sometimes for fun, but I never really thought about the important connections between reading and writing, and how reading in a particular way could also make me a better writer.

What Does It Mean to Read Like a Writer?

When you Read Like a Writer (RLW) you work to identify some of the choices the author made so that you can better understand how such choices might arise in your own writing. The idea is to carefully

examine the things you read, looking at the writerly techniques in the text in order to decide if you might want to adopt similar (or the same) techniques in your writing.

You are reading to learn about writing.

Instead of reading for content or to better understand the ideas in the writing (which you will automatically do to some degree anyway), you are trying to understand how the piece of writing was put together by the author and what you can learn about writing by reading a particular text. As you read in this way, you think about how the choices the author made and the techniques that he/she used are influencing your own responses as a reader. What is it about the way this text is written that makes you feel and respond the way you do?

The goal as you read like a writer is to locate what you believe are the most important writerly choices represented in the text—choices as large as the overall structure or as small as a single word used only once—to consider the effect of those choices on potential readers (including yourself). Then you can go one step further and imagine what *different* choices the author *might* have made instead, and what effect those different choices would have on readers.

Say you're reading an essay in class that begins with a short quote from President Barack Obama about the war in Iraq. As a writer, what do you think of this technique? Do you think it is effective to begin the essay with a quote? What if the essay began with a quote from someone else? What if it was a much *longer* quote from President Obama, or a quote from the President about something other than the war?

And here is where we get to the most important part: *Would you want to try this technique in your own writing*?

Would you want to start your own essay with a quote? Do you think it would be effective to begin your essay with a quote from President Obama? What about a quote from someone else?

You could make yourself a list. What are the advantages and disadvantages of starting with a quote? What about the advantages

and disadvantages of starting with a quote from the President? How would other readers respond to this technique? Would certain readers (say Democrats or liberals) appreciate an essay that started with a quote from President Obama better than other readers (say Republicans or conservatives)? What would be the advantages and disadvantages of starting with a quote from a *less* divisive person? What about starting with a quote from someone *more* divisive?

The goal is to carefully consider the choices the author made and the techniques that he or she used, and then decide whether you want to make those same choices or use those same techniques in your own writing. Author and professor Wendy Bishop explains how her reading process changed when she began to read like a writer:

> It wasn't until I claimed the sentence as my area of desire, interest, and expertise—until I wanted to be a writer writing better—that I had to look underneath my initial readings . . . I started asking, *how*—*how* did the writer get me to feel, *how* did the writer say something so that it remains in my memory when many other things too easily fall out, *how* did the writer communicate his/her intentions about genre, about irony? (119–20)

Bishop moved from simply reporting her personal reactions to the things she read to attempting to uncover *how* the author led her (and other readers) to have those reactions. This effort to uncover how authors build texts is what makes Reading Like a Writer so useful for student writers.

How Is RLW Different from "Normal" Reading?

Most of the time we read for information. We read a recipe to learn how to bake lasagna. We read the sports page to see if our school won the game, Facebook to see who has commented on our status

update, a history book to learn about the Vietnam War, and the syllabus to see when the next writing assignment is due. Reading Like a Writer asks for something very different.

In 1940, a famous poet and critic named Allen Tate discussed two different ways of reading:

> There are many ways to read, but generally speaking there are two ways. They correspond to the two ways in which we may be interested in a piece of architecture. If the building has Corinthian columns, we can trace the origin and development of Corinthian columns; we are interested as historians. But if we are interested as architects, we may or may not know about the history of the Corinthian style; we must, however, know all about the construction of the building, down to the last nail or peg in the beams. We have got to know this if we are going to put up buildings ourselves. (506)

While I don't know anything about Corinthian columns (and doubt that I will ever *want* to know anything about Corinthian columns), Allen Tate's metaphor of reading as if you were an architect is a great way to think about RLW. When you read like a writer, you are trying to figure out how the text you are reading was constructed so that you learn how to "build" one for yourself. Author David Jauss makes a similar comparison when he writes that "reading won't help you much unless you learn to read like a writer. You must look at a book the way a carpenter looks at a house someone else built, examining the details in order to see how it was made" (64).

Perhaps I should change the name and call this Reading Like an Architect, or Reading Like a Carpenter. In a way those names make perfect sense. You are reading to see how something was constructed so that you can construct something similar yourself.

Why Learn to Read Like a Writer?

For most college students RLW is a new way to read, and it can be difficult to learn at first. Making things even *more* difficult is that your college writing instructor may expect you to read this way for class but never actually teach you how to do it. He or she may not even tell you that you're supposed to read this way. This is because most writing instructors are so focused on teaching writing that they forget to show students how they want them to read.

That's what this essay is for.

In addition to the fact that your college writing instructor may expect you to read like a writer, this kind of reading is also one of the very best ways to learn how to write well. Reading like a writer can help you understand how the process of writing is a series of making choices, and in doing so, can help you recognize important decisions you might face and techniques you might want to use when working on your own writing. Reading this way becomes an opportunity to think and learn about writing.

Charles Moran, a professor of English at the University of Massachusetts, urges us to read like writers because:

> When we read like writers we understand and participate in the writing. We see the choices the writer has made, and we see how the writer has coped with the consequences of those choices. . .We "see" what the writer is doing because we read as writers; we see because we have written ourselves and know the territory, know the feel of it, know some of the moves ourselves. (61)

You are already an author, and that means you have a built-in advantage when reading like a writer. All of your previous writing experiences—inside the classroom and out—can contribute to your success with RLW. Because you "have written" things yourself, just as Moran suggests, you are better able to "see" the choices that the author is making in the texts that you read. This in turn helps you to

think about whether you want to make some of those same choices in your own writing, and what the consequences might be for your readers if you do.

What Are Some Questions to Ask Before You Start Reading?

As I sat down to work on this essay, I contacted a few of my former students to ask what advice they would give to college students regarding how to read effectively in the writing classroom and also to get their thoughts on RLW. Throughout the rest of the essay I'd like to share some of their insights and suggestions; after all, who is better qualified to help you learn what you need to know about reading in college writing courses than students who recently took those courses themselves?

One of the things that several students mentioned to do first, before you even start reading, is to consider the *context* surrounding both the assignment and the text you're reading. As one former student, Alison, states: "The reading I did in college asked me to go above and beyond, not only in breadth of subject matter, but in depth, with regards to informed analysis and background information on *context*." Alison was asked to think about some of the factors that went into the creation of the text, as well as some of the factors influencing her own experience of reading—taken together these constitute the context of reading. Another former student, Jamie, suggests that students "learn about the historical context of the writings" they will read for class. Writing professor Richard Straub puts it this way: "You're not going to just read a text. You're going to read a text within a certain context, a set of circumstances . . . It's one kind of writing or another, designed for one audience and purpose or another" (138).

Among the contextual factors you'll want to consider before you even start reading are:

- Do you know the author's purpose for this piece of writing?
- Do you know who the intended audience is for this piece of writing?

It may be that you need to start reading before you can answer these first two questions, but it's worth trying to answer them before you start. For example, if you know at the outset that the author is trying to reach a very specific group of readers, then his or her writerly techniques may seem more or less effective than if he/she was trying to reach a more general audience. Similarly—returning to our earlier example of beginning an essay with a quote from President Obama about the war in Iraq—if you know that the author's purpose is to address some of the dangers and drawbacks of warfare, this may be a very effective opening. If the purpose is to encourage Americans to wear sunscreen while at the beach this opening makes no sense at all. One former student, Lola, explained that most of her reading assignments in college writing classes were designed "to provoke analysis and criticisms into the style, structure, and *purpose* of the writing itself."

In What Genre Is This Written?

Another important thing to consider before reading is the genre of the text. Genre means a few different things in college English classes, but it's most often used to indicate the *type* of writing: a poem, a newspa- per article, an essay, a short story, a novel, a legal brief, an instruction manual, etc. Because the conventions for each genre can be very differ- ent (who ever heard of a 900-page newspaper article?), techniques that are effective for one genre may not work well in another. Many readers expect poems and pop songs to rhyme, for example, but might react negatively to a legal brief or instruction manual that did so.

Another former student, Mike, comments on how important the genre of the text can be for reading:

> I think a lot of the way I read, of course, depends on the type of text I'm reading. If I'm reading philosophy, I always look for signaling words (however, therefore, furthermore, despite) indicating the direction of the argument . . . when I read fiction or creative nonfiction, I look for how the author inserts dialogue or character sketches within narration or environmental observation. After reading To the Lighthouse [sic] last semester, I have noticed how much more attentive I've become to the types of narration (omniscient, impersonal, psychological, realistic, etc.), and how these different approaches are utilized to achieve an author's overall effect.

Although Mike specifically mentions what he looked for while reading a published novel, one of the great things about RLW is that it can be used equally well with either published or student-produced writing.

Is This a Published or a Student-Produced Piece of Writing?

As you read both kinds of texts you can locate the choices the author made and imagine the different decisions that he/she might have made. While it might seem a little weird at first to imagine how published texts could be written differently—after all, they were good enough to be published—remember that all writing can be improved. Scholar Nancy Walker believes that it's important for students to read published work using RLW because "the work ceases to be a mere artifact, a stone tablet, and becomes instead a living utterance with immediacy and texture. It could have been better or worse than it is had the author made different choices"

(36). As Walker suggests, it's worth thinking about how the published text would be different—maybe even better—if the author had made different choices in the writing because you may be faced with similar choices in your own work.

Is This the Kind of Writing You Will Be Assigned to Write Yourself?

Knowing ahead of time what kind of writing assignments you will be asked to complete can really help you to read like a writer. It's prob- ably impossible (and definitely too time consuming) to identify *all* of the choices the author made and *all* techniques an author used, so it's important to prioritize while reading. Knowing what you'll be writing yourself can help you prioritize. It may be the case that your instructor has assigned the text you're reading to serve as model for the kind of writing you'll be doing later. Jessie, a former student, writes, "In college writing classes, we knew we were reading for a purpose—to influence or inspire our own work. The reading that I have done in college writing courses has always been really specific to a certain type of writing, and it allows me to focus and experiment on that specific style in depth and without distraction."

If the text you're reading is a model of a particular style of writing—for example, highly-emotional or humorous—RLW is particularly helpful because you can look at a piece you're reading and think about whether you want to adopt a similar style in your own writing. You might realize that the author is trying to arouse sympathy in readers and examine what techniques he/she uses to do this; then you can decide whether these techniques might work well in your own writing. You might notice that the author keeps including jokes or funny stories and think about whether you want to include them in your writing—what would the impact be on your potential readers?

What Are Questions to Ask As You Are Reading?

It is helpful to continue to ask yourself questions *as* you read like a writer. As you're first learning to read in this new way, you may want to have a set of questions written or typed out in front of you that you can refer to while reading. Eventually—after plenty of practice—you will start to ask certain questions and locate certain things in the text almost automatically. Remember, for most students this is a new way of reading, and you'll have to train yourself to do it well. Also keep in mind that you're reading to understand how the text was *written*— how the house was built—more than you're trying to determine the meaning of the things you read or assess whether the texts are good or bad.

First, return to two of the same questions I suggested that you consider *before* reading:

- What is the author's purpose for this piece of writing?
- Who is the intended audience?

Think about these two questions again as you read. It may be that you couldn't really answer them before, or that your ideas will change while reading. Knowing *why* the piece was written and *who* it's for can help explain why the author might have made certain choices or used particular techniques in the writing, and you can assess those choices and techniques based in part on how effective they are in fulfilling that purpose and/or reaching the intended audience.

Beyond these initial two questions, there is an almost endless list of questions you might ask regarding writing choices and techniques. Here are some of the questions that one former student, Clare, asks herself:

> When reading I tend to be asking myself a million questions. If I were writing this, where would I go with the story? If the

author goes in a different direction (as they so often do) from what I am thinking, I will ask myself, why did they do this? What are they telling me?

Clare tries to figure out why the author might have made a move in the writing that she hadn't anticipated, but even more importantly, she asks herself what *she* would do if she were the author. Reading the text becomes an opportunity for Clare to think about her own role as an author.

Here are some additional examples of the kinds of questions you might ask yourself as you read:

- How effective is the language the author uses? Is it too formal? Too informal? Perfectly appropriate?

Depending on the subject matter and the intended audience, it may make sense to be more or less formal in terms of language. As you begin reading, you can ask yourself whether the word choice and tone/ language of the writing seem appropriate.

- What kinds of evidence does the author use to support his/ her claims? Does he/she use statistics? Quotes from famous people? Personal anecdotes or personal stories? Does he/she cite books or articles?
- How appropriate or effective is this evidence? Would a different type of evidence, or some combination of evidence, be more effective?

To some extent the kinds of questions you ask should be determined by the genre of writing you are reading. For example, it's probably worth examining the evidence that the author uses to support his/ her claims if you're reading an opinion column, but less important if you're reading a short story. An opinion column is often intended to convince readers of something, so the kinds of evidence used are often very important. A short story *may* be intended to convince readers of something, sometimes, but probably not in the same way.

A short story rarely includes claims or evidence in the way that we usually think about them.

- Are there places in the writing that you find confusing? What about the writing in those places makes it unclear or confusing?

It's pretty normal to get confused in places while reading, especially while reading for class, so it can be helpful to look closely at the writing to try and get a sense of exactly what tripped you up. This way you can learn to avoid those same problems in your own writing.

- How does the author move from one idea to another in the writing? Are the transitions between the ideas effective? How else might he/she have transitioned between ideas instead?

Notice that in these questions I am encouraging you to question whether aspects of the writing are *appropriate* and *effective* in addition to deciding whether you liked or disliked them. You want to imagine how other readers might respond to the writing and the techniques you've identified. Deciding whether you liked or disliked something is only about you; considering whether a technique is appropriate or effective lets you contemplate what the author might have been trying to do and to decide whether a majority of readers would find the move successful. This is important because it's the same thing you should be thinking about while you are writing: how will readers respond to this technique I am using, to this sentence, to this word? As you read, ask yourself what the author is doing at each step of the way, and then consider whether the same choice or technique might work in your own writing.

What Should You Be Writing As You Are Reading?

The most common suggestion made by former students—mentioned by every single one of them—was to mark up the text, make comments in the margins, and write yourself notes and summaries both during and after reading. Often the notes students took while reading became ideas or material for the students to use in their own papers. It's important to read with a pen or highlighter in your hand so that you can mark—right on the text—all those spots where you identify an interesting choice the author has made or a writerly technique you might want to use. One thing that I like to do is to highlight and underline the passage in the text itself, and then try to answer the fol- lowing three questions on my notepad:

- What is the technique the author is using here?
- Is this technique effective?
- What would be the advantages and disadvantages if I tried this same technique in my writing?

By utilizing this same process of highlighting and note taking, you'll end up with a useful list of specific techniques to have at your disposal when it comes time to begin your own writing.

What Does RLW Look Like in Action?

Let's go back to the opening paragraph of *this* essay and spend some time reading like writers as a way to get more comfortable with the process:

> *In 1997, I was a recent college graduate living in London for six*
> *months and working at the Palace Theatre owned by Andrew*

Lloyd Webber. The Palace was a beautiful red brick, four-story theatre in the heart of London's famous West End, and eight times a week it housed a three-hour performance of the musical Les Miserables. Because of antiquated fire-safety laws, every theatre in the city was required to have a certain number of staff members inside watching the performance in case of an emergency.

Let's begin with those questions I encouraged you to try to answer *before* you start reading. (I realize we're cheating a little bit in this case since you've already read most of this essay, but this is just practice. When doing this on your own, you should attempt to answer these questions before reading, and then return to them as you read to further develop your answers.)

- Do you know the author's purpose for this piece of writing? I hope the purpose is clear by now; if it isn't, I'm doing a pretty lousy job of explaining how and why you might read like a writer.
- Do you know who the intended audience is? Again, I hope that you know this one by now.
- What about the genre? Is this an essay? An article? What would you call it?
- You know that it's published and not student writing. How does this influence your expectations for what you will read?
- Are you going to be asked to write something like this yourself? Probably not in your college writing class, but you can still use RLW to learn about writerly techniques that you might want to use in whatever you do end up writing.

Now ask yourself questions *as* you read.

In 1997, I was a recent college graduate living in London for six months and working at the Palace Theatre owned by Andrew Lloyd Webber. The Palace was a beautiful red brick, four-story theatre in the heart of London's famous West End, and

eight times a week it housed a three-hour performance of the musical Les Miserables. Because of antiquated fire-safety laws, every theatre in the city was required to have a certain number of staff members inside watching the performance in case of an emergency.

Since this paragraph is the very first one, it makes sense to think about how it introduces readers to the essay. What technique(s) does the author use to begin the text? This is a personal story about his time working in London. What else do you notice as you read over this passage? Is the passage vague or specific about where he worked? You know that the author worked in a famous part of London in a beautiful theater owned by a well-known composer. Are these details important? How different would this opening be if instead I had written:

In 1997, I was living in London and working at a theatre that showed Les Miserables.

This is certainly shorter, and some of you may prefer this version. It's quick. To the point. But what (if anything) is lost by eliminating so much of the detail? I *chose* to include each of the details that the revised sentence omits, so it's worth considering why. Why did I mention where the theater was located? Why did I explain that I was living in London right after finishing college? Does it matter that it was after college? What effect might I have hoped the inclusion of these details would have on readers? Is this reference to college an attempt to connect with my audience of college students? Am I trying to establish my credibility as an author by announcing that I went to college? Why might I want the readers to know that this was a theater owned by Andrew Lloyd Weber? Do you think I am just trying to mention a famous name that readers will recognize? Will Andrew Lloyd Weber figure prominently in the rest of the essay?

These are all reasonable questions to ask. They are not necessarily the *right* questions to ask because there are no right questions. They certainly aren't the only questions you could ask,

either. The goal is to train yourself to formulate questions as you read based on whatever you notice in the text. Your own reactions to what you're reading will help determine the kinds of questions to ask.

Now take a broader perspective. I begin this essay—an essay about *reading*—by talking about my job in a theater in London. Why? Doesn't this seem like an odd way to begin an essay about reading? If you read on a little further (feel free to scan back up at the top of this essay) you learn in the third full paragraph what the connection is between working in the theater and reading like a writer, but why include this information at all? What does this story add to the essay? Is it worth the space it takes up?

Think about what effect presenting this personal information might have on readers. Does it make it feel like a real person, some "ordinary guy," is talking to you? Does it draw you into the essay and make you want to keep reading?

What about the language I use? Is it formal or more informal? This is a time when you can really narrow your focus and look at particular words:

> Because of antiquated fire-safety laws, every theatre in the city was required to have a certain number of staff members inside watching the performance in case of an emergency.

What is the effect of using the word "antiquated" to describe the fire-safety laws? It certainly projects a negative impression; if the laws are described as antiquated it means I view them as old-fashioned or obsolete. This is a fairly uncommon word, so it stands out, drawing attention to my choice in using it. The word also sounds quite formal. Am I formal in the rest of this sentence?

I use the word "performance" when I just as easily could have written "show." For that matter, I could have written "old" instead of "antiquated." You can proceed like this throughout the sentence, thinking about alternative choices I could have made and what the effect would be. Instead of "staff members" I could have written

"employees" or just "workers." Notice the difference if the sentence had been written:

> *Because of old fire-safety laws, every theatre in the city was required to have a certain number of workers inside watching the show in case of an emergency.*

Which version is more likely to appeal to readers? You can try to answer this question by thinking about the advantages and disadvantages of using formal language. When would you want to use formal language in your writing and when would it make more sense to be more conversational?

As you can see from discussing just this one paragraph, you could ask questions about the text forever. Luckily, you don't have to. As you continue reading like a writer, you'll learn to notice techniques that seem new and pay less attention to the ones you've thought about before. The more you practice the quicker the process becomes until you're reading like a writer almost automatically.

I want to end this essay by sharing one more set of comments by my former student, Lola, this time about what it means to her to read like a writer:

> *Reading as a writer would compel me to question what might have brought the author to make these decisions, and then decide what worked and what didn't. What could have made that chapter better or easier to understand? How can I make sure I include some of the good attributes of this writing style into my own? How can I take aspects that I feel the writer failed at and make sure not to make the same mistakes in my writing?*

Questioning why the author made certain decisions. Considering what techniques could have made the text better. Deciding how to include the best attributes of what you read in your own writing. This is what Reading Like a Writer is all about.

Are you ready to start reading?

Discussion

1. How is "Reading Like a Writer" similar to and/or different from the way(s) you read for other classes?
2. What kinds of choices do you make as a writer that readers might identify in your written work?
3. Is there anything you notice in *this* essay that you might like to try in your own writing? What is that technique or strategy? When do you plan to try using it?
4. What are some of the different ways that you can learn about the context of a text before you begin reading it?

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Author Bio

Mike Bunn is an Associate Professor (Teaching) of Writing in the USC Writing Program. Professor Bunn earned a joint Ph.D. in English & Education from the University of Michigan as well as an M.F.A. in creative writing from the University of Pittsburgh. He has designed and taught courses in first-year writing, literature, academic argumentation, cultural studies, creative writing, professional writing, and comedy writing. His interdisciplinary research investigates some of the ways that reading might best be taught in collegiate writing courses, and his work appears in journals such as *Pedagogy* and *College Composition and Communication.* From 2019-2021 he served as a member of the CCCC Task Force on Reading. He is also a co-founder of the College Composition and Communication Special Interest Group: "The Role of Reading in Composition Studies."

LITERACY AND COMPOSING PROCESSES

Section Overview

Many writing classes begin by asking students to compose a literacy narrative. Literacy narratives connect your writing present with your writing past as a way to help you make sense of how writing might function in your future. Some people love writing about their early alphabetic literacy experiences, often harkening back to their favorite book, the first story they wrote, or challenges they overcame in trying to develop their early communication skills. But this is of course not universally true. For many, reflecting on past literacy experiences can be frustrating, traumatic, or confusing. Wherever you find yourself on this spectrum, we invite you to consider the purpose of reflecting on literacy: to be able to be metacognitive about writing, or aware of the ways that you think about writing, such that you can become a more strategic, skillful communicator. One way to get started is to consider how others have described their literacy.

First, consider an award-winning literacy narrative by MTSU student Jennifer Hale, published in our GEWA Archive, "My Experience With Literacy, Part Two."

You might also peruse the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives. This is an amazing resource that provides access to thousands of stories in various forms – video, text, and audio – about people's literacy experiences.

We hope that reading these essays will be inspiring to you. You can also submit your work for the Gen Ed Writing Awards and maybe have your work published in next year's GEM!

Consider the five readings in this section that help us think through experiences and skills that help us reflect on our own alphabetic literacy. The first three chapters come from the peer-reviewed, OER textbook, *Writing Spaces* and address rhetorical ways of reflecting on and composing about literacy:

- "I Need You to Say I" by Kate McKinney Maddalena
- "Weaving Personal Experience into Academic Writing" by Marjorie Stewart
- An Introduction to and Strategies for Multimodal Composing by Melanie Gagich

The next three chapters come from *Bad Ideas About Writing*. It is important to note that *Bad Ideas About Writing* includes titles that can be misleading if you do not read the text itself. The titles for all of the *Bad Ideas About Writing* essays are actually misleading myths about writing that

"WE NEED A MORE NUANCED VIEW OF WRITING IN SOCIETY THAT ENCOURAGES EVERYONE TO ADAPT TO THEIR AUDIENCES AND CONTEXTS RATHER THAN PLACING AN UNDUE BURDEN ON THOSE WHO DO NOT FIT THE MOLD OF STANDARD ENGLISH."

-Anjali Pattanayak

circulate. It may be confusing, at first, to see these titles. And it is important to keep in mind the content of each essay dispels these popular beliefs about writing that can be found in the titles, by using research from the field. Happily, there are both written and audio versions available for each of these brief, engaging chapters. These readings dispel the ideas that we sometimes have about literacy practices: that there is a "right" way and that stumbling along the way is a problem. Instead, challenge is focal to the process of developing literacy, and there are an endless array of literacy practices that are equally effective:

- "There is One Correct Way of Writing and Speaking" by Anjali Pattanayak (*Bad Ideas About Writing*) (Podcast)
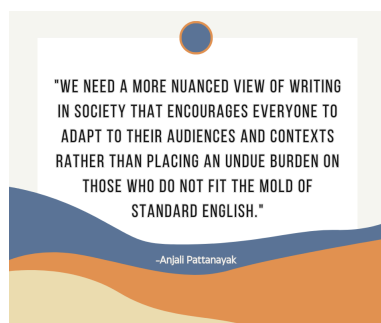
- "Failure is Not an Option" by Allison D. Carr (*Bad Ideas About Writing*) (Podcast)
- Strong Writing and Writers Don't Need Revision by Laura Giovanelli (*Bad Ideas About Writing*) (Podcast)

11. "I Need You to Say 'I'": Why First Person is Important in College Writing

KATE MCKINNEY MADDALENA

Abstract

Kate McKinney Maddalena's essay "I Need You to Say "I"": Why First Person is Important in College Writing" is a chapter in *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing, Volume* 1, and is published through Parlor Press. Many first-year writers have been taught that using first-person pronouns is prohibited because it may detract from their ability to remain objective in their academic writing. This chapter complicates preconceptions surrounding the "us," "we," and "me" of writing in the academy. McKinney Maddalena's piece presents information on how student voices can weave themselves into writing for their classes with purpose and impact.

This reading is available below and as a PDF.

At this point in your development as a writer, you may have learned to write "I-less" prose, without first person. I-less-ness is

fine; writing habits, like all habits, are best simplified when first learned or re-learned. Jazz pianists learn strict scales before they are allowed to improvise. Someone might go on a strict diet and then return to a modified menu after the desired weight is lost, and the bad eating habits are broken. Constructing arguments without using "I" is good practice for formal "improvisation" at higher levels of thinking and writing. Avoiding personal pronouns forces you to be objective. It also "sounds" more formal; you're more likely to maintain an appropriate tone if you stay away from the personal.

But writing in various academic and professional contexts needs to be more flexible, sophisticated, and subtle than writing for high school English classes. In college, you should start using first-person pronouns in your formal academic writing, where appropriate. First person has an important place—an irreplaceable place—in texts that report research and engage scholarship. Your choices about where you place yourself as subject are largely determined by context and the conventions of the field in which you're writing. The key is making sure that your choices are appropriate for the context of your paper— whom you're writing it for, and the kind of information it's meant to communicate. Here I'll list some ways in which first person improves written argument and show you some examples of the ways scholars use first person, and then I'll propose places where it might be used appropriately in your own writing.

Why "I"?

First person can support the following characteristics of good written argument (and good writing in general).

1. Objectivity and Integrity

The main reason most teachers give for the discipline of I-less-ness is that it keeps your writing "objective." They want to make sure that you don't rely on personal experiences or perspectives

where you should be providing concrete, researched support for your arguments. Your best friend at summer camp doesn't "prove" a sociological theory. Your memory of a "fact"—the average rainfall in a town, the actions of a character in a film, the tendencies of groups of people to behave in certain ways, or the population of Kenya—is not a reliable source in academic contexts. You shouldn't write, "because I think so," or "I know that . . ." But if you consider some of the higher-level implications of perspective's effects on argument, there are some well-chosen places where "I" can give your argument more objectivity and intellectual integrity.

Take scientific writing, for example. Up until very recently, when writing observational and experimental reports, scientists, as a rule, avoided first person. Methodology was (and is still, in many cases) described in the passive voice. That is, instead of writing, "We took measurements of ice thickness on the first and 15th day of every month," scientists wrote, "Measurements of ice thickness were taken on the first and 15th day of every month." Taking out the "we" focuses the reader's attention on the phenomenon (object) being observed, not the observer taking the readings (subject). Or at least that was the reasoning behind passive voice in science writing.

But during the last half of the last century, mostly because of developments in physics, scientists have talked a lot about a thing called the "observer effect": while observing or experimenting with a social or even physical system, the scientist watching can affect the system's behavior. When particle physicists try to measure the motion of something as tiny as an electron, their very observation almost certainly changes that motion. Because of the observer effect, the passive voice convention I've described above has been called into question. Is it really honest to act like "measurements are taken" by some invisible hand? Is the picture minus the researcher the whole picture? Not really. The fact is, someone took the measurements, and those measurements might reflect that observer's involvement. It's more truthful, complete, and objective, then, to put the researchers in the picture. These days, it's much

more common to "see" the researchers as subjects—"We measured ice thickness . . ."—in methodology sections.

That same kind of "whole picture" honesty applies to you making written claims, too. When you first learned to write an essay, you were probably taught to make claims as though they were true; write "The sky is blue," not "I think that the sky is blue." That second claim isn't arguable—who can disprove that you think something? But a much more sophisticated claim includes your perspective and implies the effect it may have on your stance: "From my position standing on the earth's surface in the daytime, I see the sky as blue." You can make that claim without using first person, of course, and in some contexts (i.e. for a scientific argument), you probably should. When you're taking a stance on an issue, though, first person just makes sense. Defining your perspective gives your reader context for your stance: "As a volunteer at a bilingual preschool, I can see that both language immersion and individualized language instruction have benefits," or "As a principal at an elementary school with a limited budget, I would argue that language immersion makes the most sense." Consider those two positions; without the "whole picture" that the statement of perspective implies, you might assume that the two claims disagree. The subtlety of the subject—who the writer is—lets you see quite a bit about why the claim is being made. If you asked the second writer to take a stance on the immersion/bilingual instruction issue with only learning objectives in mind, she might agree with the first writer. The "truth" might not be different, but the position it's observed from can certainly cast a different light on it.

2. Clarifying Who's Saying What

A clear description of your perspective becomes even more important when your stance has to incorporate or respond to someone else's. As you move into more advanced college writing, the claims you respond to will usually belong to scholars. Some papers may require you to spend almost as much time summarizing a scholarly conversation as they do presenting points of your own. By "signification," I mean little phrases that tell the reader, "This is

my opinion," "This is my interpretation." You need them for two big reasons.

First of all, the more "voices" you add to the conversation, the more confusing it gets. You must separate your own interpretations of scholars' claims, the claims themselves, and your argument so as not to misrepresent any of them. If you've just paraphrased a scholar, making your own claim without quite literally claiming it might make the reader think that the scholar said it. Consider these two sentences: "Wagstaff et al. (2007) conclude that the demand for practical science writing that the layperson can understand is on the rise. But there is a need for laypeople people to increase their science literacy, as well." Is that second claim part of Wagstaff's conclusion, or is it your own reflection on the implications of Wagstaff's argument? By writing something like, "Wagstaff et al. (2007) conclude that the demand for practical science that the layperson can understand is on the rise. I maintain that there is a need for laypeople to increase their science literacy, as well," you avoid the ambiguity. First person can help you express, very simply, who "says" what.

Secondly, your perceptions, and therefore your interpretations, are not always perfect. Science writing can help me illustrate this idea, as well. In the imaginary observation report I refer to above, the researchers may or may not use first person in their methodology section out of respect for the observer effect, but they are very likely to use first person in the discussion/conclusion section. The discussion section involves interpretation of the data—that is, the researchers must say what they think the data means. The importance of perspective is compounded, here. They might not be right. And even if they are mostly right, the systems scientists study are usually incredibly complex; one observation report is not the whole picture. Scientists, there- fore, often mark their own interpretations with first person pronouns. "We interpret these data to imply . . ." they might say, or, "We believe these findings indicate . . . ," and then they go on to list questions for further

research. Even the experts know that their understanding is almost always incomplete.

3. Ownership, Intellectual Involvement, and Exigency

Citing scholarship contextualizes and strengthens your argument; you want to defer to "experts" for evidence of your claims when you can. As a student, you might feel like an outsider—unable to comment with authority on the concepts you're reading and writing about. But outsider status doesn't only mean a lack of expertise. Your own, well-defined viewpoint might shed new light on a topic that the experts haven't considered (or that your classmates haven't considered, or that your professor hasn't mentioned in class, or even, quite simply, that you hadn't thought of and so you're excited about). In that case, you want to say, "This is mine, it's a new way of looking at the issue, and I'm proud of it."

Those kinds of claims are usually synthetic ones—you've put information and/or interpretations from several sources together, and you've actually got something to say. Whether your new spin has to do with a cure for cancer or an interpretation of Batman comics, pride in your own intellectual work is important on many levels. As a student, you should care; such investment can help you learn. Your school community should also care; good teachers are always looking for what we call "critical thinking," and when students form new ideas from existing ones, we know it's happening. On the larger scale, the scholarly community should care. Having something new to say increases the exigency of your argument in the larger, intellectual exchange of ideas. A scholarly reader should want to pay attention, because what you say may be a key to some puzzle (a cure for cancer) or way of thinking about the topic (interpreting Batman). That's the way scholars work together to form large bodies of knowledge: we communicate about our research and ideas, and we try to combine them when we can.

An emphatic statement like "Much discussion has addressed the topic of carbon emissions' relationship to climate change, but I would like to ask a question from a new perspective," will make your reader sit up and take notice. In I-less form, that might look

like: "Much discussion has addressed the topic of carbon emissions' relationship to climate change, but some questions remain unconsidered." In this case, second sentence still sounds like summary—the writer is telling us that research is incomplete, but isn't giving us a strong clue that his or her (new! fresh!) argument is coming up next. Be careful, of course, not to sound arrogant. If the writer of the sentences above was worried about his or her lack of expertise in an assignment involving scholarly sources, he or she could write: "What scholarly discussion I have read so far has addressed the topic of carbon emissions' relationship to climate change, but I would like to ask a question from a new perspective." He or she can use first person to employ both deference and ownership/involvement in the same sentence.

4. Rhetorical Sophistication

Some writing assignments focus on one simple task at a time: "Summarize the following . . ." "Compare the readings . . ." "analyze," or "argue." When you write a simple five-paragraph essay, your mode rarely changes—you can write an introduction, thesis, body, and conclusion without explaining too many shifts in what the paper is "doing." Writing at the college level and beyond often has to "do" a few things in the same text. Most involved writing assignments expect you to do at least two things. You may need to summarize/report and respond, or (more likely) you'll need to summarize/report, synthesize, and respond. A good introduction, as you've learned, needs to anticipate all of it so the reader knows what to expect. Anticipating the structure of a complex argument in I-less mode is tricky. Often, it comes out as a summary of the document that follows and is redundant. First person can clear that problem right up. Consider the introduction to this article; when I come to the part where I need to tell you what I'm going to do, I just . . . tell you what I'm going to do! My writing students usually find this rhetorical trick (or is it an un-trick?) refreshing and liberating. The same concept can be applied to transitions between sections and ideas: "Now that I've done this thing, I'd like to move into this other part of my argument . . ." I'll use this type of transition, myself,

when I move into the section of this text called, "When, and When not?"

Academic Examples

The fact is, using first person for rhetorical clarity and to ease transitions isn't just easier—it's common in many academic contexts. It's accepted, even expected, in some cases, for scholarly writing such as abstracts, position papers, theses, and dissertations in many fields to employ first person in the ways I've just described. In almost all genres, formats, and fields, the scholarly writer is expected to describe the research done thus far by her peers and then make her own claims—a structure that lends itself to first person.

Robert Terrill, a cultural studies scholar, begins his article, "Put on a Happy Face: Batman as Schizophrenic Savior," with an evaluation of Tim Burton's movie's box office success, and then spends several paragraphs discussing other scholars' applications of psychological frameworks to film studies. Throughout the literature review section, Terrill's own voice stays remote; he uses third person. But look at what happens when he is ready to begin his own argument:

> Because much of my analysis is grounded in the theories of Carl C. Jung, I will begin by outlining relevant aspects of that theory. Then I suggest that Gotham City is a dream world, a representative projection of image-centered dreams. Within the framework of Jung's model, I show the principal characters to be archetypal manifestations that erupt from Gotham's unconscious. Wayne/Batman is a splintered manifestation of a potential whole; his condition represents the schizophrenia required of a hero dedicated to preservation of the shattered psyche of Gotham. (321)

Terrill's move to first person separates his own claims from the scholars he's summarized in his introduction, and it allows him to

take ownership of his main claim. The way he "maps out" his article is also typical of academic argument.

First person is used similarly in the sciences. Unlike Terrill, who argues for a certain interpretation of a text, psychologists Jennifer Kraemer and David Marquez report research findings in their article, "Psychosocial Correlates and Outcomes of Yoga or Walking Among Older Adults." Much like Terrill, however, their introduction consists of a review of literature in the third person. For almost three pages, Kraemer and Marquez describe studies which have explored health and injury patterns in old age, as well as studies which have investigated various fitness programs for the elderly. When it comes time for Kraemer and Marquez to describe their own study, they shift into first person:

> We hypothesized that an acute bout of yoga would be more effective at improving mood and reducing state anxiety among older adults when compared with acute bouts of walking. We further hypothesized that older adults who practice yoga would have lower levels of depression and higher quality of life when compared with those who walk for exercise. We did not make direct hypotheses for exercise barriers and barriers self-efficacy because, to date, there is no research that has examined those variables in this population. (393)

Kraemer and Marquez continue in first person as they describe their methodology. "We recruited a total of 51 participants (8 men, 43 women)" they write, "through classes at local yoga studios and mall walking groups" (393). The researchers themselves, in first person, are the subjects who "do" every action in the methods: "We asked questions on . . . We measured state anxiety by . . . We measured mood using . . ."(393–4). By putting themselves in the picture, Kraemer and Marquez acknowledge themselves as variables in their own study—a key aspect of any scientific methodology, and especially those which involve human subjects and use interviews to collect data.

On the other hand, some academic communities and genres stay away from first person. Susan Clark, a professor at Yale who writes about the communication and implementation of sustainable forestry practices, describes her study without putting herself in the picture. Where Kraemer and Marquez describe themselves "doing" the methods of their study, Clark has her article as the agent in her description of analysis:

> This article (a) describes the intelligence function in conceptual terms, including its sequential phases (as described by McDougal, Lasswell, & Reisman, 1981); (b) uses examples to illustrate the intelligence activity from Reading and Miller (2000), *Endangered Animals: A Reference Guide to Conflicting Issues*, which gives 70 cases by 34 authors in 55 countries that focus on species, ecosystem, and sustainability challenges; and employs a "problem-oriented" look at intelligence activities across all these cases (Lasswell, 1971). It does so by asking and answering five questions . . . (637)

Clark's methods are to analyze others' processes—hers, then, is meta-analysis. It's appropriate for her to remove herself rhetorically as she deals with many actions and many, diverse actors. She is more a describer than a "do-er."

At the very end of her article, in a "call to action" that directly applies her findings, Clark does finally use first person. "We can increase the possibility of better biodiversity and ecosystem conservation, and better sustainability overall," she writes, "if we choose to use an effective intelligence activity. Success is more likely if we increase the rationality of our own directed behavior" (659). Clark's "we" is different from Kraemer and Marquez's "we," though. It refers to Clark's audience—the community of sustainable forestry as a whole—and predicts future action in which she will be active.

When (and When Not) to Use First Person?

Now that I've convinced you to try first person in some of your academic writing, I should talk about how to use it appropriately. (See? I just used "I" for a clear transition to a new idea.) The key is: don't go "I" crazy. Remember the self-discipline you practiced with I-less writing.

Probably the best way to approach first person in an academic context is this: use it to make yourself clear. You'll need "I" for clarity when one of the ideals I described above is in question. Either 1) you'll need to describe an aspect of your personal perspective that will help the reader see (your) whole picture; 2) you'll need to make the divide between your voice and the scholars' as clear as possible in order to avoid misrepresenting the scholars' claims; 3) your own claim will need to stand apart from the other perspectives you've presented as something new; or 4) you'll need to guide your reader through the organization of your text in some way.

Below, I've listed a few common writing situations/ assignments that first person can potentially support.

Try "I" when . . .

  . . . the assignment asks you to. Personal position papers, personal narratives, and assignments that say "tell what you did/read and provide your reaction," all explicitly ask you to use first person.

. . . you're asked to "Summarize and respond." You might transition into the response part of the paper with "I."

  . . . you're introducing a paper with a complicated structure: "I will summarize Wagstaff's argument, and then respond to a few key points with my own interpretation."

. . . you are proud of and intellectually invested in what you have to say, and you want to arrange it in reference to others' voices: "Many scholars have used psychological frameworks to interpret the Batman movies, but I would argue that a historical perspective is more productive . . ."

  . . . you are unsure of your interpretation of a source, or you

feel that the claim you're making may be bigger than your level of expertise: "If I read Wagstaff correctly, her conclusions imply . . ."

"I" Is a Bad Idea When . . .

. . . you use it only once. You don't want to overuse the first person, but if you're going to assert your position or make a transition with "I," give the reader a hint of your voice in the introduction. An introduction that anticipates structure with "I will," for instance, works well with transitions that use "I" as well. If you use first person only once, the tone shift will jar the reader.

. . . The assignment is a simple summary. In that case, you need only report; you are "eye," not "I."

. . . you're writing a lab report for a science class, as a general rule. But you might ask your teacher about the issues of objectivity I've addressed above, especially in terms of objective methodology.

Discussion

1. Can you remember a writing task during which you struggled to avoid using the first person? What about the nature of the content made "I" hard to avoid? Can you link the difficulty to one of the four values that first person "supports," according to this essay?

2. McKinney Maddalena claims that scientists use "I" more often in research reports, nowadays. Find a scientific article in your school's research databases that employs first person: "I" or "we." In what section is first person used, and how? Does its usage reflect one of the values this essay points out?

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Keywords

perspective, objectivity, first person, exigency, viewpoint, claim, ownership

Author Bio

Kate is an Assistant Professor of English at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. She teaches professional writing, science writing, and technical communication and

writes about media theory, rhetoric of science, and science and technology studies (STS). She is particularly interested in how toys and models are used in knowledge production.

12. Weaving Personal Experience into Academic Writing

MARJORIE STEWART

Abstract

Marjorie Stewart's essay "Weaving Personal Experience into Academic Writing" comes from the book *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing, Volume 3*. Stewart uses the metaphor of weaving to demonstrate one way of using personal and narrative writing within academic essays. Rather than debate whether narrative is appropriate for academic writing, it addresses the question of when is it appropriate and how it can be done effectively, focusing on helping writers decide when the use of personal experience is appropriate for their purpose, how to make personal experience and narrative pull its weight in the essay, and how the ability to incorporate personal experience can translate into the ability to incorporate research.

The essay is structured as an example of the use of personal experience as well as a how-to guide. "Weaving Personal Experience into Academic Writing" contains a discussion of three students who incorporated narrative in their essays in three ways: as a structural frame, as an

example when the research topic and personal experience overlap, and as a tool for discovery. Students will benefit from the peer-written examples as well as the use of the personal in the essay itself.

This reading is available below and as a PDF.

Overview

"Warp and Weft" uses the metaphor of weaving to demonstrate one way of using personal and narrative writing within academic essays. Rather than debate whether narrative is appropriate for academic writing, it addresses the question of when is it appropriate and how it can be done effectively, focusing on helping writers decide when the use of personal experience is appropriate for their purpose, how to make personal experience and narrative pull its weight in the essay, and how the ability to incorporate personal experience can translate into the ability to incorporate research. The essay is structured as an example of the use of personal experience as well as a how-to guide. "Warp and Weft" contains a discussion of three students who incorporated narrative in their essays in three ways: as a structural frame, as an example when the research topic and personal experience overlap, and as a tool for discovery. Students will benefit from the peer-written examples as well as the use of the personal in the essay itself.

Like many students, I worked my way through college with a retail job. I was luckier than many of my classmates: I found a job at a hip little boutique called Rebecca: A Gallery of Wearable Art in the

trendy part of town. We carried many styles of hand-made clothing, jewelry, and accessories, but our most important merchandise was that made by Rebecca herself. Rebecca was a weaver who made hand-woven clothing and scarves. Her loom took up half of the back room and she wove while I waited on customers. When one fabric came off the loom, Anne, the seamstress, would begin to cut and sew while Rebecca set up the loom for the next design. She created her patterns then transferred them into a computer program that told her how to thread the yarn onto the loom to produce the pattern. She threaded the warp, the yarn that runs lengthwise, onto the loom. The weft (formerly known as woof) was placed on bobbins that fed the shuttle. The act of weaving was moving the shuttle with the weft through the warp to create the weave.

So what, you might well ask. So what does this have to do with writing?

Many of you have been taught not to use the word "I" in your academic writing; not to include anything that does not directly relate to that mysterious thing called a "thesis statement;" and not to include anything personal in your writing. The opening of this essay has broken all of those so-called rules – it contains a personal story, told in the first person, that at first glance seems unrelated to the topic of writing. However, in this essay, I – yes, "I" – am here to help you step away from those rules and to use personal stories effectively in your academic writing.

The first consideration is whether using personal narrative is appropriate for your project. My story of working in Rebecca's shop is useful here – it is intended to attract the attention of the readers and to establish and explain the extended metaphor of weaving. However, if I were writing an essay for my art history class about the evolution of weaving techniques and equipment, my story would seem out of place, as I only have experience with one step in that evolution, and that experience is of an observer rather than a participant.

Your composition professor will likely talk to you about the rhetorical situation of any piece of writing. Stated simply (perhaps

too simply), the rhetorical situation – the writer, the audience, and the purpose of the writing – affects the way the message is presented. In my hypothetical art history essay, the narrative would confuse the reader as to the purpose of the project and distract from the actual message of the paper. Often in writing classes it seems that your audience is specifically your professor and secondarily, perhaps, your classmates. Given the essays you will read about in this chapter, imagine the larger audiences that the student writers might have been addressing. Consider carefully whether personal narrative belongs in papers you are writing for history, biology, or business classes.

In addition to your specific rhetorical situation, of course, you should always comply with your professors' guidelines for each assignment. "No first-person narratives" is a clear statement that personal stories are not appropriate in that classroom.

However, once you have established that your narrative is appropriate for your purpose and audience, what next? It is my purpose to help you incorporate narrative effectively, and to do that, I will use examples from three of my students in a first-year course, a course designed to help writers bridge the gap between high school and college writing. I am also using the example of this essay itself. Consider my story about Rebecca. I am using her weaving, her design of warp and weft, as a metaphor for the kind of writing this essay is going to talk about. I will also use the story as a frame – talking about weaving in the introduction, the conclusion, and perhaps in the transitions.

Personal Story As Frame

Using a personal story as a frame for your essay can be an effective way to draw your reader into your ideas and then to help them reinterpret those ideas in the end. Perhaps, like me, you're working in a retail job. Perhaps it's in a big box store instead of my artsy

boutique, and you're wondering if you'd be happier somewhere else, or you're thinking, please, hand-woven clothing? You sell electronics, important, functional electronics.

Just as I began with the story of my time at Rebecca, Lynn Z. Bloom began a conference presentation with a story from her classroom, and then commented, "Such stories, even brief ones, make us want to hear more, and to tell our own right back. They get us where they live. All writing is personal, whether it sounds that way or not, if the writer has a stake in the work" (1). One of my goals in telling the story of Rebecca is to make you want to hear more, and to make you want to tell your own. The human mind is a giant filing cabinet of stories, and when you hear one, you go to the appropriate file drawer – in this case R for Retail Employment – and pull out your own.

There are many stories in that drawer, however, and it's important that you choose the right ones. Because my metaphor of writing as weaving is central to my topic, I haven't included lots of other great stories that came out of my time at Rebecca. I didn't talk about the great gyros we used to get from Mike and Tony's across the street, or about how the changing nature of the neighborhood made Rebecca worry whether she had chosen the right location for the store, or about the great artists who came in for trunk shows of their work. I focused on the loom, the weaving. And as the framework for this essay, I consider the story of the loom to be the warp, the yarn threaded on the loom in advance. I will thread my shuttle with the examples of my students' writing and weave them through.

The first example, Callie Harding's "The Life of a Choir Director's Child," does the opposite. Her topic – the need for better education about religion in America – is the warp, and her childhood stories are woven though to show the reader how this topic became so important to her. Her stories give the readers context and help them connect with her.

Personal Story as Context

Telling a personal story can help your reader understand why you are writing about the topic you have chosen, and why you have come to care so deeply about it. Callie's childhood experience of travelling from church to church where her parents worked as choir directors gave her an understanding of many religions, and she uses those stories to show how that has helped her be a more compassionate, thoughtful, and sensitive person.

Her paper starts this way:

> When I was a child, I didn't spend much time on playgrounds or with the backyard swing set. I didn't look forward to dance class or soccer practice every week. Instead, most of my time was spent in the pews of a church with a My Little Pony figure that was weaving its way through a jungle of hymnals and pew Bibles. My playground was a cathedral with the somewhat harmonious voices from the volunteer choir echoing off the stone floor over the magnificent pipe organ. At the front of the choir was either my mother or father . . . Yes, I was the child of choir directors. (Harding 1)

Callie goes on to explain that her family moved from a non-denominational Christian church to a Jewish synagogue; the First Church of Christ, Scientist; a Catholic Church, and finally, a small Lutheran church. "What religion are we?" she asks. This is how she tries to answer her question:

> My mother spent a while with the Hindu faith before marrying my father and converting to Mormonism. We are also deeply into our Native American background and practice their cultural and religious ceremonies. Add the fact that we had many friends from many religions and cultures and you can tell that I had one of the most openly religious households on the block. (Harding 1-2)

Callie then moves very nicely into her research on how to encourage religious tolerance through education. She contrasts her experience in a fundamentalist Christian high school to a school district in Modesto, California where all ninth graders take a semester-long world religion course. She writes about the importance of helping all children understand and celebrate diversity of religion and points to her own experiences as an example of the positive effect this has on them. As part of her research, Callie interviewed her mother about her diverse upbringing. While her mother called it a "happy accident," she also explained to Callie how she stood up to her very Mormon father to make sure Callie and her sister were free to find their own beliefs.

As I was studying Callie's essay, I took three highlighters and circled each paragraph: pink for Callie's personal story; yellow for Callie's presentation and discussion of her research, and green for the information from her interview with her mother. This is the result:

- Paragraphs 1-3 – Callie's personal story
- Paragraphs 4-6 – discussion of research
- Paragraph 7 – Callie's story
- Paragraphs 8-9 – discussion of research
- Paragraph 10 – Callie's interview with her mother
- Paragraph 11 – Callie's story
- Paragraph 12 – Callie's interview with her mother
- Paragraphs 13-14 – Callie's personal story

It wasn't until I did that exercise with the markers that I realized how smoothly Callie had incorporated the three elements of her writing. As I've done in this essay, Callie framed her story with the personal. She also used it within the essay to focus and reflect on her research findings. Marking your essay the same way can help you see if you have the right balance between the personal and the more traditionally academic portions of your paper.

While Callie used her personal stories to provide context to the

issue of religion in education, she also used her own background to show herself as an example of someone for whom a broad religious education proved beneficial. In "A Life Lost," student Melynda Goodfellow used her personal story as an example.

Personal Story as Example

Melynda chose to write about teen suicide, certainly an important topic, but one that far too often leads to a patchwork of statistics and distant narratives, more a report than an essay with heart. Sadly, Melynda had reason to care deeply about her topic: her cousin Jared killed himself with an overdose of prescription pain medication.

Melynda started her essay with a simple story of a typical Friday night, getting ready to go the high school football game, where her brother would be playing in the band. This night, however, was special, because her cousin had just moved into town and her boyfriend would be meeting him for the first time. Choosing to open with a typical activity – going to the football game – but giving it special meaning was particularly effective for Melynda. I encourage writers to ask themselves the first Passover question: Why is this night different from all other nights? This is the question asked by the youngest child at the beginning of the Seder to start telling the story of the Passover. It also serves the beginning writer well: If this night, this football game, isn't special in any way, then it isn't the story to use in your essay. Melynda's football game is different from all others because her cousin will be there to meet her boyfriend.

Although the atmosphere is festive, Melynda shows us with foreshadowing that this is not a typical Friday night lights story. She writes that Jared moved because "he wanted to get away from the lifestyle that he was living back home. He wanted a kind of fresh start." She connects herself to the characters of her brother and

her cousin through the band: she had been in band, her brother is performing with the band at the football game, and her cousin is excited about returning to school and joining the band himself. Throughout the narrative part of her essay, Melynda shows Jared as sad and desperate, yet looking forward to his fresh start.

Melynda tells the story in a straightforward, chronological way from the evening of the football game through her cousin's death and funeral. Her use of personal experience is different from mine and Callie's because the majority of her paper is that narrative. The structure of her paper is very different: where Callie went back and forth between the story and the research, Melynda began with the story and introduced the research at the end. The first three pages of Melynda's six-page essay are the story of her friendship with Jared that fall, and how she becomes his confidant. Pages four and five are the story of how she heard of his death. It is only at the end of her essay that she introduces the statistics that show that suicide is "the third leading cause of death in people ages 15 to 24" (Goodfellow 6). Her conclusion, shortly after that statistic, reads:

> I never in a million years would have thought something like this would happen in my family. I knew that mental health problems run in the family, but I believed everyone knew where to get help. We knew that suicide wasn't an option and that we had each other if nothing else. As tragic as it may sound, this event brought our whole family back together. Any quarrels or grudges anyone had seemed to dissipate that day. Ironically, one of the things that Jared wanted the most was for the family to just forget their differences and get along. (Goodfellow 9)

This ending refocuses Melynda's readers on the personal meaning of the impersonal statistic.

In his book *Living the Narrative Life: Stories as a Tool for Meaning Making*, Gian Pagnucci writes, "I think, actually, that stories can help us get at the truth even if there isn't a firm truth to be had." (51) And in *Writing to Change the World*, Mary Phipher says:

> Research shows that storytelling not only engages all of the
> senses, it triggers activity on both the left and the right
> sides of the brain . . . . People attend, remember, and are
> transformed by stories which are meaning-filled units of
> ideas, the verbal equivalent of mother's milk. (11)

Melynda works at getting at the true story of her cousin's death, making meaning of it, even though there is no firm truth or solid meaning to be had there. The truth she arrives at, however, is more powerful than the "just the facts" approach because the story lingers with her readers in a way statistics can't.

Another thing Melynda does that makes her essay different from mine, and Callie's, is her inclusion of dialogue. I think she makes especially good use of it in her essay, something that is often difficult for writers at all levels. Here she shows us how she learned of Jared's death:

> "What is it?" I said when I picked the phone up.
> "It's about time you answered your phone! I've been calling
> you for over an hour," my mom said. "Well?"
>   "It's Jared. He's in the hospital. He overdosed."
>   "Oh, my God . . . Is he okay? I'll be right there. I'm leaving
> work now."
>   "No. Don't come here. There's nothing you can do. He's
> dead." (Goodfellow 4)

Recreating dialogue can be challenging – a year after her cousin's death, can Melynda be certain that these were the exact words that she and her mother spoke? Probably not, but she can show her readers the tension in the moment – her mother's anger that she didn't pick up, her desire to be with Jared, and her mother's postponing of the awful news. Dialogue also can be used to pick up the pace of the story – the light look of it on the page helps readers' eyes move over it quickly, getting a lot of information from a few carefully-chosen words.

There are significant structural differences between Melynda's

essay and Callie's. Callie's is split almost evenly between personal experience and research; Melynda's is about 85% personal story. The third student, Ethelin Ekwa, uses personal story in an even larger portion of her essay, which is entitled "Ethelin Ekwa: An Autobiography." Although the title might lead you to believe that the essay is only, or just, or simply, personal narrative, Ethelin uses the story of her life to explore her ethnic heritage, her life as a single mother, and her determination to make the most of her artistic and musical talents. She tells the story of her life as a way of understanding her place in the world at the time of the writing.

Personal Story as Discovery

Ethelin's essay can be seen as an example of Donald M. Murray' beliefs about writing: "We write to think – to be surprised by what appears on the page; to explore our world with language; to discover meaning that teaches us and may be worth sharing with others …. . . we write to know what we want to say." (3). Although my students always write multiple drafts of all of their essays, Ethelin wrote more than usual – at least four significant revisions before the final draft that she submitted in her portfolio. She was a frequent visitor at our writers' center as she worked through the paper. Somewhere in an intermediate draft, she found her frame: a quotation from Ani Difranco's song "Out of Habit:" "Art is why I get up in the morning." That idea led her Ethelin to her conclusion: "I cannot imagine a day without the ability to create in unconventional ways" (Ekwa 9). In the eight and a half pages in between, she tells the story of her life.

In Callie and Melynda's essays, there is a very clear separation between personal experience, research material, and the writers' commentary on those elements. The weaving, to continue the metaphor, is done in larger blocks of color. Ethelin's essay has a more subtle pattern. Every paragraph contains some detail of her

life – where she was born, who her parents were, where she lived – but also has a reference to her life-long desire to be an artist. She talks about her work as a writer and poet; as a singer and musician; and as a photographer and visual artist.

Ethelin's background is intriguing – her parents moved from Cameroon, West Africa to France and then to Texas, where she was born, the youngest of five children. She has lived in Europe and Africa, and she went to school in France and Cameroon. Here is how she introduces herself in the second paragraph:

> My birth name is Ethelin Ekwa. I am also known as Obsolete by my artist friends and as Krysty by my close personal friends. I am an artist, a mother, a photographer and a lover of all things. I am an American-born citizen with Cameroonian and French origins. I am 30 years old and I currently reside in North Braddock. (Ekwa 1)

Ethelin's identity is tied to her arts from the very beginning, and every story from her life is wrapped around those arts. When, at 22, she becomes a single mother, her priorities change, but she never gives up: "When I got pregnant, I put singing, painting, and drawing on hold . . . I had more pressing matters to take care of and there just was not time for art" (Ekwa 3). Soon, though, she tells us that she made a new friend who introduced her to digital photography, and by the time her daughter was two years old, she had her own photography business up and running.

While Melynda chose one special night to tell about at the start of her essay, Ethelin chose many events from her life, all of them important, life-changing events. Reading Ethelin's essay, I can almost see Rebecca's shuttle flying back and forth across the loom, the turn at each side another event that pulls Ethelin back into the world of art. When the weaver turns the shuttle at the edge of the warp, the weft creates a finished edge that prevents the fabric from fraying or unraveling called a selvage. The turns in Ethelin's story create a sense that her life, which is sometimes unplanned and

chaotic, still has something that keeps it from unraveling, and that something is her artistic nature.

Tying Up Loose Ends

The examples from my students' essays can help you understand how to use personal experience in your academic writing. But how do you know when to use it? When is it acceptable and appropriate? Gian Pagnucci asserts, "Narrative ideology is built on a trust in confusion, a letting go of certainty and clarity that can ultimately lead to understanding" (53); that stories have a "piercing clarity" (17), and that "the drive to narrate experience is, if not instinctive, then at the very least quintessentially human" (41). He also warns that the academic world is not always welcoming of personal experience. I know many of my colleagues are not willing to trust in confusion – their entire careers, and even their lives, have been built on the quest for knowledge and certainty.

If your composition professor has asked you to read this chapter, it's a pretty safe bet that you may use personal experiences in your writing for that class. Even in that setting, however, there are times when it is more effective than others. Using the examples of the essays I've quoted from and the guidelines given in the beginning of this chapter, here are some tips on when to use your personal experience in your essays:

- When, like Callie and Melynda, your experiences have inspired a passionate opinion on your topic
- When, like Ethelin, your personal experiences constantly point back to your central idea
- When, like me, your personal experiences provide a strong and ex- tended metaphor for your subject
- When, like all of the writers, your personal experience provides a structure or framework for your essay

The expression "tying up the loose ends" comes from weaving and other fabric arts. When the yarn in the shuttle is changed, the new yarn is tied to the old at the selvage. Those threads are later woven into the fabric so that they don't show, and so that the connection is tight. When your rough draft is done, it's time to take the fabric off the loom and make sure your weave is tight. At that point, ask yourself these questions to be sure you are using your experience appropriately and effectively in your essay:

- What percentage of your essay is personal experience, and how does that match up with the nature of the assignment? Callie's essay was written in response to an assignment that required more research than the one Ethelin was responding to, so it included less personal writing.
- Have you included only the personal stories that directly relate to your topic, your attitude towards your topic, or your controlling idea?
- Are your selvages tight? Do the moves you make between personal story and research and analysis make sense, or is the fabric of your essay likely to unravel?
- Is the resulting pattern appropriate to your project? Are you working in large blocks of color, like Callie and Melynda, or the subtler tweed of Ethelin's essay?

I started this essay in Rebecca's shop and tried to weave the metaphor inspired there through this essay. In the process, I realized another advantage to using personal stories in academic writing: I hadn't thought about Rebecca and Anne, about Mike and Tony's gyros, about the bright creative atmosphere in the gallery and in the neighborhood for a long time. Accessing those stories from the filing cabinet in my brain was inspirational. My stories from Rebecca are mostly fun or funny. Your stories, like mine and the writers quoted here, are a mix of light and dark, funny and serious. I encourage you to open the file cabinet and find the stories that will make your readers remember similar times.

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Keywords

rhetorical situation, personal experience, narrative, structure, context, dialogue, research material

Author Bio

Marjorie Stewart taught composition and directed the writers' center at the Art Institute of Pittsburgh. She started teaching as an adjunct at three Pittsburgh institutions in 2000 and was an instructor at a Penn State campus for a year. At GSC, she teaches first-year writing, concentrating on corequisite courses for students who are not prepared for college English. She also teaches journalism and media courses and sponsors the student newspaper, *The Phoenix*.

13. An Introduction to and Strategies for Multimodal Composing

MELANIE GAGICH

Abstract

In this chapter from *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing, Volume 3*, Melanie Gagich introduces multimodal composing and offers five strategies for creating a multimodal text. The essay begins with a brief review of key terms associated with multimodal composing and provides definitions and examples of the five modes of communication. The first section of the essay also introduces students to the New London Group and offers three reasons why students should consider multimodal composing an important skill—one that should be learned in a writing class. The second half of the essay offers three pre-drafting and two drafting strategies for multimodal composing. Pre-drafting strategies include urging students to consider their rhetorical situation, analyze other multimodal texts, research textual content, gather visual and aural materials, and evaluate tools needed for creating their text. A brief discussion of open licenses and Creative Commons licenses is also included. Drafting strategies

include citing and attributing various types of texts appropriately and suggesting that students begin drafting with an outline, script, or visual (depending on the project). Gagich concludes the chapter with suggestions for further reading.

This reading is available below and as a PDF.

Overview

This chapter introduces multimodal composing and offers five strategies for creating a multimodal text. The essay begins with a brief review of key terms associated with multimodal composing and provides definitions and examples of the five modes of communication. The first section of the essay also introduces students to the New London Group and offers three reasons why students should consider multimodal composing an im- portant skill—one that should be learned in a writing class. The second half of the essay offers three pre-drafting and two drafting strategies for multimodal composing. Pre-drafting strategies include urging students to consider their rhetorical situation, analyze other multimodal texts, research textual content, gather visual and aural materials, and evaluate tools needed for creating their text. A brief discussion of open licenses and Creative Commons licenses is also included. Drafting strategies include citing and attributing various types of texts appropriately and suggesting that students begin drafting with an outline, script, or visual (depending on the project). I conclude the chapter with suggestions for further reading.

When you think about a college writing class, you probably think of pens, paper, word processors, printers, and, of course, essay writing. However, on the first day of your college writing class, you might read the syllabus and notice that the first assignment asks you to create a "multimodal text." You may wonder to yourself, "What does multimodal mean?" Perhaps you remember an assignment from high school when your teacher required you to create a Prezi or PowerPoint presentation, and she referred to it as a "multimodal project," but you were not exactly sure what that meant. Or perhaps you only remember writing five paragraph essays in high school and have never heard or read the word "multimodal."

As a first-year and upper-level composition instructor who has integrated a multimodal project into my curriculums since 2014, I have encountered many questions and confusion related to multimodal composing, or what is sometimes referred to as "multimodality." While some students are thrilled to compose something other than an academic essay, others struggle to understand why they are required to create a multimodal text in a writing class. I assure my students that although they may not be familiar with the concept of multimodality, it has a long history in composition (e.g. writing studies). In fact, the "multimodal assignment" has been a fixture in some college writing classrooms for over a decade and continues to be prevalent in many classrooms. In light of the probability that you will be asked to create a multimodal text at some point in your academic and/or professional career, I wrote this chapter to help you understand and navigate multimodal composing. In the first half of this chapter, I provide brief definitions of terms associated with and explain the importance of multimodal composing. The remainder of the chapter offers strategies for composing a multimodal text with an emphasis on pre-drafting strategies.

What Is a Multimodal Text?

Before moving into a discussion of multimodality and modes of communication, it is important to understand the meaning of the word "text" because it is often only associated with writing (or perhaps the messages you receive or write on your phone). However, when we use the term "text" in composition courses, we often mean it is a piece of communication that can take many forms. For instance, a text is a movie, meme, social media post, essay, website, podcast, and the list goes on. In our daily lives, we encounter, interact with, and consume many types of texts, and it is important to consider how most texts are also multimodal.

Pamela Takayoshi and Cynthia L. Selfe, two important scholars in writing studies and early advocates of multimodal composing, define multimodal texts as "texts that exceed the alphabetical and may include still and moving images, animators, color, words, music, and sound" (1). You'll notice that the examples of "text" listed above are also multimodal, which demonstrates how often we encounter multimodality in our daily lives. Multimodality is sometimes associated with technology and/or digital writing spaces. For example, when you post an image to Instagram, you use technology (your phone) to snap a picture, an app to edit or modify the image, and a social media platform (Instagram) to share it with others. However, creating a multimodal text does not require the use of digital tools and/or does not need to be shared in online digital spaces to make it "multimodal." To illustrate, when you create a collage and post it on your dorm room door, you use existing printed artifacts such as pictures clipped and pasted (non-digital technologies) from a magazine and share with others by taping it to your door (a non-digital space). Both examples represent a multimodal text because they include various modes of communication.

The Five Modes of Communication

In the mid-1990s, a group of scholars gathered in New London, New Hampshire and, based on their discussions, wrote the influential article, "A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures," published in 1996. In it, the group advocated for teachers to embrace teaching practices that allow students to draw from five socially and culturally situated modes, or "way[s] of communicating" (Arola, Sheppard, and Ball 1). These modes were linguistic, visual, spatial, gestural, and aural. Yet, scholars such as Claire Lauer, another influential researcher in composition, have argued that the New London Group's definition of modes, while exceedingly important, can be difficult to grasp. In light of this, below I provide brief definitions of each mode as well as examples to help you understand the "mode" in "multimodal."

What Are the modes of communication?

The visual mode refers to what an audience can see, such as moving and still images, colors, and alphabetical text size and style. Social media photos (see figure 1) exemplify the visual mode.

Figure 1. Photo of my dog taken from my Facebook page that represents the visual mode.

The linguistic mode refers to alphabetic text or spoken word. Its emphasis is on language and how words are used (verbally or written). A traditional five paragraph essay relies on the linguistic mode; however, this mode is also apparent in some digital texts. Figure 2 shows a student's linguistic text included in their website created to promote game-based language learning.
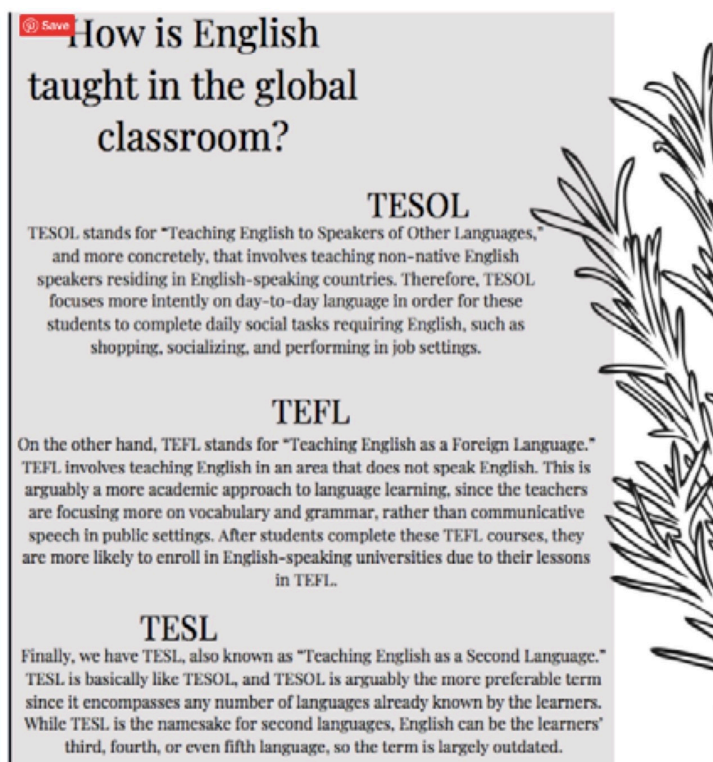
Figure 2. A student's digital text that emphasizes the linguistic mode. Photo shows a Pinterest pin that uses text to briefly explain the differences among TESOL, TEFL, and TESL. Permission to use this image was obtained from the student.

The spatial mode refers to how a text deals with space. This also relates to how other modes are arranged, organized, emphasized, and contrasted in a text. Figure 3, an infographic, is an example of the spatial mode in use because it emphasizes certain percentages and words to achieve its goal.

Figure 3. Infographic emphasizing the spatial mode. The infographic uses different sizes of text and different shapes to emphasize statistics surrounding cancer diagnoses and common types. ("Cancer Infographic" by CDC Global licensed under CC BY 2.0)

The gestural mode refers to gesture and movement. This mode is often apparent in delivery of speeches in the way(s) that speakers move their hands and fix their facial features and in other texts that capture movement such as videos, movies, and television. Figure 4 shows Michelle Obama's gestures at a speech she gave in London.

Figure 4. Picture taken of Michelle Obama while giving a speech that captures the gestural mode. She is standing at a microphone, looking out into the audience, and smiling with her hands clasped against her heart. ("US First Lady, Michelle Obama, speaking at Mulberry School for Girls, London" by DFID licensed under CC BY 2.0)

The aural mode refers to what an audience member can or cannot hear. Music is the most obvious representation of the aural mode, but an absence of sound (silence) is also aural. Examples of texts that emphasize the aural mode include podcasts, music videos, concerts, television series, movies, and radio talk shows. Figure 5 is a screenshot of my student's podcast created to convince teachers

to integrate podcasts into their language arts classrooms. A podcast exemplifies the aural mode because of its reliance on sound.
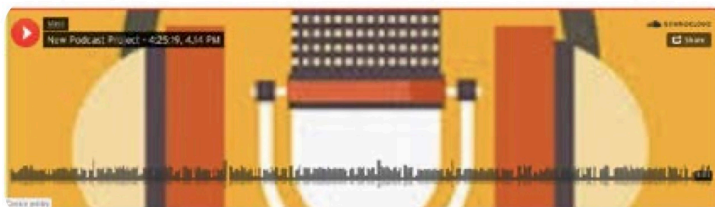

Figure 5 is a screen shot of a student's podcast and shows the audio lines and length of the text, entitled "New Podcast Project." (Permission to use this image was obtained from the student).

A multimodal text combines various modes of communication (hence the combination of the words "multiple" and "mode" in the term "multi- modal"). Cheryl E. Ball and Colin Charlton draw from The New London Group in their argument that "[a]ny combination of modes makes a multimodal text, and all text—every piece of communication a human composes—use more than one mode. Thus, all writing is multimodal" (42). However, in some communicative texts, one mode receives more emphasis than the others. For example, academia and writing teachers have historically favored the linguistic mode, often seen in the form of the written college essay. Yet, when you communicate using an essay, you are actually using three modes of communication: linguistic, spatial, and visual. The words represent the linguistic mode (the emphasized mode), the margins and spacing characterize the spatial, and the visual mode includes elements like font, font size, or the use of bold.

Combining each mode to create a clear communicative essay often involves the writing process (i.e. invention, drafting, and revision), and a thoughtful writer will also consider how the final product does or does not address an audience. The same process is used when creating a less traditional multimodal text. For instance,

when creating a text emphasizing the aural mode (e.g. a podcast), you must consider your audience, purpose, and context while also organizing and arranging your ideas and content in a coherent and logical way. This process parallels the traditional writing process. Thus, while a multimodal text might be considered less "academic" by some students and/or instructors, understanding that all writing and all texts are also multimodal demonstrates that learning about multimodality and how to multimodally compose is just as important as learning how to write.

Why Is Multimodal Composing Important?

You might be wondering why you should multimodally compose in a college writing class. In this section, I provide some answers to this question. I explain how multimodal composing assignments help students practice digital literacy skills, offer an opportunity to transfer multimodal composing experiences from home to academic settings, and allow students to learn "real life" composing practices.

Multimodal Assignments Help You Learn Digital Literacy Skills

You have likely been taught that to succeed in the world, you need to become a literate citizen. The common understanding of "literate" or "literacy" is an ability to read and write alphabetic texts. While it is important to have these skills, this definition privileges words and language over the other modes of communication. It also does not allow for assignments that help you practice communicating using multiple literacies, modes of communication, and technologies in various and diverse writing situations.

The New London Group members were some of the first to argue that students should have opportunities to practice and learn multiple literacies in the classroom, while utilizing emerging technologies. This idea continues to be reflected in writing and literacy goals in many first year writing and writing across the curriculum courses. In fact, check out your syllabus; in many colleges and universities there is a goal related to "digital literacy." The 2000s saw the arrival of "digital literacy skills" added to many first year writing program's learning outcomes and include understanding how to react to different writing assignments that require composing practices beyond writing a college essay and learning how to use various technologies to appropriately distribute information. Multimodal assignments offer opportunities for instructors to help you learn these digital literacy skills.

Multimodal Assignments Allow You to Use What You Know

You are likely already sharing and creating multimodal texts online and communicating with a wide range of audiences through social media, which Ryan P. Shepherd argues, requires multimodality. However, in his 2018 study, Shepherd also points out that students struggle to perceive the connections between the digital and multimodal composing they do *outside of school* with the same types of assignments they are asked to complete *in school*. What does this mean? Well, it means you are probably already multimodally composing outside of school but you just didn't know it. Understanding that you are already composing multimodally in many digital spaces will help you transfer that knowledge and experience into your academic assignments. This understanding might also help alleviate any fears or anxiety you may have when confronted with an assignment that disrupts what you think writing should look like. You can take a deep breath

and remember that practicing multimodal composing in school connects to the multimodal composing you likely practice outside of school.

Multimodal Assignments Offer Real Skills for the Workforce

Perhaps the most significant reason for learning how to compose multimodally is that it provides "real-life" skills that can help prepare students for careers. The United States continues to experience a "digital age" where employees are expected to have an understanding of how to use technology and communicate in various ways for various purposes. Takayoshi and Selfe argue that "[w]hatever profession students hope to enter in the 21st century . . . they can expect to read and be asked to help compose multimodal texts of various kinds . . ." (3). Additionally, professionals are also using the benefits of digital tools and multimodal composing to promote themselves, their interests, research, or all three. Learning how to create a multimodal text will prepare you for the workforce by allowing you to embrace the skills you already have and learn how to target specific audiences for specific reasons using various modes of communication.

How Do I Create a Multimodal Text?

Now that you know what a multimodal text is and why it is important to learn how to create them, it makes sense to discuss strategies for composing a multimodal text. As with writing, multimodal composing is a process and should not only emphasize the final result. Therefore, the first three strategies listed below are pre-drafting activities.

1. Determine your rhetorical situation.
2. Review and analyze other multimodal texts.
3. Gather content, media, and tools.
4. Cite and attribute information appropriately.
5. Begin drafting your text.

While I often ask my students to attend to each strategy in the order given, your process might change based on the assignment and/or instructor expectations.

Determine Your Rhetorical Situation

When brainstorming your rhetorical situation, you should consider the purpose of your text (*the message*), who you want to read and interact with your text (*the audience*), your relationship to the message and audience (*the author*), the type of text you want to create (*the genre*), and where you want to distribute it (*the medium*). Descriptions of each of the five components of the rhetorical situation are offered below.

The Message

The message relates to your purpose, and you might ask yourself, what am I trying to accomplish? You should try to make the message as clear and specific as possible. Let's say you want to create a website focused on donating to charity. An unclear message might be "getting more people in the United States to donate to charities." A clearer message is "convincing college freshmen at my university to donate to the ASPCA" because the audience and purpose are specific rather than broad.

The Audience

There are two types of audiences. An intended audience, who you target in your message, and an unintentional audience, who may stumble upon your text. When determining your message, you want to consider the beliefs, values, and demographics of your intended audience as well as the likelihood that unintentional audiences will interact with your text. Using the example above, college freshmen at your university are the intended audience, and teachers, parents, and/or students from other universities represent unintentional audience members. It might be helpful to approach audience using the concept of "discourse communities," or "a group of people, members of a community, who share a common interest and who use the same language, or discourse, as they talk and write about that interest" (National Council of Teachers of English). You can read more about discourse communities in Dan Melzer's essay, "You'll Never Write Alone Again: Understanding Discourse Communities" found in this volume of *Writing Spaces*.

The Author

You are the author and should consider your relationship to the message and audience. As an author, you bring explicit (obvious) and/or implicit (not obvious) biases to your message, so it is important to recognize how these might affect it and your audience. Also, you may be targeting an audience you are familiar with (perhaps you are also a college freshman) or not (perhaps you are a graduate student). It is important to think about how your familiarity might affect your message.

The Genre

Genre is a tricky term and can mean different things to different scholars, teachers, and students (Dirk 250). In the context of multimodal composing, genre refers to a type of text that has genre conventions, or audience expectations. For example, if I am creating a website (the genre), an audience would expect the following conventions: an easy-to-navigate toolbar, functional tabs, hyperlinks, and images. Yet, when thinking about genre, it is more useful to think specifically. If I am creating a website for horror film fans (the specific genre), then the audience would expect the following (more specific) genre conventions: references, images, and sounds associated with horror films, directors, actors, actresses, monsters, and villains. They would also expect color and font choices to align with the genre—it is likely that the color baby blue would not be well-received.

The Medium

While genre is the type of text you want to create, the medium refers to where you will distribute it. Classic media (plural for medium) includes distribution via radio, newspapers, magazines, and television; however, new media is defined by a text's online distribution. Importantly, medium refers to where you will distribute your text but not how. The how refers to the technology tools you'll use to create the text and possibly to distribute it. For example, to create a podcast, you might use your smartphone (a tool) to record, a free sound editor like Audacity (another tool) to edit it, and Soundcloud (a tool *and* the medium) to distribute it.

Review and Analyze Other Multimodal Texts

Now that you have brainstormed your rhetorical situation and determined the type of text you want to create, it is time to begin finding other texts representative of your topic and genre. In their textbook, *Writer/Designer*: A *Guide to Making Multimodal Projects*, Arola, Sheppard, and Ball argue that "[o]ne of the best ways to begin thinking about a multimodal project is to see *what* has already been said about a topic you are interested in . . . as well as *how* other authors have designed their texts on that topic . . . " (40). This is excellent advice. I suggest that you find at least one text you think is an exceptional example and one text you feel is lacking in some way. After you find these texts, you can conduct a brief analysis by responding to the following questions:

1. What is the author's message?
2. Who are they addressing? How can you tell?
3. What type of text did they create? What genre conventions do you see?
4. How was the text distributed? In what ways does it relate to the target audience?
5. What modes of communication are they using? Which are they emphasizing? Do these decisions support the message and/or appropriately target their audience?
6. What do you like about the multimodal text?
7. What, in your opinion, needs work?

If you answer these questions, you have given yourself important feedback to consider for your own work.

Gather Content, Media, and Tools

Once you have determined your rhetorical situation and examined

other multimodal texts, you should begin gathering information and materials. I have categorized this process into three components: content, visual and aural materials, and technology tools.

Conduct Content Research

A multimodal text should include content (key pieces of information that support your message), which means you will need to conduct some research. The extent of the research depends on the type of assignment; some instructors might want your multimodal text to include scholarly research while others might not. Therefore, be sure to read the assignment closely and then conduct the necessary research. For example, my student created a website and videos discussing the similarities between American music and K-pop (see figure 6). Her content research includes a scholarly article from the journal *World Englishes* and a popular article from *Billboard.com*.
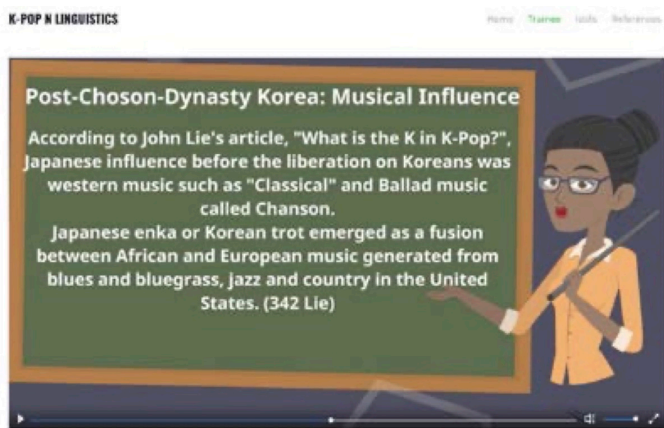

Figure 6. A screen shot of a student's video that illustrates her use of scholarly content. Video shows an animation of a teacher standing at a chalkboard. On the chalkboard, there is text explaining the musical influences on Post-Choson-Dynasty Korea. (Permission to use this image was obtained from the student).

Collect Visual and Aural Materials

In addition to textual information, you should also collect images, sounds, videos, animations, memes, etc. you want to include in your multimodal text. For instance, figure 6 demonstrates some of the pre-draft materials my student collected: openly licensed images of a teacher and chalkboard, a video they created using Animator, and K-Pop music to play on a loop.

Explore Openly Licensed Materials

When searching for visual and aural materials, you want to consider using openly licensed materials. According to *Yearofopen.org*, open licenses are "a set of conditions applied to an original work that grant permission for anyone to make use of that work as long as they follow the conditions of the license" ("What are Open Licenses"). A well-known and commonly used example of an open license are Creative Commons licenses, identified by CC. Creative Commons licenses provide the creator or author with a copyright, ensuring that they receive credit for their work, while also allowing "others to copy, distribute, and make uses of their work – at least non-commercially" ("About the Licenses"). Essentially, if a work has one of the four basic creative commons licenses (see figure 7), then a creator/author can use the licensed item in their own creative texts.

The most open license. An author can use it
in any way as long as they provide attribution

Attribution
CC BY

Allows for any use but must attribute
the author and the new work cannot
be used for commercial gain.

Attribution-NonCommercial
CC BY-NC

An author must provide attribution and
the new work must be shared with the
same license as the original work

Attribution-ShareAlike
CC BY-SA

Allows for any use but must attribute
the author and used in its original form
with no changes to the original work.

Attribution-NoDerivs
CC BY-ND

Figure 7. The four basic Creative Commons licenses including explanations for each. (Image was created by the author using "About Licenses" by Creative Commons licensed under CC BY 4.0)

There are various websites such as CC Search, Free Music Archive (FMA), or Digital Public Library of America (DPLA) where you can find openly licensed work. You may also set filters on Flickr or Google Images to locate openly licensed work.

Collect and Evaluate Technology Tools

It is important to collect and evaluate the technology tools you need to create your multimodal text prior to drafting it. As stated previously, the technology tool helps you create the final text and might also help you distribute it. The easiest way to determine the technology tools that you need is to create a list of all of the features you want to include in your text. Once you create the list, research where to find the tools either online or at your university. Be aware that some tools may not be free (although they may come with a free trial period), but you can use software available on your computer

or university computers such as iMovie or Windows Movie Maker. Or you can find freeware, software available for free online, such as Audacity (for sound editing), Canva (for infographic and/or image creation), or Blender (for video creation). Once you have created your list and found some tools, spend some time testing each one while keeping track of which is the most user-friendly and helps you achieve your composing goals.

Citing and Attributing Your Content

After researching content and collecting materials, think about how you will give rhetorically appropriate credit to authors or organizations whose work you have referenced or included. For instance, if you create a video, you should provide credits at the end rather than a Works Cited page, or if you design a website, you should include hyperlinks to outside sources rather than MLA in-text citations because this makes more sense, given the genre. For multimodal texts that rely on the aural mode (e.g. podcasts), you can use verbal attributions, or verbalize necessary information. When deciding what information is necessary, think about what you can include to help your audience locate your text, such as author, title, and website. For example, the phrase, "*According to Mandi Goodsett, in her PowerPoint 'Creative Commons Licenses' found on the library website, a student has con- trol over their online presence,*" offers the audience key information to help them find the source.

When citing openly licensed images, videos, sounds, animations, screenshots, etc., it is important to provide an attribution. According to the CC Wiki, an appropriate attribution should include the title, author, source (hyperlinked to the original website), and license (hyperlinked to the license information). Figure 8 represents example of an inappropriate attribution and figure 9 an ideal one.
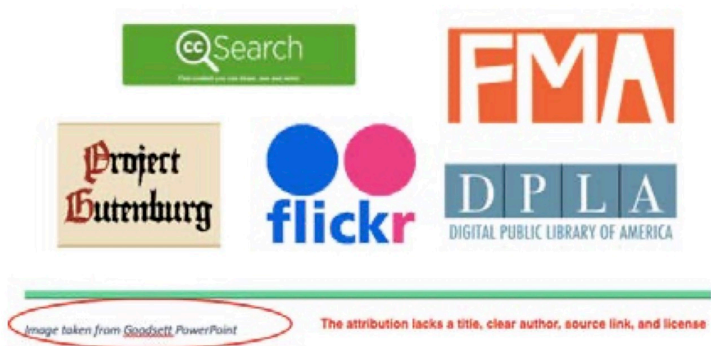
Figure 8. An example of an inappropriate attribution that lacks title, clear author, source link, and license. (Image was created by the author using "Creative Commons Licensing" by Mandi Goodsett licensed under CC BY 4.0)

Figure 9. An example of an ideal attribution, which includes a hyperlinked title for the image, a clear author name, and license information that is also hyperlinked. (Image was created by the author using "Creative Commons Licensing" by Mandi Goodsett licensed under CC BY 4.0)

Begin Drafting Your Text

Drafting your text should include outlining or mapping your project. This could take the form of writing all of the text you want to include in an outline if you have a word-heavy multimodal text like a website, drawing your design if you are creating a poster or commercial, or writing a script if you are creating a podcast or video. Of course, you can combine any of these outlining methods or come up with your own, but thinking about what you want to do before you do it will make your final text much stronger and coherent.

Final Remarks and Finding More Information

The primary purpose of this chapter is to introduce you to multimodal composing and offer some strategies to help you create a multimodal text. Yet, just like with traditional writing, multimodal composing is a process, and while I provided three pre-drafting strategies, I did not offer much in the way of guidance for drafting your final product. Therefore, I would like to conclude by offering two excellent resources:

- Michael J. Klein and Kristi L. Shackelford's *Writing Spaces* volume 2 chapter, "Beyond Black on White: Document Design and Formatting in the Writing Classroom" discusses visual design, which can help you create your final text.

- Arola, Sheppard, and Ball's commercial textbook, *Writer/Designer: A Guide to Making Multimodal Projects* (first and second editions) offers detailed advice for making your multimodal text.

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Melanie Gagich earned her PhD in Composition and Applied Linguistics from Indiana University of Pennsylvania in August 2020. Her dissertation, "Exploring FYW Students' Emotional Responses Towards Multimodal Composing and Online Audience," earned a pass with distinction. And she has written two articles exploring multimodal composing and digital literacy. She is also a co-author of the open access textbook, A *Guide to Rhetoric, Genre, and Success in First-Year Writing* (CSU Ohio Faculty Profile).

14. Bad Idea About Writing: "There is One Correct Way of Writing and Speaking"

ANJALI PATTANAYAK

Abstract

"There is One Correct Way of Writing and Speaking" by Anjali Pattanayak comes from *Bad Ideas About Writing*, edited by Cheryl E. Ball and Drew M. Loewe. This article focuses on the myth that there is only one way to read and write successfully in our world. Pattanayak dispels this position by speaking to the ways in which holding tightly to such beliefs can limit writing diversity and further marginalize those who have specific cultural linguistic styles that connect deeply with their identity.

This reading is available below, as a PDF, and as a podcast.

People consistently lament that kids today can't speak properly or that people coming to this country need to learn to write correctly. These lamentations are based on the notion that there is a single correct way of speaking and writing. Currently, the general sentiment is that people should just learn to speak and write proper

English. This understanding of writing is rooted called *current traditional rhetoric*, which focuses on a prescriptive and formulaic way of teaching writing that assumes there is only one way to write (or speak) something for it to be correct. However, over the past several decades, scholars in writing studies have examined the ways in which writing has a close dialectical relationship with identity, style genre, and culture. In other words, the rules for writing shift with the people and the community involved as well as the purpose and type of writing.

Most people implicitly understand that the way they communicate changes with different groups of people, from bosses to work colleagues to peers to relatives. They understand that conversations that may be appropriate over a private dinner may not be appropriate at the workplace. These conversational shifts might be subtle, but they are distinct. While most people accept and understand these nuances exist and will adapt to these unspoken rules— and while we have all committed a social faux pas when we didn't understand these unspoken rules—we do not often afford this same benefit of the doubt to people who are new to our communities or who are learning our unspoken rules.

While the idea of arguing whether there is one correct way of communicating or whether writing is culturally situated might seem to be a pedantic exercise, the reality is that espousing the ideology that there is one correct way to speak and write disenfranchises many populations who are already denigrated by society. The writing most valued in this binary is a type of writing that is situated in middle-class white culture. In adhering to so-called correct language, we are devaluing the non-standard dialects, cultures, and therefore identities of people and their communicative situations that do not fit a highly limited mold.

The way in which correctness in language devalues people is already troubling, but it becomes exacerbated by the current trends in education. Please refer to the literary crisis chapter to learn more about the changing dynamics in education. Given this shift and the way that Standard Written English is deeply rooted in white upper/

middle-class culture, we see more and more students from diverse backgrounds gaining access to college who are facing barriers due to their linguistic backgrounds.

This means that while minority students and lower class students are ostensibly being given greater access to education, careers, and other facets of society they had been previously barred from, they are still facing serious barriers that their upper-class white counterparts do not, particularly in terms of culture, language, and literacy. J. Elspeth Stuckey argues that literacy, rather than enfranchising students, is a means of oppression and that it does little to help the economic futures of minority students because of how literacy teaches a particular set of values—ways of communicating and identity. In the context of educational settings, the cultures and identities of academia are valued more than those of the students, which sends the message that how they, their family, and members in their community speak and act are wrong by comparison. In essence, it sends the message starting at a very young age that who they are and where they come from is somehow lesser.

In this sense, education, while well intentioned, serves to further the marginalization of certain identities and cultures that do not fit. This is particularly evident in Latino, African American, and English as Second Language communities. In the book *Paying for the Party*, Elizabeth Armstrong and Laura Hamilton note that colleges like the school they studied for five years, which they call Midwestern University, do not help facilitate social mobility. Frequently, the students who entered college best prepared were those who were already middle or upper class, meaning the opportunities the working-and lower-class students received were more limited. When you look at this alongside what Gloria Ladson-Billings calls the *educational debt*, or the compounded impact of educational deficits that grow across generations of poor minority students, literacy efforts as they are currently framed paint a bleak picture for poor, minority students.

The issue is not just one of unequal access to opportunities.

Jacqueline Jones Royster and Carmen Kynard illustrate how attitudes toward students as writers are interwoven with attitudes toward them as people. Language cannot be disassociated from people, which has important consequences for those who grow up speaking different dialects. By continuing to propagate the notion of correct and incorrect ways of speaking, we effectively devalue the intelligence and character of students, employees, and colleagues, who, for whatever reasons, don't speak or write what in historical terms has been called the King's English (among other names). We use the perception of improper communication as evidence of others' lesser character or ability, despite recognizing that this country was united (if only in name) after declaring independence from that King.

This perception becomes all the more problematic because it is not just about devaluing individuals, but about the widespread practice of devaluing the literate practices of those who are already marginalized. David Gold highlights the marginalization of women, working class, rural, and African American literacy in our understanding of writing. Gold writes about how the literacy practices of African Americans in universities laid the groundwork for the Civil Rights movement. Indeed, the schools he studied were decades ahead of the larger national conversation on how literacy, identity, and power were interrelated. In her work examining how literacy and identity formation were key for African American women and for social change, Jacqueline Jones Royster discusses the importance of understanding the these cultural, identity, and social movements, echoing the impact marginalized scholars had in academia. Both demonstrate the detrimental impact of sidelining groups of people and their literate practices by devaluing their languages and their experiences, not just for those who are marginalized but for our larger understanding of how we as a society write.

The notion of one correct way of writing is also troubling because it operates under the assumption that linguistic differences are the result of error. The reality is that, for many speakers, what

we might perceive as a mistake is actually a system of difference. One notable example of a different dialect of English is Ebonics, which has different patterns of speech rooted in the ancestral heritage of its speakers. Similarly, immigrant groups will frequently speak and write English in a way that mirrors the linguistic heritage of their mother tongue.

The way that we conceptualize language is not just detrimental to minorities; it also devalues the identities that working- and lower-class people bring to communicative situations, including the classroom. Lynn Z. Bloom writes that "Freshman Composition is an unabashedly middle-class enterprise." She argues that one of the reasons composition is required for all students is because it promulgates middle-class values and ways of thinking. These values in the writing classroom are embodied in everything from the notion of property, which undergirds the way that plagiarism and intellectual property are treated, to formality of language and rhetorical choices that are encouraged in papers. Indeed, the way many instructors teach writing, plagiarism, citation, and word choice in papers is not in and of itself good but rather is the socially accepted way of interacting with text as defined by the middle class. Mike Rose and Irvin Peckham write about the tension of middle-class values on working-class students and the cognitive dissonance and struggles with identity that come with imposing such values in writing under the guise of correctness. The idea that there is one correct way of writing devalues the writing, thoughts, intelligence, and identities of people from lower-class backgrounds.

Pragmatically, many argue that standard English should be dominant in the binary between academic English and all other dialects in order for speakers and writers to communicate with credibility in their communities. This argument has been used to justify the continued attention to correctness at the expense of authors' voices, but we can teach people to adapt while also valuing their identities. We can talk about writing as something that they can employ to their benefit rather than a hegemonic standard that supersedes their backgrounds, identities, and experiences.

In order to value the diversity of communication and identities that exist in the U.S., we need to start teaching and envisioning writing as a cultural and social activity. We need a more nuanced view of writing in society that encourages everyone to adapt to their audiences and contexts rather than placing an undue burden on those who do not fit the mold of standard English. One strategy for teaching academic English without devaluing a writer's identity is code-switching, a concept already taught in schools with significant minority populations as a way of empowering young people. While instruction in code-switching is valuable because it teaches students that they can adopt different linguistic choices to appeal to different audiences, it is deeply problematic that the impetus is still placed on minority students with non-standard dialects to adapt. While code-switching is meant to empower people, it is still rooted in the mentality that there is one correct way of writing, because even as code-switching teaches an incredibly nuanced way of thinking about writing, it is still being taught in the context of preparing writers to deal with a society that will use errors in speaking as evidence that they are lesser. As a result, it is a less-than-ideal solution because it plays into—rather than undermines—the racism of academic English.

By perpetuating the myth of one correct way of writing, we are effectively marginalizing substantial swaths of the population linguistically and culturally. The first step in combating this is as easy as recognizing how correctness reinforces inequality and affects our own perceptions of people and questioning our assumptions about communication, and a second step is valuing code-switching in a wide swath of communicative situations.

Further Reading

While the notion of what constitutes academic English has remained relatively static in popular culture, the reality of writing

in the university has broadened to include many other types of writing. Patricia Bizzell, Helen Fox, and Christopher Shroeder compile arguments for addressing these other types of communication in *Alt Dis: Alternative Discourses and the Academy*. In *College Writing and Beyond*, Anne Beaufort provides a framework in which to understand how writing is dynamic. In her article "Freshman Composition as a Middle-Class Enterprise," Lynn Z. Bloom articulates the ways in which the cultural values of the middle class are being taught in the writing classroom as objectively good or true and the impact of this mentality. Additionally, Asao Inoue compiles a collection of articles in *Race and Writing Assessment* that provides frameworks for considering race in assessment practices.

In 1974, the Conference for College Composition and Communication passed the resolution *Students' Right to Their Own Language*. In this time since it passed, there has been a great deal of discussion around the wisdom of that resolution. Editors Austin Jackson, David E. Kirkland, and Staci Perryman-Clark compile short articles for and against the resolution called "Students' Right to Their Own Language."

Bruce Horner, Min-Zhan Lu, Jacqueline Jones Royster, and John Trimbur write about how the increasing number of English speakers in the world is increasing linguistic diversity in "Opinion: Language Difference in Writing: Toward a Translingual Approach." Additionally, Irvin Peckham writes extensively with a focus on working class students in the classroom and the impact of college and academic writing as a middle-class enterprise in "The Stories We Tell." For more on the history and cultural development of African American Vernacular English, consider *Beyond Ebonics: Linguistic Pride and Racial Prejudice* by John Baugh.

Keywords

African American Vernacular, cultural rhetorics, Ebonics, non-standard dialect, rhetorical genre studies, writing, class

Author Bio

Anjali Pattanayak is the Academic Enrichment program coordinator for the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs at the University of Wisconsin–Platteville. She currently runs programs that help underrepresented students transition into their first year
of college to support retention and matriculation. She has spent over five years doing outreach work with under-represented youth
as they transition to college. She has taught both first-year composition and first-year experience classes. You can follow her @
lalaithfeanaro or @arpattanayak.

15. Bad Idea About Writing: "Failure is Not an Option"

ALLISON D. CARR

Abstract

Allison D. Carr's essay "Failure is Not an Option" comes from the book *Bad Ideas About Writing.* In Carr's essay, she draws on both personal experiences of failure and research to suggest that failure is an important part of the writing process. Carr argues that instead of avoiding failure we need to change our orientation toward failure, which is not an easy thing to do.

This reading is available below, as a PDF, and as a podcast.

Failure, so goes the dominant cultural narrative, is a sign of weakness. Of laziness. Of stupidity and bad breeding and busted bootstraps. Failure will ruin your life. In action, suspense, and sports films, *failure is not an option.* In real life, failure only happens to bad people. Or, more to the point in this context, to bad writ- ers. Failure in writing betrays dullness of mind, smallness of imagination. The failed writer—the one who cannot learn to write well (which is to say, according to accepted conventions of good writing)—is

discounted as dim, unprepared, non-serious, wacky, or weird, distracted, behind.

Or, failure is acceptable if we learn from it. If we can recuperate it, if it brings us virtue and strength and morality because what doesn't kill us makes us stronger. And if we never, ever do it again.

No. Stop with this. This is stupid, and the opposite is actually true: Failure should be welcomed, if not actively sought out, signaling as it does both the presence of creative, risky thinking and an opportunity to explore a new direction. To writing especially, failure is integral, and I will go so far as to assert that the best writing (and the best learning-to-write) happens when one approaches the activity from a mindset trained on failure. Failure represents a certain against-the-grain jettisoning of established ideas about what counts as good writing in favor of rogue, original, attention-capturing, and intentional art. To fail willingly in writing is to be empowered by the possibilities that emerge. It is to trust oneself and one's ideas, a quality too rare in the age of hyper-achievement, in which the only progress that counts is progress that moves up.

A History of Failure

Broadly speaking, failure's bad reputation is an inherited relic of another time. Though it would certainly be possible to trace its origins back to many religious mythologies, I will in the interest of brevity go back only so far as the mid-19th century in America, when the economy shifted from one based in agriculture to one based in industry (closing, in theory, the opportunity gap between rich and poor). From this backdrop grew the recognition that literacy, the ability to read and write (and generally comprehend information), would be the bedrock of a thriving community. Thus, literacy took on the status of social necessity for the masses, not simply a luxury

for the ruling class. By the middle of the 19th century, a system of common schools had been codified, and central to its curriculum was grammar instruction and conventions of speech and writing.

According to literacy scholar John Trimbur, from whom I have been piecing together this history, reading and writing instruction functioned "as both a means to regulate popular literacy and a social marker to divide the literate from the illiterate, the worthy poor from the unworthy, 'us' from 'them.'" Given the then-corresponding (perhaps correlative) rates of illiteracy among incarcerated populations, success and failure in this realm came to be perceived not simply as an indication of intelligence or economic advantage, but as a matter of moral fiber. To fail in reading or writing meant a failure of moral fortitude.

But cultural attitudes toward failure remain as sinister as ever, perhaps more so in the wake of standardized testing, No Child Left Behind, and Race to the Top. Failure continues to represent not just ill preparedness, but weakness in spirit and mind, stupidity, inadequacy, and a lifetime of toiling. And there is something about failure in writing that amplifies these judgments, suggesting that the subject somehow deserves to be judged and disadvantaged in these ways.

An Alternative View

What we have failed to grasp—why the idea that failure is bad needs to die—is the integral connection between failure and risk, creativity, and innovation, not to mention emotional and cognitive resilience. This relationship is well documented, making its tenacious hold on cultural ideology especially confounding. For example, many of us use and benefit daily from innovations discovered by accident: penicillin, Corn Flakes, Post-it Notes, Corningware, WD-40, oral contraception, and potato chips. All of these were discovered when the discoverer was working on a

different puzzle. And discoveries like these are the norm, not the exception. This is the primary activity of lab research, after all: A researcher may run hundreds, thousands of trials and experiments, each a failure in its own unique way (and some leading to accidental discoveries) before landing on, say, the polio vaccine or the secret to the expanding universe. Likewise, in the tech industry, we need only look as far as Silicon Valley and the dozens of stories of failed start- ups to understand how integral failure is to the culture of innovation there (even when it is difficult to stomach). In fact, failure is so common and so prominent in tech, they've developed an entire annual conference around it, FailCon.

And though writing is not obviously about discovery of life-altering products, it is about discovery of a different sort and thus, the virtue of failure should be similarly celebrated. In fact, knowing what I know about learning to write (as a writer and a writing teacher myself), I would argue that it is impossible for one to develop anything approaching a good writing ability without years—decades, probably—of repeated failure. We aren't born pen in hand, fully primed to write sonnets or political treatises as soon as we get a grip on those fine motor skills. Writing is learned slowly, over a long period of time, and with much difficulty, and anybody who says otherwise is lying or delusional or both.

Consider the testimony of renowned journalist and public intellectual Ta-Nehisi Coates who, in an interview for *The Atlantic*'s "Creative Breakthroughs" series, describes writing as a process of repeated failures that, with persistence, accumulate to create breakthroughs. "I always consider the entire process about failure," he says, "and I think that's the reason why more people don't write." Similarly, novelist Stephen King speaks publicly (and repeatedly) about his impressively large stack of rejection slips before *Carrie* was finally picked up by Doubleday, thereby launching his illustrious career (powered by persistence, no doubt, in the face of his continued fear "of failing at whatever story I'm writing"). Pulitzer Prize winning novelist Junot Díaz writes memorably of his difficulty in writing his second novel, a years-long exercise in failure; it

famously took Jane Austen fourteen years to write *Sense and Sensibility*; and Joyce Carol Oates, in her "Notes on Failure," reminds us that Faulkner considered himself a failed poet and that Henry James only became a novelist after a failed turn at playwriting.

There is much disagreement, or shall I say healthy debate, in the community of writing scholars about the best and most effective ways to teach writing. The specifics in this case are immaterial, because these scholars do agree on (at least) one foundational idea: that writing is a *process*, which is a coded way of avoiding the harsher truth: Writing—and learning to write—involves a great deal of failure. We start a draft; we get frustrated or stuck or side-tracked, or we discover halfway through that we're actually interested in something else. We move to a clean sheet of paper or a fresh document and start again. And the process continues until we've made something cohesive, something that works. We scholars know this not only because we've researched it, but because we are writers ourselves, and we spend a great deal of time with people struggling to improve their writing.

Writing scholars don't use the word "failure" very often (or at all), but we should. There is something bold there, something that a dogged denial of failure closes off: permission to make a mess, to throw something away, to try thirty different ideas instead of toiling away on one. It's a reset button for the brain. That didn't work! Let's salvage what we can and try again! Scholars and teachers don't use this word, but we should—it is the most honest thing we have to say about writing.

Making Failure an Option

What should be clear is that failure is a significant part of the entire scene of learning, an assertion that, again, is borne out by widely respected research. Malcolm Gladwell isn't wrong when he insists upon the 10,000-hour rule, which, in suggesting that it takes

10,000 hours to truly master anything (shooting free-throws, playing an instrument), implicitly builds in a generous rate of failure. It's true that writing is not stable in the way that chess is stable, but the broad message of Gladwell's limited theory—that to excel at anything takes a tremendous amount of practice and persistence—easily aligns with prevailing thought on what is central to development in writing: Writing is difficult and complex, and development is not linear. More recently, Carol Dweck's concept of *growth mindset* suggests that people learn better when their efforts are assessed and praised as opposed to their autonomous being: "You seem to be working really hard" instead of "You're smart." Drawing on this learning paradigm, cognitive researcher Manu Kapur tells us that our brains are actually wired for failure.

Failure is integral to learning and development, more so than external markers of achievement or success. An avoidance of failure in learning, or in writing, or in industry or parenting or any other human/community endeavor, represents an absence of creativity and an abundance of predictability, little to no risk, and perhaps even harmful or counter-productive thinking. This is not a mindset anyone should encourage or reinforce. Instead, teachers, scholars, mentors, and anybody involved in the conversation about writing development should be taking concrete steps toward normalizing failure. This means rethinking the frame of the entire scene of writing, including what it means to learn how to do it and what it means to teach it. As my invocation of Gladwell above demonstrates, it is foolish to imagine writing as a discrete and stable skill that can be mastered, a mindset that unfortunately dominates much writing instruction (especially in this era of testing); instead, it is crucial that the project of developing as a writer is understood as an always ongoing process of learning and discovery and that writing classrooms should be thought of as laboratories where experimentation and question-asking prevails over rule-memorization and formulaic discipline. Writing is not a list of dos and don'ts, nor is success in writing a universally acknowledged ideal. Writing is about risk and wonder and a compulsion to make

something known. Failure—and a willingness to fail often in large, obvious ways—should always be an option.

Further Reading

To learn more about the correlation between organized writing instruction and the rise of industrial capitalism, see John Trimbur's essay titled "Literacy and the Discourse of Crisis" in the collection *The Politics of Writing Instruction: Postsecondary* (Boynton/Cook), edited by Trimbur and Richard Bullock.

Cultural attitudes about education, learning, and literacy have been challenged in recent years, most successfully by advocates for a "growth mindset," which strives to distinguish learners' natural ability from learned and determined effort, ultimately empowering students in the face of struggle and failure. To learn more about this research, see Ingfei Chen's "New Research: Students Benefit from Learning that Intelligence is not Fixed" (*Mind/Shift*), Manu Kapur's "Productive Failure in Learning Math" (*Cognitive Science*), and Katrina Schwartz's "Growth Mindset: How to Normalize Mistake Making and Struggle in Class" (*Mind/Shift*).

Stephen King may be the most well-known writer to address failure, as evident in Lucas Reilly's article "How Stephen King's Wife Saved Carrie and Launched His Career" (*Mental Floss*) as well as Andy Greene's interview with him (*Rolling Stone*). Outside the world of writing, the culture of failure thrives most prominently in technological innovation. For more, consider Rory Carroll's "Silicon Valley's Culture of Failure…And the 'Walking Dead' it Leaves Behind" (*The Guardian*), Kevin Maney's "In Silicon Valley, Failing is Succeeding" (*Newsweek*), Bo Yaghmaie's "A Case of Startup Failure" (*Techcrunch.com*), and "146 Startup Failure Post- Mortems," compiled by the editor at CBInsights.com.

Author Bio

Allison Carr is an assistant professor of rhetoric and Director of Writing Across the Curriculum at Coe College. Beyond researching the intersection of failure and emotion for her doctoral dissertation, Allison considers herself a failure savant, leading her students by example toward riskier, frightening, and sometimes downright stupid undertakings. She tweets about food, politics, writing, and baseball through the handle @hors_doeuvre.

16. Bad Idea About Writing: "Strong Writing and Writers Don't Need Revision"

LAURA GIOVANELLI

Abstract

Laura Giovanelli's essay "Strong Writing and Writers Don't Need Revision" comes from the book *Bad Ideas About Writing*. She argues that revision is not simply a matter of addressing localized concerns such as grammar and spelling, but looking at more global, all-encompassing issues within a piece such as development and organization. Giovanelli also emphasizes that drafts are living documents, and pushes against the static nature by which many writers revisit previous drafts.

This reading is available below, as a PDF, and as a podcast.

"The standard perception that revision is something that happens at the end of the writing process is a good place to start revising ideas about revision."—Cathleen Breidenbach

The fantasy that good writers summon forth beautiful, lean, yet

intricate sentences onto a page without sweating is an unhealthy fiction, and it is wrong. What writers need is revision. Novice writers, experienced writers, *all* writers. Anyone interested in writing clearer, stronger, more persuasive and passionate prose, even those of us who are procrastinators panicking because we need to get a project finished or a paper written and it's 2:00 a.m. the night before our deadline—writers need revision because revision is not a discrete step. Revision is not the thing writers do when they're done writing. Revision is the writing.

It's important to keep in mind I'm not talking about revision as proofreading or copy editing; no amount of grammatical, spelling, and style corrections transforms a piece of writing like focused attention to fundamental questions about purpose, evidence, and organization. That, to me, is revision: the heavy lifting of working through why I'm writing, who I'm writing for, and how I structure writing logically and effectively.

Revision is Writing

My writing students are usually relieved to hear that published authors often find writing just as fraught as they do. Like first-year college students, people paid to write—the journalists and the novelists and the technical writers—more often than not despair at the difference between what's in their heads and hearts and what ends up on the page the first time around. The professionals are just a little better at waiting things out, pushing through what Anne Lamott calls "shitty first drafts" and all the ones that follow, the revision of a tenth and a thirteenth and a twenty-third draft. I show a YouTube video by Tim Weninger, a computer scientist and engineer at the University of Notre Dame. In the video, Weninger stitches together his revisions of a research paper. In my class, we play a game, guessing how many revisions Weninger did. The answer—463!—almost always surprises them. It still sometimes

surprises me. And sure, some of those revisions are small, fiddly changes. But most of the time, even watching this quickly on classroom monitors, my students notice Weninger aims for the jugular in his writing. He's after wholesale overhaul of his argument and of his larger work.

However, talking about revision in terms of numbers of drafts implies that all writing, all writers, and all revision work one way: hit your target draft number, like your daily Fitbit goals, and you magically get good writing. But more revision isn't necessarily better. Effective revising isn't making changes for the sake of change, but instead making smarter changes. And professional writers—practiced writers—have this awareness even if they aren't aware of it. In Stephen King's memoir *On Writing*, he calls this instinct the *ideal reader*: an imagined person a writer knows and trusts but rewrites in response to, a kind of collaborative dance between writer and reader. To writers, the act of *writing* is an act of *thinking*. One writer in a landmark study of comparing the habits of experienced writers to those of novices called their first drafts "the kernel." If you're someone like me who is constantly struggling to demystify this complex cognitive thing we humans do, that metaphor of writing as a seed is revelatory. Revision is not a sign of weakness or inexperienced or poor writing. *It is the writing.* The more writers push through chaos to get to the good stuff, the more they revise. The more writers revise, whether that be the keystrokes they sweat in front of a blinking, demanding cursor or the unofficial revising they do in our heads when they're showering or driving or running, the more the ideal reader becomes a part of their craft and muscle memory, of *who they are* as writers, so at some point they may not know where the writing stops and the revision begins.

Because writing and revision are impossible to untangle, revision is just as situational and interpretive as writing. In other words, writers interact with readers—writing and revision are social, responsive, and communal. Take Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. King gave a rough draft of the most famous

American speech of the 20th century to 1,800 people crammed into a gymnasium in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, in November of 1962. Seven months later, King gave another revision of the speech to a gathering of political and spiritual leaders, musicians, and activists in Detroit. In August of 1963, in front of the Lincoln Memorial, King riffed and reworked and rebuilt what he preached in Rocky Mount and Detroit, ad-libbing, deleting, and flipping lines. "I Have a Dream" is what Americans remember today, engraved in our collective memories, archives, and textbooks as symbols of an entire era, but King's famous refrain singing his vision for a less racially divided country was not even part of his speech's official text that day. Was King writing a new speech? Was he done with the Rocky Mount or Detroit one? "I Have a Dream" was not one speech, but many, written and re-written. King was not content to let his words sit, but like any practiced writer working out his muscles, he revised and riffed, adapting it for new audiences and purposes.

Revision: Alive and Kicking

All this revision talk could lead to the counterargument that revision is a death spiral, a way of shoving off the potential critique of a finished draft forever. Tinkering is something we think of as quaint, but not very efficient. Writers can always make the excuse that something is a work-in-progress, that they just don't have time for all this revision today. But this critique echoes the point that writing is social and responsive to its readers. Writing is almost always meant to be read and responded to, not hoarded away. A recent large-scale study by Paul Anderson, Chris Anson, and other writing researchers supports the idea that specific interventions in the writing process matter more in learning to write rather than how *much* students are writing. Among these useful interventions are participation in a lively revision culture and an interactive and social writing process such as talking over drafts—soliciting

feedback from instructors and classmates. Extending the modern definition of writing more broadly to composing in any medium, revision is as bound to writing as breathing is to living. If anything, humans are doing more writing and revision today. Sure, there are people who call themselves writers and mean that it is part of their formal job title. But then there are the greater numbers of us who are writers but don't label ourselves as such, the millions of us just noodling around on Facebook or Snapchat or Instagram. Facebook and Instagram have an edit feature on posts. Google Docs includes a revision history tool. When we send a text and our buzzy little e-devices kick in with Autocorrect, changing Linkin Park to Kinky Park, we compensate with frantic asterisks. We edit our comments or return to clarify them; we cannot resist. Revision as writing is an idea that we should not abandon or trash. And it may not even be possible to.

Further Reading

For more about the relationships between revision, writing experience, and writing processes, see Alice Horning and Anne Becker's *Revision: History, Theory, and Practice* (Parlor Press) and Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle's *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies* (Utah State University Press), specifically Doug Downs's chapter, "Revision is Central to Developing Writing."

Just a handful of many important studies that have helped writing scholars better understand what's going on when writers revise are Nancy Sommers's "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Writers," Lester Faigley and Stephen Witte's "Analyzing Revision," Mina Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing* (Oxford University Press); and Paul Anderson, Chris Anson, Charles Paine, and Robert M. Gonyea's

"The Contributions of Writing to Learning and Development: Results From a Large-Scale Multi-Institutional Study."

For more on how to frame revision and feedback for student writers, see Donald Murray's *A Writer Teaches Writing* (Wadsworth), Nancy Sommers's *Responding to Student Writers* (Macmillan Learning), and the video "Across the Drafts: Students and Teachers Talk About Feedback." Watch Tim Weninger's YouTube video, "Timelapse Writing of a Research Paper." Read more on Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech and its origins through the research of Jason Miller.

Keywords

ideal reader, revision strategies, revision, writing about writing, writing as process

Author Bio

Laura Giovanelli is an assistant teaching professor of writing at Wake Forest University. Before she earned her MFA in fiction writing from North Carolina State University, she spent nine years as a journalist writing for daily newspapers. Her personal essays, including one on pushing through writer's block and writing as a writing teacher, have appeared in *The Washington Post.* According to her

Google Doc revision history, she revised this article 19 times. You can follow her on Twitter @lauragiovanelli.

PRIMARY RESEARCH AND ETHICAL RESEARCH PROCESSES

Section Overview

Central to anyone's writing life is generating and filtering knowledge. However, just because we do this every day doesn't make it easy. In fact, one of the primary challenges of effective writing is ensuring that whatever argument we're building or reading is based on effective evidence. That's why a concerted focus on primary research methods and ethical research processes are central to extending the rhetorical understanding of composing you're developing. We're certain that you have many experiences with primary research, although you may not have recognized them as such. The chapters in this section invite you to think about how you access information and develop data for your arguments.

   The first few articles provide an overview of research methods, ethical practices, and making sense of data. These articles come from two peer-reviewed, open access textbooks, *Writing Spaces* and *Try This: Research Methods For Writers*. In fact, two of the chapters are excerpts from *Try This* chapters. If you'd like to read the text in its entirety, it's fully available online. Check out these overviews:

- "Introduction to Primary Research: Observations, Surveys, and Interviews" by Dana Lynn Driscoll (from *Writing Spaces*)
- "Using Research Methods Effectively" by Jennifer Clary-Lemon, Kate Pantelides, and Derek Mueller (from *Try This*, pp. 18-19)
- "Ethics and Primary Research" by Jennifer Clary-Lemon, Kate

Pantelides, and Derek Mueller (from *Try This*, pp. 32-37)

> JUST AS WORKING WITH ARCHIVES REQUIRES THAT WE BUILD CAREFUL STORIES OF THOSE WHO LIVED IN THE PAST, CHOOSING TO DO RESEARCH BY WORKING WITH PEOPLE IN THE PRESENT REQUIRES A GREAT DEGREE OF CARE.
>
> JENNIFER CLARY-LEMON; DEREK MUELLER; AND KATE PANTELIDES

Once you feel confident, or at least excited, about conducting primary research, the last three chapters offer specific primary research methods attuned to different types of data and how to make sense of that data. Remember, research is often a messy process, and your work will be gathering data, making sense of it, and organizing your findings for your audience. Like writing, research is a recursive process. Consider research methods for working with people, places, and things:

- "Working with People" by Jennifer Clary-Lemon, Kate Pantelides, and Derek Mueller (from *Try This*, pp. 89-107)
- "Working with Places and Things" by Jennifer Clary-Lemon, Kate Pantelides, and Derek Mueller (from *Try This*, pp. 109-124)

17. Introduction to Primary Research: Observations, Surveys, and Interviews

DANA LYNN DRISCOLL

Abstract

Dana Driscoll's essay "Introduction to Primary Research: Observations, Surveys, and Interviews" comes from the book *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writings, Volume 2*. Projects where students are asked to gather first-hand data are a common occurrence in **first-year composition** (FYC). However, FYC students may struggle with the ethical and practical issues of collecting, analyzing, and writing about survey results, interviews, and observations. This chapter introduces definitions of research from an interdisciplinary perspective, examines ethical considerations, and compares the research process to the writing process. The chapter concludes with information about writing from primary research, including integrating research and creating visuals. Two student examples – a nutrition observation/survey project and an agricultural and biological engineering interview project – are provided to give students concrete examples.

This reading is available below and as a PDF.

Primary Research: Definitions and Overview

How research is defined varies widely from field to field, and as you progress through your college career, your coursework will teach you much more about what it means to be a researcher within your field. For example, engineers, who focus on applying scientific knowledge to develop designs, processes, and objects, conduct research using simulations, mathematical models, and a variety of tests to see how well their designs work. Sociologists conduct research using surveys, interviews, observations, and statistical analysis to better understand people, societies, and cultures. Graphic designers conduct research through locating images for reference for their artwork and engaging in background research on clients and companies to best serve their needs. Historians conduct research by examining archival materials—newspapers, journals, letters, and other surviving texts—and through conducting oral history interviews. Research is not limited to what has already been written or found at the library, also known as secondary research. Rather, individuals conducting research are *producing* the articles and reports found in a library database or in a book. Primary research, the focus of this essay, is research that is collected firsthand rather than found in a book, database, or journal.

Primary research is often based on principles of the scientific method, a theory of investigation first developed by John Stuart Mill in the nineteenth century in his book *Philosophy of the Scientific Method.* Although the application of the scientific method varies from field to field, the general principles of the scientific method allow researchers to learn more about the world and observable phenomena. Using the scientific method, researchers develop research questions or hypotheses and collect data on events, objects, or people that is measurable, observable, and replicable. The ultimate goal in conducting primary research is to learn about something new that can be confirmed by others and to eliminate our own biases in the process.

Essay Overview and Student Examples

The essay begins by providing an overview of ethical considerations when conducting primary research, and then covers the stages that you will go through in your primary research: planning, collecting, analyzing, and writing. After the four stages comes an introduction to three common ways of conducting primary research in first year writing classes:

- *Observations.* Observing and measuring the world around you, including observations of people and other measurable events.
- *Interviews.* Asking participants questions in a one-on-one or small group setting.
- *Surveys.* Asking participants about their opinions and behaviors through a short questionnaire.

In addition, we will be examining two student projects that used substantial portions of primary research:

Derek Laan, a nutrition major at Purdue University, wanted to learn more about student eating habits on campus. His primary research included observations of the campus food courts, student behavior while in the food courts, and a survey of students' daily food intake. His secondary research included looking at national student eating trends on college campuses, information from the United States Food and Drug Administration, and books on healthy eating.

Jared Schwab, an agricultural and biological engineering major at Purdue, was interested in learning more about how writing and communication took place in his field. His primary research included interviewing a professional engineer and a student who was a senior majoring in engineering. His secondary research included examining journals, books, professional organizations, and writing guides within the field of engineering.

Ethics of Primary Research

Both projects listed above included primary research on human participants; therefore, Derek and Jared both had to consider research ethics throughout their primary research process. As Earl Babbie writes in *The Practice of Social Research*, throughout the early and middle parts of the twentieth century researchers took advantage of participants and treated them unethically. During World War II, Nazi doctors performed heinous experiments on prisoners without their consent, while in the U.S., a number of medical and psychological experiments on caused patients undue mental and physical trauma and, in some cases, death. Because of these and other similar events, many nations have established ethical laws and guidelines for researchers who work with human participants. In the United States, the guidelines for the ethical treatment of human research participants are described in *The Belmont Report*, released in 1979. Today, universities have Institutional Review Boards (or IRBs) that oversee research. Students conducting research as part of a class may not need permission from the university's IRB, although they still need to ensure that they follow ethical guidelines in research. The following provides a brief overview of ethical considerations:

- *Voluntary participation.* *The Belmont Report* suggests that, in most cases, you need to get permission from people before you involve them in any primary research you are conducting. If you are doing a survey or interview, your participants must first agree to fill out your survey or to be interviewed. Consent for observations can be more complicated, and is discussed later in the essay.
- *Confidentiality and anonymity.* Your participants may reveal embarrassing or potentially damaging information such as racist comments or unconventional behavior. In these cases, you should keep your participants' identities anonymous when

writing your results. An easy way to do this is to create a "pseudonym" (or false name) for them so that their identity is protected.

- *Researcher bias.* There is little point in collecting data and learning about something if you already think you know the answer! Bias might be present in the way you ask questions, the way you take notes, or the conclusions you draw from the data you collect.

The above are only three of many considerations when involving human participants in your primary research. For a complete understanding of ethical considerations please refer to *The Belmont Report*.

Now that we have considered the ethical implications of research, we will examine how to formulate research questions and plan your primary research project.

Planning Your Primary Research Project

The primary research process is quite similar to the writing process, and you can draw upon your knowledge of the writing process to understand the steps involved in a primary research project. Just like in the writing process, a successful primary research project begins with careful planning and background research. This section first describes how to create a research timeline to help plan your research. It then walks you through the planning stages by examining when primary research is useful or appropriate for your first year composition course, narrowing down a topic, and developing research questions.

The Research Timeline

When you begin to conduct any kind of primary research, creating a timeline will help keep you on task. Because students conducting primary research usually focus on the collection of data itself, they often overlook the equally important areas of planning (invention), analyzing data, and writing. To help manage your time, you should create a research timeline, such as the sample timeline presented here.
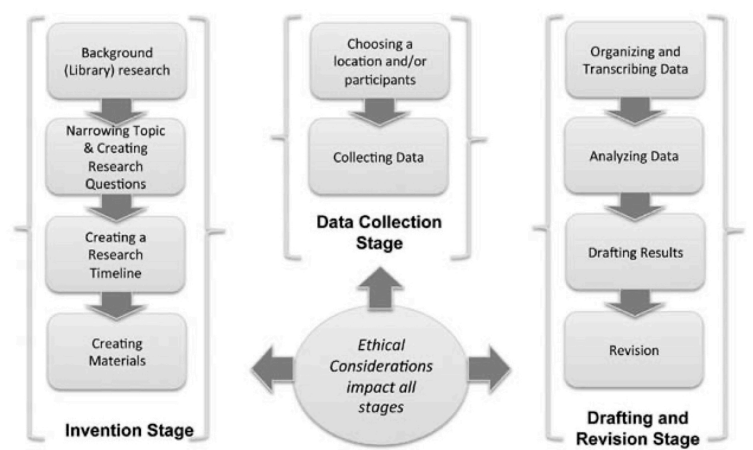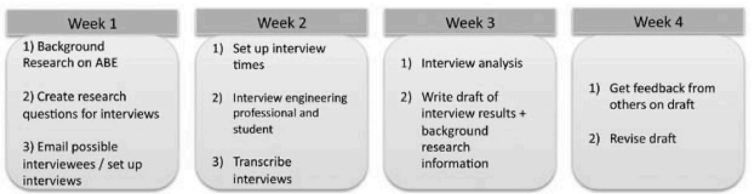

Fig. 1: *The Research Process*

Fig. 2: A sample timeline of Jared's research project.

When Primary Research Is Useful or Appropriate

In *Evaluating Scientific Research: Separating Fact from Fiction*, Fred Leavitt explains that primary research is useful for questions that can be answered through asking others and direct observation. For first year writing courses, primary research is particularly useful when you want to learn about a problem that does not have a wealth of published information. This may be because the problem is a recent event or it is something not commonly studied. For example, if you are writing a paper on a new political issue, such as changes in tax laws or healthcare, you might not be able to find a wealth of peer-reviewed research because the issue is only several weeks old. You may find it necessary to collect some of your own data on the issue to supplement what you found at the library. Primary research is also useful when you are studying a local problem or learning how a larger issue plays out at the local level. Although you might be able to find information on national statistics for healthy eating, whether or not those statistics are representative of your college campus is something that you can learn through primary research.

However, not all research questions and topics are appropriate for primary research. As Fred Leavitt writes, questions of an ethical, philosophical, or metaphysical nature are not appropriate because these questions are not testable or observable. For example, the question "Does an afterlife exist?" is not a question that can be answered with primary research. However, the question "How many people in my community believe in an afterlife?" is something that primary research can answer.

Narrowing Your Topic

Just like the writing process, you should start your primary research process with secondary (library) research to learn more about what

is already known and what gaps you need to fill with your own data. As you learn more about the topic, you can narrow down your interest area and eventually develop a research question or hypothesis, just as you would with a secondary research paper.

Developing Research Questions or Hypotheses

As John Stuart Mill describes, primary research can use both *inductive* and *deductive* approaches, and the type approach is usually based on the field of inquiry. Some fields use *deductive reasoning*, where researchers start with a hypothesis or general conclusion and then collect specific data to support or refute their hypothesis. Other fields use *inductive reasoning*, where researchers start with a question and collect information that eventually leads to a conclusion.

   Once you have spent some time reviewing the secondary research on your topic, you are ready to write a primary research question or hypothesis. A research question or hypothesis should be something that is specific, narrow, and discoverable through primary research methods. Just like a thesis statement for a paper, if your research question or hypothesis is too broad, your research will be unfocused and your data will be difficult to analyze and write about. Here is a set of sample research questions:

> *Poor Research Question*: What do college students think of politics and the economy?
> *Revised Research Question*: What do students at Purdue University believe about the current economic crisis in terms of economic recoverability?

   The poor research question is unspecific as to what group of students the researcher is interested in—i.e. students in the U.S.? In a particular state? At their university? The poor research question was also too broad; terms like "politics" and the "economy" cover

too much ground for a single project. The revised question narrows down the topic to students at a particular university and focuses on a specific issue related to the economy: economic recoverability. The research question could also be rephrased as a testable hypothesis using deductive reasoning: "Purdue University college students are well informed about economic recoverability plans." Because they were approaching their projects in an exploratory, inductive manner, both Derek and Jared chose to ask research questions:

> Derek: Are students' eating habits at Purdue University healthy or unhealthy? What are the causes of students' eating behavior?

> Jared: What are the major features of writing and communication in agricultural and biological engineering? What are the major controversies?

A final step in working with a research question or hypothesis is determining what key terms you are using and how you will define them. Before conducting his research, Derek had to define the terms "healthy" and "unhealthy"; for this, he used the USDA's Food Pyramid as a guide. Similarly, part of what Jared focused on in his interviews was learning more about how agricultural and biological engineers defined terms like "writing" and "communication." Derek and Jared thought carefully about the terms within their research questions and how these terms might be measured.

Choosing a Data Collection Method

Once you have formulated a research question or hypothesis, you will need to make decisions about what kind of data you can collect that will best address your research topic. Derek chose to examine eating habits by observing both what students ate at lunch and surveying students about eating behavior. Jared decided that in-

depth interviews with experienced individuals in his field would provide him with the best information.

To choose a data collection method for your research question, read through the next sections on observations, interviews, and surveys.

Observations

Observations have lead to some of the most important scientific discoveries in human history. Charles Darwin used observations of the animal and marine life at the Galapagos Islands to help him formulate his theory of evolution that he describes in *On the Origin of Species*. Today, social scientists, natural scientists, engineers, computer scien- tists, educational researchers, and many others use observations as a primary research method.

Observations can be conducted on nearly any subject matter, and the kinds of observations you will do depend on your research question. You might observe traffic or parking patterns on campus to get a sense of what improvements could be made. You might observe clouds, plants, or other natural phenomena. If you choose to observe people, you will have several additional considerations including the manner in which you will observe them and gain their consent.

If you are observing people, you can choose between two common ways to observe: participant observation and unobtrusive observation. Participant observation is a common method within ethnographic research in sociology and anthropology. In this kind of observation, a researcher may interact with participants and become part of their community. Margaret Mead, a famous anthropologist, spent extended periods of time living in, and interacting with, communities that she studied. Conversely, in unobtrusive observation, you do not interact with participants but

rather simply record their behavior. Although in most circumstances people must volunteer to be participants in research, in some cases it is acceptable to not let participants know you are observing them. In places that people perceive as public, such as a campus food court or a shopping mall, people do not expect privacy, and so it is generally acceptable to observe without participant consent. In places that people perceive as private, which can include a church, home, classroom, or even an intimate conversation at a restaurant, participant consent should be sought.

The second issue about participant consent in terms of unobtrusive observation is whether or not getting consent is feasible for the study. If you are observing people in a busy airport, bus station, or campus food court, getting participant consent may be next to impossible. In Derek's study of student eating habits on campus, he went to the campus food courts during meal times and observed students purchasing food. Obtaining participant consent for his observations would have been next to impossible because hundreds of students were coming through the food court during meal times. Since Derek's research was in a place that participants would perceive as public, it was not practical to get their consent, and since his data was anonymous, he did not violate their privacy.

Eliminating Bias in Your Observation Notes

The ethical concern of being unbiased is important in recording your observations. You need to be aware of the difference between an observation (recording exactly what you see) and an interpretation (making assumptions and judgments about what you see). When you observe, you should focus first on only the events that are directly observable. Consider the following two example entries in an observation log:

1. The student sitting in the dining hall enjoys his greasy, oil-

soaked pizza. He is clearly oblivious of the calorie content and damage it may do to his body.

2. The student sits in the dining hall. As he eats his piece of pizza, which drips oil, he says to a friend, "This pizza is good."

The first entry is biased and demonstrates judgment about the event. First, the observer makes assumptions about the internal state of the student when she writes "enjoys" and "clearly oblivious to the calorie content." From an observer's standpoint, there is no way of ascertaining what the student may or may not know about pizza's nutritional value nor how much the student enjoys the pizza. The second entry provides only the details and facts that are observable.

To avoid bias in your observations, you can use something called a "double-entry notebook." This is a type of observation log that encourages you to separate your observations (the facts) from your feelings and judgments about the facts.

Observations	Thoughts
The student sits in the dining hall. As he eats his piece of pizza, which drips oil, he says to a friend, "This pizza is good."	It seems like the student really enjoys the high-calorie content pizza.
I observed cash register #1 for 15 minutes. During that time 22 students paid for meals. Of those 22 students, 15 grabbed a candy bar or granola bar. 3 of the 22 students had a piece of fruit on their plate.	Fruit is less accessible than candy bars (it is further back in the dining court). Is this why more students are reaching for candy bars?

Fig. 3: *Two sample entries from a double-entry notebook*

Observations are only one strategy in collecting primary research. You may also want to ask people directly about their behaviors, beliefs, or attitudes—and for this you will need to use surveys or interviews.

Surveys and Interviews: Question Creation

Sometimes it is very difficult for a researcher to gain all of the necessary information through observations alone. Along with his observations of the dining halls, Derek wanted to know what students ate in a typical day, and so he used a survey to have them keep track of their eating habits. Likewise, Jared wanted to learn about writing and com- munication in engineering and decided to draw upon expert knowledge by asking experienced individuals within the field.

Interviews and surveys are two ways that you can gather information about people's beliefs or behaviors. With these methods, the in- formation you collect is not first-hand (like an observation) but rather "self-reported" data, or data collected in an indirect manner. William Shadish, Thomas Cook, and Donald Campbell argued that people are inherently biased about how they see the world and may report their own actions in a more favorable way than they may actually behave. Despite the issues in self-reported data, surveys and interviews are an excellent way to gather data for your primary research project.

Survey or Interview?

How do you choose between conducting a survey or an interview? It depends on what kind of information you are looking for. You should use surveys if you want to learn about a general trend in people's opinions, experiences, and behavior. Surveys are particularly useful to find small amounts of information from a wider selection of people in the hopes of making a general claim. Interviews are best used when you want to learn detailed information from a few specific people. Interviews are also particularly useful if you want to interview experts about their opinions, as Jared did. In sum, use

interviews to gain details from a few people, and surveys to learn general patterns from many people.

Writing Good Questions

One of the greatest challenges in conducting surveys and interviews is writing good questions. As a researcher, you are always trying to eliminate bias, and the questions you ask need to be unbiased and clear. Here are some suggestions on writing good questions:

Ask about One Thing at a Time

A poorly written question can contain multiple questions, which can confuse participants or lead them to answer only part of the question you are asking. This is called a "double-barreled question" in journalism. The following questions are taken from Jared's research:

> Poor question: What kinds of problems are being faced in the field today and where do you see the search for solutions to these problems going?

> Revised question #1 : What kinds of problems are being faced in the field today?

> Revised question #2: Where do you see the search for solu- tions to these problems going?

Avoid Leading Questions

A leading question is one where you prompt the participant to respond in a particular way, which can create bias in the answers given:

Leading question: The economy is clearly in a crisis, wouldn't you agree?

Revised question: Do you believe the economy is currently in a crisis? Why or why not?

Understand When to Use Open and Closed Questions

Closed questions, or questions that have yes/no or other limited responses, should be used in surveys. However, avoid these kinds of questions in interviews because they discourage the interviewee from going into depth. The question sample above, "Do you believe the economy currently is in a crisis?" could be answered with a simple yes or no, which could keep a participant from talking more about the issue. The "why or why not?" portion of the question asks the participant to elaborate. On a survey, the question "Do you believe the economy currently is in a crisis?" is a useful question because you can easily count the number of yes and no answers and make a general claim about participant responses.

Write Clear Questions

When you write questions, make sure they are clear, concise, and to the point. Questions that are too long, use unfamiliar vocabulary, or are unclear may confuse participants and you will not get quality responses.

Now that question creation has been addressed, we will next examine specific considerations for interviews and surveys.

Interviews

Interviews, or question and answer sessions with one or more people, are an excellent way to learn in-depth information from a person for your primary research project. This section presents information on how to conduct a successful interview, including choosing the right person, ways of interviewing, recording your interview, interview locations, and transcribing your interview.

Choosing the Right Person

One of the keys to a successful interview is choosing the right person to interview. Think about whom you would like to interview and whom you might know. Do not be afraid to ask people you do not know for interviews. When asking, simply tell them what the interview will be about, what the interview is for, and how much time it will take. Jared used his Purdue University connection to locate both of the individuals that he ended up interviewing—an advanced Purdue student and a Purdue alum working in an Engineering firm.

Face-to-Face and Virtual Interviews

When interviewing, you have a choice of conducting a traditional, face-to-face interview or an interview using technology over the Internet. Face-to-face interviews have the strength that you can ask follow-up questions and use non-verbal communication to your advantage. Individuals are able to say much more in a face-to-face interview than in an email, so you will get more information from a face-to-face interview. However, the Internet provides a host of new possibilities when it comes to interviewing people at a distance.

You may choose to do an email interview, where you send questions and ask the person to respond. You may also choose to use a video or audio conferencing program to talk with the person virtually. If you are choosing any Internet-based option, make sure you have a way of recording the interview. You may also use a chat or instant messaging program to interview your participant—the benefit of this is that you can ask follow-up questions during the interview and the interview is already transcribed for you. Because one of his interviewees lived several hours away, Jared chose to interview the Purdue student face- to-face and the Purdue alum via email.

Finding a Suitable Location

If you are conducting an in-person interview, it is essential that you find a quiet place for your interview. Many universities have quiet study rooms that can be reserved (often found in the university library). Do not try to interview someone in a coffee shop, dining hall, or other loud area, as it is difficult to focus and get a clear recording.

Recording Interviews

One way of eliminating bias in your research is to record your interviews rather than rely on your memory. Recording interviews allows you to directly quote the individual and re-read the interview when you are writing. It is recommended that you have two recording devices for the interview in case one recording device fails. Most computers, MP3 players, and even cell phones come with recording equipment built in. Many universities also offer equipment that students can check out and use, including

computers and recorders. Before you record any interview, be sure that you have permission from your participant.

Transcribing Your Interview

Once your interview is over, you will need to transcribe your interview to prepare it for analysis. The term transcribing means creating a writ- ten record that is exactly what was said—i.e. typing up your interviews. If you have conducted an email or chat interview, you already have a transcription and can move on to your analysis stage.

Surveys

Other than the fact that they both involve asking people questions, interviews and surveys are quite different data collection methods. Creating a survey may seem easy at first, but developing a quality survey can be quite challenging. When conducting a survey, you need to focus on the following areas: survey creation, survey testing, survey sampling, and distributing your survey.

Survey Creation: Length and Types of Questions

One of the keys to creating a successful survey is to keep your survey short and focused. Participants are unlikely to fill out a survey that is lengthy, and you'll have a more difficult time during your analysis if your survey contains too many questions. In most cases, you want your survey to be something that can be filled out within a few minutes. The target length of the survey also depends

on how you will distribute the survey. If you are giving your survey to other students in your dorm or classes, they will have more time to complete the survey. Therefore, five to ten minutes to complete the survey is reasonable. If you are asking students as they are walking to class to fill out your sur- vey, keep it limited to several questions that can be answered in thirty seconds or less. Derek's survey took about ten minutes and asked students to describe what they ate for a day, along with some demographic information like class level and gender.

Use closed questions to your advantage when creating your survey. A closed question is any set of questions that gives a limited amount of choices (yes/no, a 1–5 scale, choose the statement that best describes you). When creating closed questions, be sure that you are accounting for all reasonable answers in your question creation. For example, ask- ing someone "Do you believe you eat healthy?" and providing them only "yes" and "no" options means that a "neutral" or "undecided" option does not exist, even though the survey respondent may not feel strongly either way. Therefore, on closed questions you may find it helpful to include an "other" category where participants can fill in an answer. It is also a good idea to have a few open-ended questions where participants can elaborate on certain points or earlier responses. However, open-ended questions take much longer to fill out than closed questions.

Survey Creation: Testing Your Survey

To make sure your survey is an appropriate length and that your questions are clear, you can "pilot test" your survey. Prior to administering your survey on a larger scale, ask several classmates or friends to fill it out and give you feedback on the survey. Keep track of how long the survey takes to complete. Ask them if the questions are clear and make sense. Look at their answers to see if

the answers match what you wanted to learn. You can revise your survey questions and the length of your survey as necessary.

Sampling and Access to Survey Populations

"Sampling" is a term used within survey research to describe the subset of people that are included in your study. Derek's first research question was: "Are students' eating habits at Purdue University healthy or unhealthy?" Because it was impossible for Derek to survey all 38,000 students on Purdue's campus, he had to choose a representative sample of students. Derek chose to survey students who lived in the dorms because of the wide variety of student class levels and majors in the dorms and his easy access to this group. By making this choice, however, he did not account for commuter students, graduate students, or those who live off campus. As Derek's case demonstrates, it is very challenging to get a truly representative sample.

Part of the reason that sampling is a challenge is that you may find difficulty in finding enough people to take your survey. In thinking about how get people to take your survey, consider both your everyday surroundings and also technological solutions. Derek had access to many students in the dorms, but he also considered surveying students in his classes in order to reach as many people as possible. Another possibility is to conduct an online survey. Online surveys greatly increase your access to different kinds of people from across the globe, but may decrease your chances of having a high survey response rate. An email or private message survey request is more likely to be ignored due to the impersonal quality and high volume of emails most people receive.

Analyzing and Writing About Primary Research

Once you collect primary research data, you will need to analyze what you have found so that you can write about it. The purpose of analyzing your data is to look at what you collected (survey responses, interview answers to questions, observations) and to create a cohesive, systematic interpretation to help answer your research question or ex- amine the validity of your hypothesis.

When you are analyzing and presenting your findings, remember to work to eliminate bias by being truthful and as accurate as possible about what you found, even if it differs from what you expected to find. You should see your data as sources of information, just like sources you find in the library, and you should work to represent them accurately.

The following are suggestions for analyzing different types of data.

Observations

If you've counted anything you were observing, you can simply add up what you counted and report the results. If you've collected descriptions using a double-entry notebook, you might work to write thick descriptions of what you observed into your writing. This could include descriptions of the scene, behaviors you observed, and your overall conclusions about events. Be sure that your readers are clear on what were your actual observations versus your thoughts or interpretations of those observations.

Interviews

If you've interviewed one or two people, then you can use your

summary, paraphrasing, and quotation skills to help you accurately describe what was said in the interview. Just like in secondary research when working with sources, you should introduce your interviewees and choose clear and relevant quotes from the interviews to use in your writing. An easy way to find the important information in an interview is to print out your transcription and take a highlighter and mark the important parts that you might use in your paper. If you have conducted a large number of interviews, it will be helpful for you to create a spreadsheet of responses to each question and compare the responses, choosing representative answers for each area you want to describe.

Surveys

Surveys can contain quantitative (numerical) and qualitative (written answers/descriptions) data. Quantitative data can be analyzed using a spreadsheet program like Microsoft Excel to calculate the mean (average) answer or to calculate the percentage of people who responded in a certain way. You can display this information in a chart or a graph and also describe it in writing in your paper. If you have qualitative responses, you might choose to group them into categories and/or you may choose to quote several representative responses.

Writing about Primary Research

In formal research writing in a variety of fields, it is common for research to be presented in the following format: introduction/background; methods; results; discussions; conclusion. Not all first year writing classes will require such an organizational structure, although it is likely that you will be required to present many of

these elements in your paper. Because of this, the next section examines each of these in depth.

Introduction (Review of Literature)

The purpose of an introduction and review of literature in a research paper is to provide readers with information that helps them understand the context, purpose, and relevancy of your research. The introduction is where you provide most of your background (library) research that you did earlier in the process. You can include articles, statistics, research studies, and quotes that are pertinent to the issues at hand. A second purpose in an introduction is to establish your own credibility (ethos) as a writer by showing that you have researched your topic thoroughly. This kind of background discussion is required in nearly every field of inquiry when presenting research in oral or writ- ten formats.

Derek provided information from the Food and Drug Administration on healthy eating and national statistics about eating habits as part of his background information. He also made the case for healthy eating on campus to show relevancy:

> Currently Americans are more overweight than ever. This is coming at a huge cost to the economy and government. If current trends in increasing rates of overweight and obesity continue it is likely that this generation will be the first one to live shorter lives than their parents did. Looking at the habits of university students is a good way to see how a new generation behaves when they are living out on their own for the first time.

Describing What You Did (Methods)

When writing, you need to provide enough information to your readers about your primary research process for them to understand what you collected and how you collected it. In formal research papers, this is often called a methods section. Providing information on your study methods also adds to your credibility as a writer. For surveys, your methods would include describing who you surveyed, how many surveys you collected, decisions you made about your survey sample, and relevant demographic information about your participants (age, class level, major). For interviews, introduce whom you interviewed and any other relevant information about interviewees such as their career or expertise area. For observations, list the locations and times you observed and how you recorded your observations (i.e. double-entry notebook). For all data types, you should describe how you analyzed your data.

The following is a sample from Jared about his participants:

> In order to gain a better understanding of the discourse community in environmental and resource engineering, I interviewed Anne Dare, a senior in environmental and natural resource engineering, and Alyson Keaton an alumnus of Purdue University. Alyson is a current employee of the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), which is a division of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Here is a sample from Derek's methods section:

> I conducted a survey so that I could find out what students at Purdue actually eat on a typical day. I handed out surveys asking students to record what they ate for a day . . . I received 29 back and averaged the results based on average number of servings from each food group on the old food guide pyramid. The group included students from the freshman to the graduate level and had 8 women and 21 men respond.

Describing Your Study Findings (Results)

In a formal research paper, the results section is where you describe what you found. The results section can include charts, graphs, lists, direct quotes, and overviews of findings. Readers find it helpful if you are able to provide the information in different formats. For example, if you have any kind of numbers or percentages, you can talk about them in your written description and then present a graph or chart showing them visually. You should provide specific details as supporting evidence to back up your findings. These details can be in the form of direct quotations, numbers, or observations.
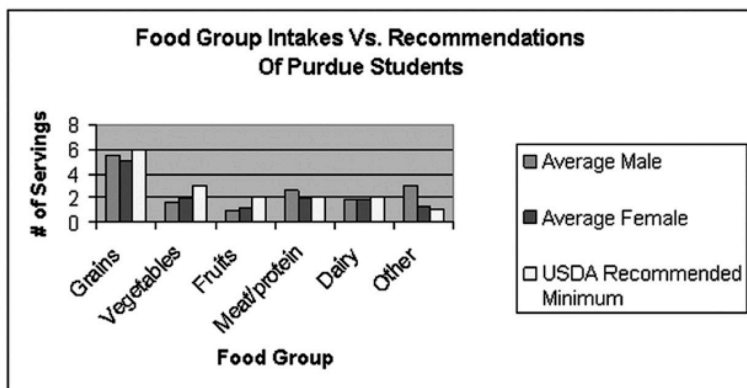
Fig. 4: Graphic from Derek's results section

Jared describes some of his interview results:

> Alyson also mentioned the need for phone conversation. She stated, "The phone is a large part of my job. I am communicating with other NRCS offices daily to find out the status of our jobs." She needs to be in constant contact in order to insure that everything is running smoothly. This is common with those overseeing projects. In these cases, the

wait for a response to an email or a memo can be too long to be effective.

Interpreting What You Learned (Discussion)

In formal research papers, the discussion section presents your own interpretation of your results. This may include what you think the results mean or how they are useful to your larger argument. If you are making a proposal for change or a call to action, this is where you make it. For example, in Derek's project about healthy eating on campus, Derek used his primary research on students' unhealthy eat- ing and observations of the food courts to argue that the campus food courts needed serious changes. Derek writes, "Make healthy food options the most accessible in every dining hall while making unhealthy foods the least. Put nutrition facts for everything that is served in the dining halls near the food so that students can make more informed decisions on what to eat."

Jared used the individuals he interviewed as informants that helped him learn more about writing in agricultural and biological engineering. He integrated the interviews he conducted with secondary research to form a complete picture of writing and communication in agricultural and biological engineering. He concludes:

> Writing takes so many forms, and it is important to know about all these forms in one way or another. The more forms of writing you can achieve, the more flexible you can be. This ability to be flexible can make all the difference in writing when you are dealing with a field as complex as engineering.

Primary Research and Works Cited or References Pages

The last part of presenting your primary research project is a works cited or references page. In general, since you are working with data you collected yourself, there is no source to cite an external source. Your methods section should describe in detail to the readers how and where the data presented was obtained. However, if you are working with interviews, you can cite these as "personal communication." The MLA and APA handbooks both provide clear listings of how to cite personal communication in a works cited/ references page.

Conclusion

This essay has presented an overview to three commonly used methods of primary research in first year writing courses: observations, interviews, and surveys. By using these methods, you can learn more about the world around you and craft meaningful written discussions of your findings.

Discussion

1. Primary research techniques show up in more places than just first year writing courses. Where else might interviews, surveys, or observations be used? Where have you seen them used?
2. The chapter provides a brief discussion of the ethical considerations of research. Can you think of any additional ethical considerations when conducting primary research?

Can you think of ethical considerations unique to your own research project?

3. Primary research is most useful for first year writing students if it is based in your local community or campus. What are some current issues on your campus or in your community that could be investigated using primary research methods?

4. In groups or as a class, make a list of potential primary research topics. After each topic on the list, consider what method of inquiry (observation, interview, or survey) you would use to study the topic and answer why that method is a good choice.

Suggested Resources

For more information on the primary methods of inquiry described here, please see the following sources:

Babbie, Earl. *The Practice of Social Research.* 10th edition. Wadsworth Publishing, 2003. Print.

Creswell, John. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches.* 3rd ed. Sage publications, 2008. Print.

Rubin, Herbert and Irene Rubin. *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data.* 2nd edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2004. Print.

Fink, Arlene. *How to Conduct Surveys: A Step-by-Step Guide.* 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008. Print.

Sanger, Jack. *Compleat Observer? A Field Research Guide to Observation.* New York: Routledge, 1996. Print.

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Shadish, William, Thomas, Cook and Donald Campbell. *Quasi-Experimentation: Design and Analysis Issues.* Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1979. Print.

Darwin, Charles. *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection.* New York: L Hurst and Company, No date. Print.

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Mead, Margaret. *Growing Up in New Guinea: A Comparative Study of Primitive Education.* New York: Morrow, 193. Print.

Mill, John Stuart. *John Stuart Mill's Philosophy of Scientific Method.* Ernest Nagel, Ed. New York: Hafner Publishing Co, 1950. Print.

Rubin, Herbert and Irene Rubin. *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data.* 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2004. Print.

Keywords

primary research, observations, interviews, surveys, research ethics, research questions

Author Bio

Dana Lynn Driscoll, Assistant Professor in Writing and Rhetoric at Oakland University, teaches first year composition and upper division courses in peer tutoring, global rhetoric, research, and literacy and technology. Her research interests include research methods, transfer of learning, and metacognitive aspects of learning to write.

18. Using Research Methods Effectively

JENNIFER CLARY-LEMON; DEREK MUELLER; AND KATE PANTELIDES

Abstract

This text is an excerpt from chapter 1 "What Are Research Methods?" from *Try This: Research Methods For Writers.* by Jennifer Clary-Lemon, Derek Mueller, and Kate Pantelides.

This reading is available below and as a PDF.

The decisions you make in developing an effective research question, matching it to an appropriate research method, and then responsibly analyzing the implications of your findings (research design), are especially important because research is subjective. Subjectivity is often seen as negative and is frequently leveled as a reason to mistrust a decision or judgment, as in, "You're just being subjective." But: all research is subjective, all research is communication. Of course, not all scholars and fields believe this, but let us try to convince you, because it is important. This belief is central to conducting ethical research.

There is no pure objectivity when it comes to research. Research is conducted by people, all of whom have different

ideas about effective research, but researchers abide by a code of ethics that holds them to standards that help them maintain safety and develop meaningful research. Even quantitative research, even computer algorithms that identify trends—all of the methods associated with developing this data are engineered by people and are, thus, subjective. And this is a good thing!

Instead of striving for objective research (an impossibility), we strive for ethical research. Ethical research takes into account the fact that people perform research and that their research designs are impacted by their own subjectivities: the thoughts, beliefs, and values that make us human. As researchers, it is essential to be reflective on our subjectivities, mitigate subjectivities that might make us conduct research unfairly, and adhere to high ethical standards for research.

Keywords

ethical research, methodology, subjectivity

Author Bios

Jennifer Clary-Lemon is Associate Professor of English at

the University of Waterloo. She is the author of *Planting the Anthropocene: Rhetorics of Natureculture*, *Cross Border Networks in Writing Studies* (with Mueller, Williams, and Phelps), and co-editor of *Decolonial Conversations in Posthuman and New Material Rhetorics* (with Grant) and *Relations, Locations, Positions: Composition Theory for Writing Teachers* (with Vandenberg and Hum). Her research interests include rhetorics of the environment, theories of affect, writing and location, material rhetorics, critical discourse studies, and research methodologies. Her work has been published in *Rhetoric Review*, *Discourse and Society*, *The American Review of Canadian Studies*, *Composition Forum*, *Oral History Forum d'histoire orale*, *enculturation*, and *College Composition and Communication*.

Derek N. Mueller is Professor of Rhetoric and Writing and Director of the University Writing Program at Virginia Tech. His teaching and research attends to the interplay among writing, rhetorics, and technologies. Mueller regularly teaches courses in visual rhetorics, writing pedagogy, first-year writing, and digital media. He continues to be motivated professionally and intellectually by questions concerning digital writing platforms, networked writing practices, theories of composing, and discipliniographies or field narratives related to writing studies/rhetoric and composition. Along with Andrea Williams, Louise Wetherbee Phelps, and Jen Clary-Lemon, he is co-author of *Cross-Border Networks in Writing Studies* (Inkshed/Parlor, 2017). His 2018 monograph, *Network Sense: Methods for Visualizing a Discipline* (in the WAC Clearinghouse #writing series) argues for thin and distant approaches to discerning disciplinary patterns. His other

work has been published in *College Composition and Communication*, *Kairos*, *Enculturation*, *Present Tense*, *Computers and Composition*, *Composition Forum*, and JAC.

Kate Lisbeth Pantelides is Associate Professor of English and Director of General Education English at Middle Tennessee State University. Kate's research examines workplace documents to better understand how to improve written and professional processes, particularly as they relate to equity and inclusion. In the context of teaching, Kate applies this approach to iterative methods of teaching writing to students and teachers, which informs her recent co-authored project, *A Theory of Public Higher Education* (with Blum, Fernandez, Imad, Korstange, and Laird). Her work has been recognized in *The Best of Independent Rhetoric and Composition Journals* and circulates in venues such as *College Composition and Communication*, *Composition Studies*, *Computers and Composition*, *Inside Higher Ed*, *Journal of Technical and Professional Writing*, and *Review of Communication*.

19. Working With People

JENNIFER CLARY-LEMON; DEREK MUELLER; AND KATE PANTELIDES

Abstract

In this chapter from *Try This*, the authors encourage writers to consider the unique perspective of people as primary sources, and detail strategies like interviews, surveys, case-studies and questionnaires to collect data about people. They outline methods for collecting primary research, and offer suggestions for the best practices of working closely with human subjects. The chapter also includes instructions for putting together a research memo of collected information.

This reading is available below and as a PDF.

New to town, you notice a lot of activity at a skate park near where you live. You walk nearby a time or two, noticing the activities, which involve small groups of teenagers, some of whom talk with one another and others of whom appear far more interested in attempting skateboarding feats while friends and accomplices video record.

At a local coffee shop where you frequently go to study, you begin to notice a pattern in the ways twenty-somethings sit at tables by themselves and divide their time

between paying attention to their phones and paying attention to their computer screens.

You've started a new job at a local restaurant where the managers, kitchen team, and front of the house staff gather for weekly meetings. By the fourth meeting, you notice the same people talk, some of them saying the same things almost verbatim each week.

In each of these scenarios, you begin to wonder why and how people do what they do in these contexts. Questions begin to form. In this chapter, you will learn more about how researchers work with people and how they might approach such contexts.

Just as working with archives requires that we build careful stories of those who lived in the past, choosing to do research by working with people in the present requires a great degree of care. In Chapter 2, we suggested that ethical research with people begins with following your university's practices for working with human subjects. In this chapter, we discuss different research methods that can be helpful once you've determined that your research question is best answered through writing with, talking to, or observing people. As we discussed in Chapter 3, there's a lot of information already out there in secondary forms of research—literature that has already been read and reviewed, surveys that have already been conducted, sources that have already included ethnographic research in their design so that you don't have to. **Ethnography** (from the Greek *ethno-*, meaning "people" and *–grapho*, meaning "to write") is a common research methodology, a way of thinking and doing that includes many kinds of methods put together as data in the humanities and social sciences. It uses a variety of research practices that work with people in order to come to some kind of conclusion about a societal or cultural phenomenon. In order to study societies, of course, you have to work with people, which is why ethnographers use a variety of methods in their research that we cover here, like **interviews** and **surveys**, as well as some of

the methods that we've talked about in earlier chapters, like coding schemes.

While you may or may not be ready to become an ethnographer, it helps to think about your research question a bit in order to determine if it might be best answered by working with people rather than in some other way.* When we conduct research about writing in particular, our first impulse may be to talk to those who are already engaged in the practice we are interested in: those who write! However, it's important to remember before we decide to work with people that many researchers who study writing have already produced a lot of knowledge on that subject by working with human subjects, whether by using focus groups to figure out if what students learn in university writing classes transfers to other classes (Bergman and Zepernick), interviewing students to see if there is a link between reading and identity (Glenn and Ginsberg), or surveying students to see how they really feel about buying a plagiarized essay online (Ritter). Lots of excellent people-based research has already been done about a variety of research topics. It's important to do some preliminary reading (this is where your worknets come in!) to figure out if you should go through the careful process of working with people or if your research question can be answered by another means. It's also important to know when the benefits of working with people outweigh any potential drawbacks. Some questions you can ask yourself as you decide if you want to work with people in research that might span a semester are:

Should I work with people?* Likely YES if	Should I work with people? Likely NO if
• I want to replicate a prior study with people on a smaller scale to see if it is still true; • I want to build on prior studies by working with people; • I have insider insight into a particular group; • I want to help preserve someone's story or memory; • there is information about people's behaviors, feelings, sensations, knowledge, background, or values about my topic that I don't know and cannot find out any other way; • my ethics review and research can be completed in the time I have allotted for this work; • I want to gather pilot information on a topic rather than generate definite conclusions; or • working with people might help prove or disprove a theory.	• the research question has already been answered by many other studies and does not need replication; • I already know what I think people will answer; • I don't know anyone from the population of people who would be knowledgeable about my research question; • I won't have the time to transcribe or code a lot of data; • I have definite opinions about how people should behave or respond while I work with them; • my work will be with vulnerable people—for example, under the age of 18—or about sensitive content; • my work will put people in physical or emotional discomfort; or • I have some kind of power over the people I might work with.

The decision about whether or not to work with people should be made with care. If possible, ask other researching writers why they decided to work with people (or not).

Once you've decided that you want to work with people in order to gather data to try to answer your research question, it's important to think about the kind of method you want to use. We'll be talking about **surveys**, **interviews**, and **case-study** approaches to research design in this chapter, and each method has its own distinct advantages and disadvantages (often related to how much time a researcher has to work with large amounts of data). We like to think of these as differences in the **proximity**—closeness—of a researcher to her research question and how it might be best answered. A **survey** is an eagle-eye, overhead view of a group of people that

gathers big-picture and multilayered information, often about a breadth of knowledge, behaviors, and opinions. **Interviews** allow for a much closer, intimate, in-depth view of one or more of those same things. A **case-study** approach might balance between near and far, using some up-close interview data or site-based observations to support parts of an argument, and using the benefit of the breadth of survey data to support other parts. As you begin to think about which method is right for you, start thinking about whether your question implies a research strategy that would be better as a snapshot from above (How stressed out does writing a paper make university students?) or as an in-depth look into particular processes (How stressed out did writing a paper make a particular student over a particular period time?).

Try This Together: People-Focused Research (20 minutes)

Working with a partner, generate a list of three to five research focuses where people seem important to some activity, but you aren't aware of any studies related to this group, or you think the people may be difficult to gain access to. Why do you think this group hasn't been studied before? What are some of the reasons access may be challenging? What ideas do you have for ways to gain access to this person or group?

Surveys

One of the ways we collect data about numbers of people that are too large to interview—depending on your time frame for data collection, this might be 20 people or it might be in the thousands—is a survey. A survey is a series of carefully-designed questions, sometimes called a **questionnaire**. In the context of a

research project, surveys are put together with the intention of gathering information that will answer a bigger research question. Whether working with smaller or larger populations of people, surveys can help you determine both countable, or quantitative, information about your respondents (how many people answered yes or no on a question, for example) and descriptive information, or qualitative data, about their opinions, habits, and beliefs—what we might call **variables**.* In the following examples, we discuss how a researcher might go about research design and considerations when working with small and large groups as well as with one or more variables. However, when it comes to survey question design and survey implementation (getting your surveys out to intended respondents), there are resources that you can access that will help no matter how large or small a population you study.

*The word "variables" is also used to describe quantitative data. Much like qualitative variables, variables in those cases are items that you can measure, such as time, height, density, distance, strength, and weight. Such variables are usually those that come with measurement markers—pounds, inches, centimeters, microns, moles.

Example 1: You get your most recent paper back from your instructor, and on it you've received a B+. All in all, you're pretty happy, since you've always gotten Bs on high school writing assignments. You get into a conversation after class with someone next to you who is very upset that he got a B+ on his paper. "I've only ever gotten As on high school English papers," he says. Because of this conversation, you've become curious about how being graded on writing in high school affects people's perception of themselves as "good" writers by the time they are in college or university. A well-designed survey might look at a small relevant population

of people (say, a classroom's worth. Your classroom's worth!) that would help determine both the answer to that research question and even the future pathway of a research project—perhaps after surveying 25 students, you are so interested in some answers that you'd like to follow up more closely by interviewing four or five of them. A research project of this size benefits from **convenience sampling***—finding survey participants by who you know.

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*What are some ethical implications of convenience sampling?

Once you know who you are going to survey, you might think about the kinds of information that would be helpful to know about the two variables you're interested in: people's feelings about themselves as writers and their feelings about grades. You might survey respondents with **open-ended questions**, which allow students to write (or say) their responses in short statements or sentences, or with **closed-ended questions**, in which students would choose among a finite set of answer choices (like "yes" or "no"). Open-ended questions better allow you to report descriptive data, while closed-ended questions allow you to get a quick snapshot of a large number of responses. Question design depends on the kind of information you need: if you need to determine what you mean by a "good" writer, you'll need to be able to define it—or determine if that's something you'll want your survey respondents to define for you. You may want to know about what kinds of grades or comments students received on high school papers and what kinds of grades or comments they've received on college or university papers. These kinds of information are well-suited to open-ended questions. However, you might also want to know how happy students are with particular grades. In order to get that information, it might be best to ask students closed-ended questions, assessing people's feelings about writing on an **ordinal**

scale—an ordered set of numbers that correspond to a variable, like how happy or unhappy a student is with a particular grade on a paper. The people you're surveying should be able to distinguish between the kinds of modifiers you use to describe that variable.

For example:

I just got a B back on my last paper. On a scale of 1-5, I am

1. Extremely happy
2. Very happy
3. Somewhat happy
4. Not so happy
5. Not at all happy

Most people can figure out that in the order of things, "extremely" is higher than "very," and "not at all" is lower than "not so." The easy part about this kind of survey is that you can distribute and collect the survey in class. After you collect your survey data, you can begin to put together a picture of how the small sample group you're working with feels about the relationship between high school and college or university paper grades and how the group members feel about their writing performance. However, it would be important to compare what you find out with other studies that have been done about your topic in order to synthesize as much available data as you can in order to draw conclusions from it.

Example 2: Let's say you've been thinking a lot about a conversation you've had with your father recently. In it, he talked a lot about unpredictable weather and how it's been affecting his gardens. When you brought up the idea of global warming, he got a bit flustered and insisted that it was just a matter of weather variability. Since then, you've been thinking a lot about whether the kind of words people use to discuss climate change impacts whether or not they believe in it as a proven scientific phenomenon. After doing a bit of reading, you come across an article that talks about the kinds of questions climate-change surveys ask their respondents—Tariq Abdel-Monem and colleagues' "Climate Change

Survey Measures: Exploring Perceived Bias and Question Interpretation." At the end of that article, you notice the authors mentioned that often survey respondents did not have a clear consensus about the definitions of the terms used to describe climate change. The authors call for more research on that issue in particular, which fits well with the thoughts you'd been having about the conversation with your father.

You decide to design a survey to help clarify how people interpret climate-related terms, like "weather variability," "climate change," "global warming," "greenhouse effect," and "arctic shrinkage." Because you're in- terested in how lots of people define these terms, you're not limiting your sample only by the convenience of who you are immediately near but on a more random sample of groups of people that begin with who you know but snowball, or grow bigger, from there: you might make a list of all possible people you could send a survey to, such as people in all of your classes, your instructors, your friends, your parents and grandparents and their friends, clubs you and your family belong to, members of a church, organization, or extracurricular activity. This list might make you decide that you are only interested in a certain **demographic** (or particular slice of the population, such as those between the ages of 18-25), in which case you might narrow your list to one or two groups and make sure that you have the people you survey identify their age groups in a survey question. If you just want large numbers of responses and are only mildly interested in demographic data, you might design a survey that can be distributed online and circulated widely—posted on social media, for example, or to online classroom message boards. Perhaps you would aim, in this case, to survey 100 people about their interpretation of climate-related terms.

In this example, you'll want to think about the best way to answer a specific research question about how people interpret climate-related terminology. Because there has been a lot of survey research already done in this area, your best place to start designing your survey is to look at surveys that have been conducted

before—which brings us to some good advice about survey design, no matter the research question!

Designing Good Questionnaires

Unlike interviews, which are often intimately tied to a research design that is so specific they usually have to be uniquely crafted, surveys are often more general. Yet, like interview questions, survey questions should be tested before they are launched in a questionnaire and you accidentally receive information you don't want! The good news is that you have access to a range of national and international surveys (and their questions) that have already been pre-tested for you: Roper iPoll through the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research (ropercenter.cornell.edu/ipoll/), the Pew Research Center (www.pewresearch.org/), Gallup (www.gallup.com/home.aspx), the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) (www.icpsr.umich.edu/web/pages/ICPSR/index. html), and Ipsos (www.ipsos.com/en) all store large repositories of surveys— both their analyses and the questions themselves. You can search them by keyword and find surveys on topics done that are similar to the one you're planning.

Once you have a few models of survey questions, you can

change them to suit your needs. There are a few best practices to keep in mind when designing your own questionnaire:

- Don't forget instructions! Be sure to tell people briefly what they can expect (how many questions, how to fill out the survey, and how long it will take to complete).
- Questions should be clear and free of jargon: don't put in any specialized vocabulary that would be difficult for a respondent to understand.
- If you have to use technical terms, define them for your respondents.
- Each question should measure only one thing at a time—avoid questions that ask people to respond to multiple items in one question.
- If you are putting answers on a scale, respondents should have between five and seven points from which to choose.
- Be as specific as you can with your questions, whether they are open- or closed-ended.
- Questions should be short. In fact, your questionnaire should be short! When questions and surveys are too long, people lose interest and do not complete them.
- With closed-ended questions, people often choose the first option they read (if reading a survey) and the last option they hear (if a survey is read aloud). Vary the order of your answers to avoid this, if you can.
- Try to avoid loaded (or unloaded!) language that might persuade your respondents to answer a certain way: there is a perceived difference between, for example, the words "climate change" and "global warming." Be sure you use the terminology you mean, and be ready to explain your choices in your analysis.

Designing and Distributing Surveys

Surveys can be physically designed and distributed in a number of ways: on paper through the mail, in person, on the phone, or online through email or a distributed link. It's important to note that if you deliver a survey in person (on the phone or distributing a paper survey), you should have an introductory script that gives a framework and instructions for your research.

If you are designing and/or distributing a survey online, you can use websites that offer free survey software with some basic functionality—surveys of ten questions or less, say, or surveys that max out at a total number of respondents.* These are excellent and professional sites to use to begin your survey research, and the surveys you produce with them can be circulated and embedded into emails to specific people or circulated as a link that can be forwarded on to other people than its first recipients. If you require more functionality, you might check with your college or university's research office, some of which give access to institutional survey software to students upon request. This will enable you to design farther-reaching surveys that often have extra bells and whistles to their design and functionality, like graphic sliding scales, heat maps, and the ability to drag-and-drop text into categories.

*Test your survey by sharing a draft with a friend, roommate, or classmate and listening to their feedback. Sometimes called usability testing, or user-testing, this, too, is an approach to research commonly practiced by professional and technical writers.

Once your survey is ready for distribution, it's important to know that a good research process should result in a high survey response

rate. The larger your sample size or the less you know your targeted audience (such as in the climate change example), the lower your response rate is likely to be. In a large survey, a good response rate is about 30 percent. So, if you really wanted to survey 100 people, you would want to send your survey out to at least 300 people to try to reach that number. However, a high response rate for a small survey, such as our first example of a 25-student classroom, is about 80 percent—the smaller, more personal, and more targeted an audience, the higher the response rate.

Now, let's say you successfully surveyed 25 people in your classroom, but after looking at your survey results, you decide you want more information from just a few of those people. An interview might be an excellent method to achieve that purpose.

Try This: Revising Survey Questions (15 minutes)

Working with the questions for Examples 1 and 2 that you generated in the previous "Try This," revise your questions by following the suggestions in at least one of the best practices for writing questionnaires.

Interviews

Interviews allow a researcher a real-time environment that allows for things that surveys don't, like being able to ask follow-up questions or asking someone to clarify an answer. Yet interviews also generate a lot of data because conversations need to be recorded and usually transcribed or written down (and it takes about three hours to transcribe every one hour of talk). A benefit to interviews is that there are different types, depending on your research question. You might sit down with a small group of people, called a **focus group**, and ask one question to see how people

respond and negotiate their answers in groups, since usually one person's response provokes agreement, disagreement, or room for follow-up. A focus group might enable you to get a general sense of consensus or understand divergent attitudes about a particular variable. You might develop questions for **1-on-1 research interviews**, in which you sit down with one person at a time and ask them a series of carefully-designed questions that help you answer your research question (you might repeat the same set of questions with each interview for consistency, in this case). If your purposes extend beyond only answering a research question and you are trying to preserve a sound recording of stories or memories for future generations to listen to, then you would conduct an **oral history interview** with either one person or a group of people, in which you would design an interview script with topics about a particular area of interest and a long list of questions that you may or may not ask, depending on your participant's memory and willingness to talk. Unlike a research interview, an oral history interview does not seek to replicate the same questions for each interviewee but instead trusts the process of proceeding through topics and questions that result in the best outcome: an oral history of a person, place, or group.

Asking Questions "From the Side"

Some of the same advice about survey questions applies to interview questions: They should be clear, specific, short, and free of specialized vocabulary your interviewees might not know. They shouldn't try to double up a few questions in just one breath or be written in a way that offends a listener or presumes something about them. However, unlike survey questions, interviews don't really benefit from closed-ended (yes or no) questions; usually you are more interested in *why* a participant answered yes or no.

Good interviews come from really good questions that are related

to your research question, but research questions often are not what you would actually ask someone in an interview. In other words, there is a difference between your research question and an interview question. The best way to ask about your research question is actually by asking an interview question from the side rather than head on. For example, a research question about a topic you want to learn about—let's say, plagiarism—is not best answered by the most direct question. Asking, "Have you ever copied a paper from someone?" likely would result in some discomfort on both sides of the interviewing table. Instead, designing questions from the side might be a better way to get at what you're hoping to find out. In the case of curiosity about plagiarism, you might ask about someone's knowledge of online paper mills, ask about whether or not they have ever had trouble with their works cited page, ask about their opinion of plagiarism detection software, or ask if they know about campus resources that help students revise their work. All of these topics are about plagiarism without developing an accusatory tone about serious academic misconduct, and they would probably help you establish a more interesting angle for your own research question once you've spoken to a few people.

Try This: *Designing Interview Questions from the Side (30 minutes)*

In order to design an interview question from the side, you'll need to know your research question. (Note that Chapter 1 introduces research questions and the ways they expand and shift throughout a research process.) Once you have that, you'll need to figure out what exactly it is you're hoping to learn to be able to answer that research question. Then, you'll need to determine who you might ask to get at

what you want to learn. Finally, you'll generate a list of interview questions that would help you get at what you're trying to learn—from the side! Here's an example of how this process works:

- **Research Question**: What matters more in the workplace: "hard skills" (technical skills) or "soft skills" (communication skills)?
- **What I'm hoping to learn**: Do employers value technical skills more than communication skills or vice-versa? Are college or university graduates being given the tools they need in technical and communication skills to get a job when they graduate? Which kind of skill is the more difficult to learn?
- **Who might have this information**: Employers/ employees at any company, recently employed college or university graduates, instructors in both technical and communication-based fields are all likely to have insights.
- **Interview questions from the side that will help me learn what I want to know:**

  ◦ For an employer: What is the most important skill an employee can have?
  ◦ For a student: What is the hardest assignment you ever had to complete? What made it so hard?
  ◦ For anyone: Think about a recent problem that came up in your workplace. What do you think caused it?

Based on this example, come up with some interview questions from the side for your own research question.

Interviewing Equipment and Best Practices

Unlike surveys, to really be useful, interviews need to be audio- or video-recorded and then transcribed so you can understand what was said in order to interpret your data. This means that interviews require putting in some effort to be successful: finding a comfortable and quiet place to meet (so that voices are easily heard over any ambient noise), using a good quality audio and/or video recorder, and finding the time it takes to listen and transcribe the voices you hear (including your own). As you decide which kind of interview to con- duct, you'll want to consider that transcribing a 1-on-1 research or oral history interview is much easier than transcribing a group interview, where people talk over and interrupt one another. Similarly, in a video recording, it is easier to set up a camera that captures two people in a frame than a whole group, which may require another person to operate a camera. While we don't expect you to bring a camera crew to a group interview, it's important to know the benefits and constraints of working with certain kinds of equipment.

Try This Together: Interview Question Sketch (30 minutes)

In a small group, choose one of the following topics:

- Fake news
- Seasonal affective disorder

- Photo retouching
- Learning a second language
- Genetically modified foods

Next, complete the following steps:

1. Develop a research question about your chosen topic.
2. Decide what you would hope to learn from interviews.
3. Consider who might have the information you need.
4. Write three interview questions you might ask.

When it comes time to conduct the actual interview, you'll want to talk to your interviewees before you begin recording. About a week or so before, it is often good practice to share the interview questions or interview script (in the case of an oral history, which might be more loosely configured) with your participant(s) so they know what you plan on asking and thus can be prepared with thoughtful answers. This isn't always possible, especially if you don't have a way of contacting your interviewees beforehand. The day of your interview, you should make sure that your participants know the details of where you'll be meeting and at what time. Right before your interview, you should discuss with your interviewee the **ethics protocol** of the interview in order to get their **informed consent**, as we discussed in Chapter 2. If you're undertaking an oral history interview, you will also want to discuss a **deed of gift*** with your interviewee, in which they agree to release their story both to you and to a larger public repository of other stories like theirs. This is unlike a research interview, in which it is likely that only you will ever listen to the recording or read a transcript. After any kind of interview, you'll want to follow up with your interviewees with a

brief note of thanks that reminds them of what will happen with their data as well as how they might reach you if they have questions about the interview process.

*A Deed of Gift is a separate and special document from other consent forms. In a Deed of Gift, the oral history participant "gifts" the interviewer (or institution, or library, or archive) their story so that other people may listen to it or use it for research purposes

Try This Together: Research Interview vs. Oral History Interview (45 minutes)

Because a research interview is very different in its purpose (to help answer a research question) than an oral history interview (which records and preserves stories and memories and sometimes helps to answer a research question), it's important that interview questions are designed with the appropriate purpose in mind depending on the type of interview you're conducting. Because they emphasize storytelling, ways of seeing the self or the community, and memories of historical events, oral history interviews often need fewer specific questions and more prompts than research interviews.

First, choose one of the following topics:

- Changes in telephone technology since its patent in 1876
- The best cake you've ever eaten
- The "millenium" or "Y2K" bug
- The development of a local community center in your region
- The increase in diabetes since 1980
- The price of gasoline over the last 100 years

Then, generate with a partner four different interview questions (one of which needs to be a follow-up question) for both a research interview and an oral history interview. When you're finished, discuss the differences between the two sets of questions and what accounts for these differences.

When you're interviewing, it's important to keep track of your main research question, as responses may stray from what you expect and you might get caught up in what your interviewee is saying. It's important to be prepared with **follow-up interview questions** that might piggy-back off of a prior question. Similarly, you might also want to be prepared to ask "Why?" or "Tell me more about that," after an answer you receive (especially if you get an answer that is shorter than you expect). Sometimes the best questions simply ask for clarification ("Could you tell me what you mean by that?" or "Could you give me an example of what you mean?") or are constructed on the fly ("Can we go back to that example you talked about earlier?" or "How did you feel about that?"). Oral history interviews benefit from mocking up an outline of topics and then generating a list of many possible questions in each section of your outline and letting the interview organically emerge from whatever series of questions are appropriate.

Finally, it is important to take into account that, as the

interviewer, you develop and ask the questions. This places you in a position of power (even if you don't feel particularly powerful, such as if you are a student interviewing an instructor). When you interview someone, you enter into a relationship with them for a brief time, and it is important that everyone feels as comfortable as possible.

Putting It All Together: Case Studies

A **case study** is a kind of qualitative research method that combines data collected from a variety of other methods that we have already talked about—like surveys, interviews, and different kinds of documents and artifacts. A case-study approach to answering a research question is best suited when the phenomenon you're studying is particular, or distinct, in relation to a larger society, culture, or environment. You might want to look at a case to understand broader details than any one method, like an interview with one person, might tell you. Looking at cases is particularly helpful when researchers are trying to gain some insight about the nature of a particular environment in more detail; however, it's important to note that the limitation of a case study is that one single, detailed instance of a phenomenon cannot be used to generalize to all instances of that kind of activity everywhere. Case studies offer us a snapshot of an individual unit, a glimpse as comprehensive as we can get, that helps us understand or know systems of the world—and its people—a bit better.

To undertake a case study, you will need to gather one or more kinds of data that we have already discussed and then analyze or code it to find categories or patterns. Once you have those preliminary analyses or codes, you might compare what you've found with other, similar cases. Finally, you'll work to interpret your research notes to come to some conclusions about how the case you've chosen offers up an understanding of your research question.

For example, let's say commencement is right around the corner and you are interested in the rules and regulations that govern graduation—what people can (and cannot) wear, what

freedom they have to decorate their mortarboard hats or wear culturally significant accessories, how honorary degrees get conferred and taken away—and what graduation signifies in terms of a major life event for college or university students. In other words, you are seeking an answer to a broad research question, "What does commencement mean to a college or university community?" Because most colleges and universities engage in this activity, choosing to look at one—at the college or university you attend—would offer a case-study glimpse at the nature of commencement. Your examination of commencement at your institution would give an audience some ways to understand how graduation is significant to college and university communities.

You might begin this case study with a worknet, reviewing the literature about the history of commencements, recent newsworthy pieces about dress codes or cultural items that have made it into the popular press, and local updates from your college or university about the who, what, where, and how of commencement planning. Once you've done some reading, it's time to plan your case study: just what kind of data should you collect, from who, and why?

We realize that even planning out a case study as a brief exercise might seem overwhelming, especially if you have to use one or more research methods to get there. That's why it's important at every step in your research process—whether gathering a preliminary round of survey results, reflecting after an interview or site-based observation, or handling a new artifact—to document what you notice, document what sticks out during the experience you've just had, document how it connects to other data-collection or data-handling experiences, and document what significant patterns emerge as your research experiences add up. Researchers call this documentation a **research memo***, and it will help you move from data collection to data interpretation—in other words, a research memo will help you begin to make sense of all the information you are gathering in a way that is not as overwhelming as looking at data from 50 surveys, 5 interviews, and 3 site visits all at once.

*Research memos are also remarkably important for showing the work and communicating in-progress analysis when multiple researchers collaborate

Using the commencement example above, develop design considerations for a case study by answering the following questions:

- What kinds of data will you collect?
- What are the best methods to use to collect your data?
- Who should you talk to?
- What other cases can you compare this case to?
- What are you going to look for in your data? What are your variables?

Focus on Delivery: Writing a Research Memo

A research memo is an in-between phase of writing: it's not the same as the data you collect or code, but it also isn't a final research paper. Instead, it's an analytic memo that a researcher writes after each of their major data-collection episodes to help them make sense of what they just experienced. It helps a researcher look back on the small pieces of what they've done to understand emergent patterns for analysis of their research question. Because all of the small parts of a case-study—field notes, transcriptions, documents,

coding sheets—can add up, taking time out to review and reflect is necessary.

Unlike the observant, real-time detail that is required of field notes, research memos are instead a place for analysis, which means they are a place for freewriting, thinking on paper, noting patterns and anomalies by comparing one kind of data with another, assessing your progress or noting problems with your research, planning for a future stage, and noting your feelings about your research. You might think of a research memo as a working paper about the major data points of your case study—this may mean one interview or a series of interviews, one site visit or multiple visits, one coding sheet or ten coding sheets. Regardless, it's important to keep up with your research memos, as they will simplify the process of interpreting multiple kinds of data.

As you write your research memo, it is best if you have with you the data you've already collected (the interview transcript, field notes, coding sheet, document, or artifact).

In your research memo, you should

- include relevant dates and data types (e.g., "June 14 research memo on interview with Sonja Notte, May 31") and bibliographic information if a textual source;
- include relevant quotations (for interviews or surveys), quantities (for surveys), observations (for fieldwork), words and phrases (for coded documents), or descriptions (for material artifacts) that stick out to you from your data collection;
- record why you think these chosen details are important, relevant, or stick out;
- reflect on how the data contributes to clarifying your research question or helps to define or refine the scope of your research question (this can help you revise your **research proposal**); and
- comment on what you think of the data: What questions do you have? What patterns or trends are emerging when you consider this data in light of others you've collected? What connections can you make across data sets? What confuses

you?

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Keywords

interviews, **surveys**, questionnaires, case-study, research memo

Jennifer Clary-Lemon is Associate Professor of English at the University of Waterloo. She is the author of *Planting the Anthropocene: Rhetorics of Natureculture*, *Cross Border Networks in Writing Studies* (with Mueller, Williams, and Phelps), and co-editor of *Decolonial Conversations in Posthuman and New Material Rhetorics* (with Grant) and *Relations, Locations, Positions: Composition Theory for Writing Teachers* (with Vandenberg and Hum). Her research interests include rhetorics of the environment, theories of affect, writing and location, material rhetorics, critical discourse studies, and research methodologies. Her work has been published in *Rhetoric Review*, *Discourse and Society*, *The American Review of Canadian Studies*, *Composition Forum*, *Oral History Forum d'histoire orale*, *enculturation*, and *College Composition and Communication.*

Derek N. Mueller is Professor of Rhetoric and Writing and Director of the University Writing Program at Virginia Tech. His teaching and research attends to the interplay among writing, rhetorics, and technologies. Mueller regularly teaches courses in visual rhetorics, writing pedagogy, first-year writing, and digital media. He continues to be motivated professionally and intellectually by questions concerning digital writing platforms, networked writing practices, theories of composing, and discipliniographies or field narratives related to writing studies/rhetoric and composition. Along with Andrea Williams, Louise

Wetherbee Phelps, and Jen Clary-Lemon, he is co-author of *Cross-Border Networks in Writing Studies* (Inkshed/Parlor, 2017). His 2018 monograph, *Network Sense: Methods for Visualizing a Discipline* (in the WAC Clearinghouse #writing series) argues for thin and distant approaches to discerning disciplinary patterns. His other work has been published in *College Composition and Communication*, *Kairos*, *Enculturation*, *Present Tense*, *Computers and Composition*, *Composition Forum*, and JAC.

Kate Lisbeth Pantelides is Associate Professor of English and Director of General Education English at Middle Tennessee State University. Kate's research examines workplace documents to better understand how to improve written and professional processes, particularly as they relate to equity and inclusion. In the context of teaching, Kate applies this approach to iterative methods of teaching writing to students and teachers, which informs her recent co-authored project, *A Theory of Public Higher Education* (with Blum, Fernandez, Imad, Korstange, and Laird). Her work has been recognized in *The Best of Independent Rhetoric and Composition Journals* and circulates in venues such as *College Composition and Communication*, *Composition Studies*, *Computers and Composition*, *Inside Higher Ed*, *Journal of Technical and Professional Writing*, and *Review of Communication*.

20. Working With Places and Things

JENNIFER CLARY-LEMON; DEREK MUELLER; AND KATE PANTELIDES

Abstract

"Working With Places and Things" is a chapter from *Try This: Research Methods for Writers.* The authors argue that understanding *where* people and things exist helps researchers to contextualize writing situations. The chapter focuses on the possibilities of using archives, conducting site-based observations, and making maps to better understand subjects and rhetorical situations. These fieldwork methods give researchers new ways of answering their research questions by collecting and curating artifacts, and in uncovering the relationships between physical locations, materials, data, and language.

This reading is available below and as a PDF.

So far in this book, we've been paying close attention to words and how to do things that are ethical, meaningful, and methodical with them. In Chapter 2, we learned about how using citation systems and institutional reviews are ways of ethically planning for and representing the people and ideas we are working with. In Chapter 3, we talked about affinity and choric worknets, how words on a page can form relationships between people over time,

and how words can construct inventive worlds we hadn't thought about before. In Chapter 4, we introduced coding and analysis and worked on developing a methodical research design that helps us understand the patterns that develop in language. In Chapter 5, we considered how and when to include people in our research. In this chapter, we focus on the *where** of working with words and people: where you might find words that matter, where you might go to understand that words happen in particular places and are used by particular people with particular materials, and the wheres you can create in your own primary research that are worth exploring. This chapter will give you some options for deciding if archives, site-based observing, or mapmaking are good choices for you to use to answer the research question(s) you began working with in Chapter 1. Considering these methods might also give rise to new questions you want to work with.

> *Whether working in archives, observing specific sites, or mapping individual spaces, considering the places where language happens and the things we use to understand those activities is a central part of being a researcher

You might be wondering why place matters in writing, or why we should care about things if we are primarily working with words. The short answer is because where people are, and the things they are surrounded by, matter to the kinds of writing they produce and the subjects they care about. Places and things help build a particular rhetorical situation, and those situations create knowledge problems that we, as researchers, might solve. The longer answer might be imagined with a few examples of interesting knowledge problems that emerge when we consider how words are complicated by places and things:

- How safe is the place you live? How does the ability to walk in your neighborhood at certain times of day reinforce or detract from feeling safe? [working with places]
- What happens when we look for a source using the library's online catalogue compared to walking around and navigating the stacks? [working with places]
- What is the experience of reading an ebook or PDF compared to a printed book? What sights, sounds, feelings, and smells do you associate with each one? [working with things]
- How does it feel to read a recipe and then join a family member or friend in making your favorite dish the way you've always eaten it? [working with things]
- What might be the experience of reading love letters between two people who lived a hundred years ago compared to reading a roman- tic textual exchange on someone's phone today? [working with places and things]
- What changes when you use a nature identification app to learn about local plants or animals and then try to identify the nature around you on a walk to campus or in your neighborhood? [working with places and things]
- How does reading a job preparation manual differ from being on a job site? How are experiences, equipment use, and safety changed by going to a job versus reading about work? [working with places and things]

Each of these situations ask us to consider words in conjunction with places and things—how words are shaped by our experiences with places; how our bodies feel at a desk or perusing shelves; or how a walk in the woods, a meal in a kitchen, or a visit to a job site might impact our feelings about the words we use or the words we read.

Try This: Identifying Campus Trees (60 minutes)

Take a walk around or nearby your campus, noting how many and what kinds of trees you find. Write down important tree details: how tall they are, how their leaves are shaped (or whether they have leaves during the season you observe them), where they are planted, and what they smell like. Write down the names of the trees you know, and use a nature identification app to help you find out the names you don't.

In this chapter, we pay special attention to the way places invoke our senses—sight, sound, touch, smell, taste—and the way involvement of our senses shapes our research. We also look at the role things play in our research questions and research designs as well as the kind of **rhetorical weight*** they lend to our data as we fully examine our research question.

*While we can't exactly put rhetoric on a scale to know what it weighs, we can think of rhetorical weight as a metaphor for significance, or the ways that our focus on important concepts may be changed by the way data is considered or presented

Methods Can Be Material

If we remember the definition of research methods from Chapter 1, that is, that they are the tools, instruments, practices, and processes that help us answer our research questions, it's important to recognize that some methods that help us think through and

answer those questions are actual things themselves, whether we make them ourselves or use instruments to help us collect our data. Researchers from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds use the process of making using things as a vital part of their research methods. Take, for example, the way that making a textile, like a basket or a quilt, helps give our bodies a particular kind of touch knowledge. When we engage in sharing that basket or quilt with others and observe their reactions to our ef- forts, that gives us a certain kind of affective, embodied, or feeling-knowledge. It is possible that the only way to really answer a research question about how baskets or quilts make us feel or what significance they have for a community is by engaging in the material making. Thus, even seemingly ordinary practices like basket making or quilting can be a research method if they help provide knowledge about a research question.

Similarly, working with instruments as things helps us extend our knowledge to answer research questions in different ways. Perhaps, after trying to identify trees on your campus using all of your senses, you are interested in trees and the different ways they make us feel about the environments we live in. As a continuation of the "Try This" that invites you to explore campus grounds with particular attention to trees, you might move forward in such an investigation with a campus tree survey, even using satellite maps to locate where all of the trees are on your campus and visiting and taking pictures at each of those places to count how many trees exist where you spend so much time each day (see Chapter 7). Following your making of a campus tree survey, even if limited to a small section of campus, you might then, as part of your research design (see Chapter 5), create a questionnaire about how people feel about nature on campus. You also might look at the way researchers have used a variety of instruments and tools to measure this same phenomenon, for example through the use of small microphones and surface transducers (speakers) embedded in the bark of trees to give rise to projects like the ListenTree project (listentree.media.mit.edu/), in which people can listen to the sonic

vibrations trees make in forests, or the Danish Living Tree project (airlab.itu.dk/the-living-tree), in which researchers placed small, hidden speakers in trees to allow people around them to listen differently to the life of trees represented sonically: the sounds of insects crawling, or the tree "breathing" as people get closer to it. In those particular cases, things—both instruments (microphones and speaker) and non-humans (trees)—help us understand different facets of the research question in ways that reading a literature review about the coniferous and deciduous trees in our area might not. It's important to recognize that research methods engage places, things, and texts in sometimes complicated ways and that sometimes texts themselves may be things: images, recordings, and ephemera—those things we never imagine might be collected and given meaning, like ticket stubs, receipts, flyers, buttons, and letters.

Archival Methods

One of the ways that writers conduct primary research is by going to **original** sources*—sources unlike the **secondary sources** discussed in Chapter 3, such as books and articles, that we usually find at the library or through a database search. Original sources are singular (one-of-a-kind) and provide first-hand accounts of events. They are also known as **primary sources**. One of the main places a researcher can find original sources are in archives—collections of materials such as images, texts, or audio and video recordings that are housed in one place and usually catalogued and ordered in a way that helps researchers locate the sources they want to work with. Thus, archival research methods are shaped by considering history and how it can be built out of a collection of things.

*Whether located online, in campus buildings, or in your own house, archives are important places where writing happens and where we can uncover voices and artifacts from the past

There are a few different kinds of archives, and some of them are accessed easily and from the comfort of your own home. Internet or **digital archives** are growing daily: a quick search will tell you that archival materials are available in their entirety about subjects as varied as literacy narratives (www.thedaln.org/), nature images (desertmuseum.org/center/digital_library.php), or AIDS activism (www.actuporalhistory.org/), to name a few. There are a number of websites devoted to putting many portals of digital archives in one place, notably the Digital Public Library of America (dp.la/).

What distinguishes a digital archive from a physical one is often access: some archives only digitize some content rather than all content, and some digital archives have no real physical home. Physical archives, or **traditional archives**, are usually housed in brick-and-mortar places: public libraries, universities and colleges, corporations, governments, museums, or historical societies. When they're grouped together, the sources located in archives are called **fonds** (pronounced fon), which tells you they are grouped in a specific way by the people—archivists—who put them together. Navigating the fonds is some of the most difficult (and rewarding!) work of archival research, and it often takes more time than other kinds of research. Much as working with a new computer program isn't intuitive unless you've made the program yourself, often you either have to think like someone else to navigate the fonds or let a bit of serendipity lead the way. The most important things to know about conducting archival research are the following: every archive is different and comes with different rules (which are useful to know ahead of time), most archives utilize some kind of **finding aid**—a

description that places the material in context—to help researchers use them, and most archives are staffed with **archivists**—people who can help you navigate the archives so that you can find what you think you're looking for. We say "think you're looking for" because in many cases, archival work is more about what you don't find when you're expecting to, or what you do find when you aren't!

Archival research isn't an exact science: often materials are labeled differently than you would label them or filed in one of any number of ways (for example, a letter about the Old Faithful geyser between two rangers in a historic Yellowstone Park archive might be filed under the rangers' names, under "Old Faithful," or under miscellaneous letters). The key to archival research is being patient, being flexible, and knowing that it may take one or more return trips. Some tips for visiting traditional archives are:

- **Research the archives in advance**. Sometimes you have to request materials a few days in advance of your arrival or have a special pass to visit them. You can also usually locate the particular finding aids that an archive uses to help you find or request what you're looking for ahead of time.
- **Plan what to bring**. Many archives do not allow you to bring computers or cell phones and allow a pencil and paper only for notetaking. How might this affect your research process?
- **Know the costs**. If you either cannot or are not allowed to take photos of the archival materials, many archives offer printing services, but these often come at a price.

Try This: Working with a Digital Archive (45 minutes)

Locate a digital archive that originates from a place close to where you are—in the same city, state, or region. Find one artifact in the archive (image, text, audio, video) and answer the following questions about it:

- What kind of artifact is it? Who authored it and for what purpose?
- What does the kind of artifact it is tell you about what it contains? How does the artifact type (for example, interview transcript, photograph, or meeting note) give you clues as to what it can contain and what it cannot?
- Why was the artifact created and by whom was it made? What function did/does it serve?
- Who was the intended audience for the artifact? Do you think the creator ever intended you to be viewing the artifact?
- When was the artifact created? What was going on in the world then that could have affected its creation?
- Where was the artifact created? Did it have to travel to be included in the archive? What does that tell you about the artifact?
- What clues from the artifact (words, formality or informality of tone or dress, position of landmarks or commonplaces) help you understand where it comes from?
- Is the artifact unique, or is it one of a series of other artifacts like it? How do you know?
- How reliable is the artifact? How do you know? How would you cite this artifact?
- Who is missing from the artifact, and what might that tell you about the time or place it was made?
- What is your own reaction to the artifact? How does it make you feel? Which of your senses are engaged by the artifact?
- What questions do you have about the artifact?

Once you have generated the answers to these questions, do one of the following:

- Draft a research proposal (see Chapter 1) that creates a research question about this artifact and uses archival research as a method; OR

- Write a rhetorical analysis (see Chapter 4) of this artifact.

A final type of archive is a **personal archive**—a collection of materials that might be housed with you, a friend, or a relative. Perhaps your grandmother kept a collection of quilting fabric, quilts that she made, and quilting books that is in a box or closet that you know of. Or maybe your aunt has amassed a large assortment of baseball memorabilia including newspaper clippings of her favorite teams, thousands of cards, jerseys, and signed baseballs. It is also conceivable that you have been keeping a written record of your goings-on for the last fifteen years, from report cards to journals to artwork to emails. While cataloguing these personal archives would take far more work than simply going to an archive and using a finding aid, they are rich sources of research that allow you to engage more deeply with the contexts and places that artifacts have emerged from in ways that reading about them in a textbook would not. To that end, what separates an archive from a pile of stuff is the meaning that we give it by **curation**—the way we select, order, and label items in a way that gives shape to the significance of the collection.

Try This: Identifying a Personal Collection (1 hour)

Bring to class a personal collection of things. You may not think of old notebooks, pictures, or digital spaces as archives, but they hold information about your past, about who you were at a different time in your life. Turn your analytical eye to the archive and use primary research methods to make sense of who you were and what artifacts you developed or collected at that time. Using labels,

ordering, and framing documents, curate and order artifacts from your collection, giving each piece meaning as part of a whole archive.

One part of working with archives is caring for the people you come in contact with, even if you have never met those people who were involved with the artifacts you've found—or even if they are long gone. How might you represent in an ethical way an image, a set of correspondence, or a relationship that appears in the archives? It's important to think of uncovering the primary research of the archives that others may or may not have looked at closely as a way of honoring stories that have been there before we get to them. Whether this means we tell partial stories (perhaps we leave the part about our aunt's baseball boyfriend out of our archival story), spend time carefully constructing the contexts for artifacts (as in the case of marginalized groups, such as prison inmate records in the New York State Archive, or those records in Ireland's National Archive of women forced to give babies up for adoption by the Catholic church in the late 1960s), or reflect on our own connection with those we learn from in the archives, it is important to remember that what we find in the archives brings a past place into a present one—and that you are the person responsible for handling those places with care.

Site-Based Observations

Although archival work with artifacts, materials, and things asks that we pay special attention to understanding and piecing together a historical past, **site-based observations**, often called **fieldwork** or **field methods**, emphasize how close reading of sites helps us more deeply engage with a particular present. Site-based observations

are an important part of qualitative research because they depend on a researcher's experience to explain a phenomenon and result in **thick description**—detailed notes—that help emplace a reader in the research while providing evidence about a particular activity or situation that the researcher has experienced.

Central to site-based observations is selecting a site that will give you more information about your research question than only reading the literature about it will tell you. For example, if you are curious about how often texting gets in the way of a person's everyday life, you could read studies about technology and distraction to gather some preliminary ideas about it. But if you wanted to generate your own primary research that could help answer that question, you might select a busy campus spot for a certain amount of time—say, two hours—and observe how often texting impacts people's ability to walk, multitask, cross a street, or interact with others. By writing down what you see in detailed field notes, you will also have observational data that will help you answer your research question.

However, site-based observation isn't just sitting down and recording what you see. Selection of a site, subjects (or people), activities, and things that you record should have some definable reason behind why those and not others, and it's important to spend some time thinking about your choices of site before you begin fieldwork. From the example above, where is the best spot for learning about texting and walking? Who is most likely to be engaging in the behavior you wish to observe? Why is the activity and site you've chosen the best representative of what you're trying to explore—for example, why use site-based observation when you might instead survey people about texting and distraction? What assumptions do you already have about texting and distraction that could impact how you represent it in your field notes?

Once you've generated some ideas about your chosen site and research question and gathered the permission you need (if you're working with human subjects; see Chapter 5), it's time to keep **field notes***—detailed observations about your chosen site that will help others have a rich view of a particular place. Field notes depend on your ability to be a close observer of what you see: detail people, places, and things; document sounds, smells, textures, feelings, weather conditions, tastes, colors; and define as closely as you can elements that others might not understand or share (for example, instead of "she wrote slowly" you might write "it took the writer ten minutes to compose her first sentence"). There are a few different ways to keep field notes, but we encourage you to keep a special

notebook that is lightweight and portable and that you use only for site-based observations.

*Field notes can also include sketches and hand-drawn maps, which are meant to capture fields of vision, orientations to space, and measurable distances

Many site-based observations take the form of a **double-entry journal** (see Figure 6.1) that in some way splits your notes into two columns, one side that documents an informational record of what is happening, and the other side that contains a more personal response to what is happening. These might be split and labeled "information" and "personal" or "record" and "response," and they are a good way to begin to think about the difference between what is happening and what you feel about what is happening around you.

Figure 6.1. Example of a double-entry journal for field notes. The left-hand column is labeled "record." The right-hand column is labeled "respond."

But once you delve into a site, especially if you return to the same site more than once, you'll need to develop your own system for detailing, documenting, and defining what you see. Often there is so much happening in a place that it is difficult to know where to begin notetaking: Which conversation soundbyte is important? Does the weather or the time of day matter? What happens if you're feeling sick that day on the site? Because every site is filled with rich detail, and every researcher might take different field notes about

the same moment, it's important for you to develop a system for your note taking that will help you later connect your observations to your research question. We suggest that whatever form your field notes take, you aim for the following:

- **Accuracy**: record the same kinds of information during every observational visit (date, time, location).
- **Detail**: record the who, what, where of every visit (conversation bits, room or site conditions and description, length of time it takes for something to happen).
- **Definition**: be as specific as you can about elements around you that would help someone unfamiliar with the site understand what is happening.
- **Sensation and Response**: make note of specific ways your body feels in the space and which emotions arise.
- **Questions**: record any questions you are left with while at the site.*

> *It's important to keep in mind that site-based observation is a source of data, and that, in order to answer your research question, your data needs to be filtered and organized in ways that account for what your question is asking

You may well end up with more observational data than you need—but as you go back through your notes, you will begin to see patterns and trends emerging from your observations, much like when you developed your coding scheme for discourse in Chapter 4. As you compose research memos from each site visit (see Chapter 5), certain details will become important as you group similar things together, examine outliers from what you expected, or reflect on your own reactions and feelings to what you saw. All of those ways

of assembling information provide evidence for answering your research question and for understanding the way that places shape what happens within them.

Places and Things Converge: Mapmaking as a Method

So far, we've discussed some important places where words work to make history (archives) as well as a method for recording the current impacts that places have (site-based observations). Archival research and fieldwork are privileged by researchers in both the humanities and social sciences, but they both make meaning out of observation primarily by using words. As we introduce this final method, mapmaking, we do so not because we expect you to be geographers or cartographers when you graduate, but because sometimes we see relationships and patterns more clearly when we view them spatially and visually, not only verbally or textually. Maps enable us to travel to places we've never been, and global satellite imagery allows us to view the world from a bird's-eye view. For this reason, researchers in many disciplines rely on maps to help them understand, explore, and answer their research questions.

Try This Together: Analyzing Maps (30 minutes)

Go to The Decolonial Atlas and "40 Maps that Will Help You Make Sense of the World" online. With a partner, choose five different maps from these sites. What are we supposed to pay attention to based on what the maps highlight? What would each map be good for? What would

each map not be helpful for?

Making maps helps us see differently. Maps can be used to help us plan information, as in an idea map during pre-writing stages, or they can help us step back from a phenomenon so that we can see patterns and relationships at a distance, as word cloud maps do. Mapping may be part of how we compose field notes in order to orient ourselves or others to our places of research. Mapping as a method is a way of generating data visually and spatially that helps us understand focal points, themes, and hierarchies.

Mapping can also be a way of visualizing location and movement of people and things over time. For instance, let's say that you're working with the research question we raised in the beginning of the chapter about the differences and similarities between reading love letters between two people who lived a hundred years ago and reading a romantic textual exchange on someone's phone today. While you might begin your project with worknets and researching what has been written about the genres of letters and texts, mapping the location and movement of specific letters and texts might give you some different insight about the function of each that could help you answer your research question.

Try This: *Map Comparison (45 minutes)*

First, hand-draw a map of the trees that you found on or near your campus when you completed the "Try This: Identifying Campus Trees" exercise earlier in this chapter.

Then, consider that the process of moving back and forth

between being in a the physical location and looking at a map or satellite view is called ground-truthing among geographers and cartographers. Ground-truthing cares for the ethical coordination of the direct sensory experience (finding trees on campus, as you did) and checking those impressions against the aerial imagery, satellite view, or perhaps a map you have created. Ground-truthing acknowledges that maps, too, warrant ethical consideration and that maps change because the material world changes.

Finally, compare your notes from the "Try This: Identifying Campus Trees" activity with both the map you made and a satellite view of the trees on or near your campus. What is similar? What is different?

Let's say you're working with the publicly published letters of lifelong partners Simone de Beauvoir (who lived from 1908-1986) and Jean-Paul Sartre (who lived from 1905-1980), whose correspondence spanned from 1930-1963. Let's also say you'll be working with a series of a three-month-long text exchange between you and your romantic partner. There are many ways you could begin to try to answer this research question. On the one hand, you could use some quantitative methods to help you understand these genres of exchange—you might count how many letter exchanges each participant had in each genre and compare the counts, or you might count how many letters were exchanged in three months' time and compare that number to the number of text messages exchanged in the same amount of time. Or, you might use a qualitative method by reading a sample of letters and texts and creating a coding sheet for discourse analysis (see Chapter 4) that suggests some common (or uncommon) themes that appear in both kinds of exchanges. On the other hand, you might map out these

exchanges. You might place each letter in a mapped location of the place where they were at the time they were mailed, which might reveal interesting points of comparison and contrast. Based on your knowledge of where de Beauvoir and Sartre lived between 1930 and 1963, you might find that their correspondence covered the time period of the Second World War and spanned locations throughout France and Germany when Sartre was a prisoner of war. You might also chart where you and your partner lived in the three-month timespan of your exchange, accounting also for the location of text messages in space, pinging off of satellites. In this way, you are creating a location-based, or spatial, map of time travel, distance, and discourse that might help you draw some different kinds of conclusions about letters and texts in the context of a romantic relationship and in the context of the past and present.

Try This: *Mapping Movement (60 minutes plus 1 day)*

Try making your own map of time travel. In one 24-hour time period, document on a map of your choice where you've traveled. On either a hand-drawn or online map and using locative images (dots, lines, and arrows), reference where you were at what time of day during that 24 hours. What different information do you generate when you capture your day on a map rather than on a calendar or daily schedule of appointments?

Maps not only help us see differently—in both words and images—but they also can lead us to different kinds of realizations about our research and can exist as important research methods to help us consider elements of distance, scale, scope, and movement. To that end, they should be seen as a complementary method to

site-based observations and hold much potential for being included in your field notes. Maps can also help us recognize patterns, themes, or focal points, and they can be created for audiences to help them understand, navigate, or replicate a particular research site or process.

Focus on Delivery: Curating a Collection

Whether you are working with a personal collection, a library archive, or a collection of field notes or maps, inquiry into places and things frequently requires assembling and curating a collection. Curation explores various groupings and patterns, and it often assigns numbering or naming systems so all items in the collection can be referenced. Curated collections aid in making research materials accessible and making patterns discoverable. To help places and things become meaningful in a research context, curate a collection following these steps:

1. **Select**: choose the artifacts you will curate, or identify an existing archive—this can be an old box of stuff, a journal, letters, a drawer of old things, field notes, maps, a digital collection (of pictures, of social media artifacts, of writing, etc.);
2. **Preserve**: take care of your archive—reinforce the box, clean old pictures, back up digital work, label artifacts, and edit the components of your archive;
3. **Present**: collect the work in this archive in a way that will allow you to present it to the class—mount artifacts on a poster, in a book, in a shadow box, etc.; although you've selected a personal archive, make sure not to share parts of the archive that you do not want to be public (within the class);
4. **Analyze**: compose an expository, narrative essay highlighting some of the artifacts in this archive and what they tell us about

you at that time and place; and

5. **Reflect**: after you've composed your essay and developed the presentation of your archive, consider how your work might inform future primary research projects that address archives external to your experience.

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Keywords

primary research, site-based observations, observational data, archives

Jennifer Clary-Lemon is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Waterloo. She is the author of *Planting the Anthropocene: Rhetorics of Natureculture*, *Cross Border Networks in Writing Studies* (with Mueller, Williams, and Phelps), and co-editor of *Decolonial Conversations in Posthuman and New Material Rhetorics* (with Grant) and *Relations, Locations, Positions: Composition Theory for Writing Teachers* (with Vandenberg and Hum). Her research interests include rhetorics of the environment, theories of affect, writing and location, material rhetorics, critical discourse studies, and research methodologies. Her work has been published in *Rhetoric Review, Discourse and Society, The American Review of Canadian Studies, Composition Forum, Oral History Forum d'histoire orale, enculturation*, and *College Composition and Communication.*

Derek N. Mueller is Professor of Rhetoric and Writing and Director of the University Writing Program at Virginia Tech. His teaching and research attends to the interplay among writing, rhetorics, and technologies. Mueller regularly teaches courses in visual rhetorics, writing pedagogy, first-year writing, and digital media. He continues to be motivated professionally and intellectually by questions concerning digital writing platforms, networked writing practices, theories of composing, and discipliniographies or field narratives related to writing studies/rhetoric and composition. Along with Andrea Williams, Louise Wetherbee Phelps, and Jen Clary-Lemon, he is co-author

of *Cross-Border Networks in Writing Studies* (Inkshed/ Parlor, 2017). His 2018 monograph, *Network Sense: Methods for Visualizing a Discipline* (in the WAC Clearinghouse #writing series) argues for thin and distant approaches to discerning disciplinary patterns. His other work has been published in *College Composition and Communication*, *Kairos*, *Enculturation*, *Present Tense*, *Computers and Composition*, *Composition Forum*, and JAC.

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21. Ethics and Primary Research

JENNIFER CLARY-LEMON; DEREK MUELLER; AND KATE PANTELIDES

Abstract

"Ethics and Primary Research" is an excerpt from chapter 2 ("Making Research Ethical") of *Try This: Research Methods for Writers*.

This reading is available below and as a PDF.

Working with Human Subjects

When you conduct primary research with human subjects (which might include texts, images, or places) you need to take into account particular ethical aspects of your research. Imagine if the scientists who discovered the DNA Double Helix had considered how their discovery might impact subsequent generations. What if they had suggested guidelines? Or, what if they hadn't fought over ownership of the model? How might their interactions with each other have changed ethical approaches to the treatment of DNA data? Nowadays, universities have Institutional Review Boards (IRB) that approve and make recommendations about research with human subjects. If you do not intend to publish your research, your

research is not necessarily replicable, or it won't contribute to generalized knowledge—conversations about research to which particular communities and bodies of research orient, then you do not necessarily need to have your research plan approved by an IRB. When in doubt, you can always ask a faculty member or contact your IRB representative to see if your work is exempt. Even if your research need not be approved by IRB, it is useful to consider their recommendations for ethical research with human subjects because these regulations were developed to protect people. Unfortunately, all of these regulations were developed because researchers have conducted incredibly unethical research. Joseph Breault and other scholars have detailed how our current guidelines have come to be. In brief, many of our guidelines are a version of the 1976 Belmont Report, a report developed by a commission, the purpose of which was to ensure informed consent and ethical treatment of research participants. Informed consent is required when you are conducting research with human subjects. This just means that you ensure that the person you are surveying or interviewing (see Chapter 5 for detailed focus on research methods designed for working with people) fully understands the research in which they're taking part and that they agree to participate. It is important to let participants know what the research is about; if there will be any benefits, danger, or threat to them; and that they can choose not to participate at any time.

Informed consent and recommendations for ethical treatment of human subjects is a response to inhumane research conducted by Nazis on people during World War II. There have been other problematic, unethical studies— too many to mention here—but one particularly heinous, well-known study is the Tuskegee Study in which African American men infected with syphilis went untreated for forty years so that researchers could examine the impact of the disease. Subsequent regulations ensure that research does not hurt participants and that participants are fully aware of what a study in which they take part fully entails.

This notion of informed consent is central to ethical treatment

of research participants. Folks need to fully understand what they are agreeing to when you ask them to participate in your research. There are some populations of people—children, prisoners, mentally disabled persons, and pregnant women—who receive additional protections according to IRB protocols, so you might take this into account if your research includes members of one of these groups. Further, face-to-face research with people can differ from research that you conduct in digital spaces. For instance, if you conduct an informal poll through social media for the purposes of a research project, it may not feel like you're doing research, but you are! You will need to get consent from your participants, though it might look different than obtaining consent in person.

Interacting with Audiences

The thing is, even if you don't set out to interview or survey folks, your research still might involve interaction with people, and ultimately, the goal of research is to share your ideas with an audience. If you're taking photographs as part of your research, as you'll spend time with in Chapter 7, you'll have to consider whether or not people will end up in those images. And if so, do they know they're being photographed? If you're doing textual research on a blog or a Facebook community, even though the texts you're considering are public, folks might not think of that space as public. You'll need to think through how you interact with your potential research participants, data, and audience.

For instance, Kate is currently conducting a project that examines the impact of plagiarism accusations on students and faculty members. All people in her study are asked to consent to participate in the study. However, in talking to research participants about their experiences, she has learned about other students who have plagiarized. What is Kate's responsibility as a researcher in writing about these people who have plagiarized but who have not consented to participate in her study? As a researcher, she needs to

consider the expectations for student privacy, the sensitivity of the material, and the potential harms and/or benefits to the university community. Can she anonymize the students in the stories she has heard, or would sharing any part of these narratives cause the students to suffer? Key aspects to consider when making such decisions are the relationship between the researcher and the research population—or proximity—and potential beneficence* of the research. In this case, Kate is a faculty member, and her research participants are students, so although they all interact in the same sphere, there is a power differential that complicates the relationship. The findings of Kate's research have significantly beneficial potential for the university, but not at the expense of outing students who have not shared their plagiarism stories publicly.

Try This: Learn About Your Institution's IRB Office (30 minutes)

Every institution has their own IRB office, complete with their own guidelines and reporting structures. To get a sense of your institution's ethical approach to research, find your IRB office's website, and consider the following:

• Who is on your institution's IRB board? Are they faculty members? Staff members? What disciplines do they represent?

• What is the process on your campus for conducting research with human subjects? • Are there different expectations for undergraduate student, graduate student, faculty member, and staff member researchers?

• How does your institution define research with human subjects? How does it define ethics? You might also identify a nearby institution or a school you considered attending. Find its IRB office website and compare it with the one at your school. Where are the overlaps? What is different? And what is the significance of the comparisons you have made?

Designing Writing That Does Ethical Work

Hopefully you are already on board with the importance of approaching research ethically, with ethics and fairness as your primary research objective rather than objectivity. If you still have questions, or if you're not sold on these ideas yet, please don't hesitate to talk to your instructor and colleagues (and us!) about your questions, engage in your own research on ethics, and see the end of this chapter for further reading recommendations. But if you are ready to start designing ethical research, some important written products to develop are research protocols, or your plan for research; scripts, or the particular way you will describe your research to participants, particularly for focus groups in which a group of people participate in the research or there are multiple research facilitators; and participation or consent forms.

Try This Together: Considering Ethical Research (45 minutes)

In groups, consider the following situations, which include complex ethical components from research projects scholars have developed. Talk through the ethical issues at hand: how might you handle them?

- In 2012, scholar Jody Shipka bought six boxes from a yard sale that included personal photographs, diaries, and scrapbooks from a couple she did not know. These boxes inspired her project, "Inhabiting Dorothy," in which she attempted to travel and record the same paths that the couple had catalogued in their materials. Dr. Shipka invited audience members to also participate in the project, reenacting experiences and images of folks they do not know. What are the ethical components at work here?
- Technical Communication Scholar Fernando Sanchez examined a 2017 court case in response to gerrymandering in two Texas districts. He examined the ways that legislative mapmakers used GIS software to create maps that make political arguments. How might maps and their

representations of people represent ethical or unethical research practices? How do images and their representation impact audiences? How might subsequent researchers take up Sanchez's findings?

- Heidi McKee described how in 2008 she read a research project that accidentally included contact information for one of the research participants who was supposed to be anonymous. The authors had included a screen capture of a newspaper article that described the research participant's brush with the law. Although the researchers meant to keep the subject's identity secret, the screen capture was easily enlarged, and the article and identifying information about the person was easily accessed. How does this experience highlight the complexities of maintaining research participant anonymity? How does digital research and publication impact this complexity?

- Photographer Christine Rogers developed a series of images between 2007-2008 titled "New Family" in which she posed for family photos (complete with the quintessential hand on shoulder pose) with people who were strangers to her. In what ways would Ms. Rogers have to approach participants? What are the ethical considerations of such a project?

Below, we'll focus in particular on developing a participation form, which is necessary for conducting research with human subjects. In Chapter 5, we outline specific research methods for working with people, including surveys, interviews, and case studies, but before you do that work, you'll need to make sure that participants understand and want to participate in your research. Often in working with human subjects, we are asked to "do no harm" and to weigh the potential benefit to society in relation to the potential discomfort to research participants. We hope that this chapter helps demonstrate why it is so important (and complicated) to consider ethical questions in conducting secondary research and designing primary research, but we invite you to go a step further.

In the chapters that follow, you'll be introduced to multiple research methods and invited to develop invention activities for potential research projects. Instead of merely considering how to avoid harm, consider how your research might actually do good. How can we use these research methods to not just perform ethical research but to in fact be more ethical?

Keywords

ethics, primary research

Author Bios

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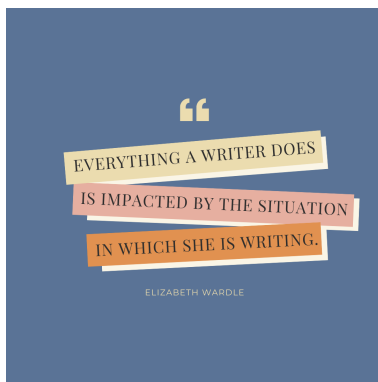
GENRE AND METHODS OF ANALYSIS

Section Overview

Genre is one of the key ideas to understand in ENGL 1010. The more you write as an adult, the more you learn that the "rules" you may have gleaned in early writing experiences are only useful in certain contexts. Instead, different writing contexts, or **rhetorical situations**, have different expectations. This can start to feel overwhelming, like there are no rules for writing. In some ways this is true! *There are no hard and fast rules that are true across all writing situations*. However, there are similar, repeated situations that we find ourselves in: we need to request something from a company, we need to compose a memo, we need to craft a professional email, we need to draw up an invitation to a party. These repeated rhetorical situations are **exigencies**, the context that invites a particular written or spoken response. These responses are called genres. There is a reciprocal, problem/solution relationship between exigencies and written genres. The key is to understand the relationship between exigency and genre to compose effectively. The expectations we have for certain genres are called **conventions**, and the differences within these expectations (not exactly rules) are **deviations**. We notice when things are different than we expect. For instance, when you read a textbook, you likely have certain expectations of the writing based on previous experiences. If there are words, images, or experiences in the text that remind you more of a novel, poem, or menu, that will be surprising. It will be a deviation that stands out to you. You might also notice that this book is free! That is a deviation that we

hope gets your attention in a positive way. The key in developing as a writer is to develop an understanding of genres such that you can adhere to convention when you want to and strategically deviate when it meets your rhetorical purpose.

The readings in this chapter describe how genre functions, provides examples of genre, and demonstrates what a powerful concept genre is for helping us write across the curriculum and across personal and professional writing situations. The first reading comes from the excellent collection *Bad Ideas About Writing*. Please note that the titles for all of the *Bad Ideas About Writing* essays are actually misleading myths about writing that circulate. It may be confusing, at first, to see these titles. And it is important to keep in mind the content of each essay dispels these popular beliefs about writing that can be found in the titles, by using research from the field. The other chapters come from the open educational resource (OER) textbook, *Writing Spaces*:

- "You Can Learn to Write in General" by Elizabeth Wardle
- "Navigating Genres" by Kerry Dirk
- "Understanding Discourse Communities" by Dan Melzer
- "Make Your Move: Writing in Genres" by Brad Jacobson, Madelyn Pawlowski, & Christine M. Tardy

22. Bad Idea About Writing: "You Can Learn to Write in General"

ELIZABETH WARDLE

Abstract

Although the purpose of a first-year writing class is ostensibly to teach you how to write in college, there is no way to teach anyone to write in all situations. Instead, a first-year writing course asks faculty and students to understand writing situations and the best way to approach different situations. This is the argument of Elizabeth Wardle's essay from *Bad Ideas About Writing*, "You Can Learn to Write in General."

This reading is available below, as a PDF, or as a podcast.

There is no such thing as writing in general. Do you doubt this claim? Test it out. Go to your desk right now and attempt to write something in general. Do not write for any specific audience, purpose, or context. Do not use any conventions that you've learned for school, work, creative writing, and so on. Just write in general. You can't do it, because it can't be done. There is no such thing as writing in general. Writing is always in particular. It's not just common sense that tells us that learning to write in general is not

possible. Many studies of writing have been done— in workplaces, in classes across the college landscape, and in social and civic settings. They tell us that every new situation, audience, and purpose requires writers to learn to do and understand new possibilities and constraints for their writing. Writing fan fiction in Wattpad requires understanding what other fans expect, what fan fiction writers and readers think good fan fiction is, and what the technological medium supports and allows. The same is true for any other kind of writing—we write in our journals and think of our future selves or anyone who might find the journal. We write as biologists for other specialists who understand previous findings and value the ideas of some biologists more than others. As students write across their general education courses, they find themselves repeatedly asked to write essays or research papers, but often learn the hard way that their history teacher, poetry teacher, and philosophy teacher all mean and expect very different things by "essay" or "research paper." This is because context, audience, purpose, medium, history, and values of the community all impact what writing is and needs to be in each situation.

There is no writing in general, and thus no single class or workshop or experience can teach people to write. once and for all. But people want to believe that it's possible to write in general because this belief makes writing seem less difficult and allows them to believe that writers can get a one-time writing inoculation that will extend across all settings. If this is the case, then non-English teachers and employers are off the hook; they don't have to help students learn to write in their classrooms or workplaces, they can just criticize writers for not being able to meet their expectations— and criticize English teachers for not doing their jobs.

The idea that we can all learn to "write in general" is not just a harmless myth. It's a dangerous idea that needs to die because it hurts students and frustrates teachers and employers. And writers who believe it are easily discouraged because they don't know how to learn what they need to learn in new writing situations.

A better conception of writing is one in which we all remember

(realistically) our own experiences learning to write in different situations, and then apply that memory to our expectations of what we and others are capable of achieving. A better notion of how writing works is one that recognizes that after learning scribal skills (letters, basic grammatical constructions), everything a writer does is impacted by the situation in which she is writing. And thus she is going to have to learn again in each new situation. Yes, she can apply and repurpose some of what she already knows how to do, but she will have to learn new things and not expect that what she already knows about writing is easily applicable in new situations. This means that when an employer hires a student fresh out of college and asks her to write a report for the CEO, he might expect that she knows what a report is in general, but he needs to remember that she's never seen a report at this company (she needs some examples), does not know the CEO and his idiosyncrasies (she needs some insider info), and does not yet understand what people in this setting consider important (she needs a heads-up on that). Similarly, parents should expect that their child might struggle when writing in a new class, or when moving from high school to college because learning takes time and requires being immersed in the context. Journalists and critics need to remember that texting employs certain conventions that are appropriate for their medium and purpose—and those are not destroying writing in general, because there is no writing in general. All of us, then, should give ourselves time to anticipate new writing situations, look at examples, find out what people's values and expectations are in them, and give ourselves time to practice and learn what we need to know in order to write successfully in that new situation.

If we can remember that there is no writing in general and no magic formula that will help us write well in all situations, we are more likely to be able to use (or transfer or repurpose) what we know effectively from prior writing situations. This is because we will be aware of the new context, on the lookout for examples, and willing to accept that struggle and practice are simply a part of learning to write in a new situation. Too frequently, writers attempt

to rigidly use what has worked for them in other situations, only to find out the hard way that such rigid re-use is not appropriate in the new setting. These ideas—that there is no writing in general, that writers always have more to learn, that failing or struggling are a normal part of writing—are some of the many threshold concepts of the discipline of writing studies. In other words, they are things researchers have learned, and things that will help writers be more effective, if only they can accept them in place of the common cultural assumptions about writing that are not always accurate.

There is no writing inoculation, because there is no such thing as writing in general. But this isn't bad news. Rather, it gives all writers permission to keep learning, to fail, and to engage in new kinds of writing in new situations.

Further Reading

For more about transfer of learning, see David Perkins and Gavriel Salomon's entry on transfer of learning in the *International Encyclopedia of Education*, Second Edition. For more about transfer specifically for writing, see Aviva Freedman and Christine Adam's "Learning to Write Professionally: 'Situated Learning' and the Transition from University to Professional Discourse," Anne Beaufort's *Writing in the Real World: Making the Transition from School to Work*, Patrick Dias et al.'s *Worlds Apart: Acting and Writing in Academic and Workplace Contexts*, Elon University's "Elon Statement on Writing Transfer," and a special-issue in the journal *Composition Forum* on transfer of writing-related knowledge and skills.

Keywords

dispositions, **genre conventions**, **genre**, **literacy**, **transfer**

Author Bio

Elizabeth Wardle is the Howe Professor of English and Director of the Roger and Joyce Howe Center for Writing Excellence at Miami University (Oxford, OH). She has directed the writing program at the University of Central Florida and the University of Dayton, experiences that have contributed to her ongoing interest in how learners use and transfer prior knowledge about writing, and how courses and programs can best help students learn to write more effectively. She regularly gives talks and workshops around the U.S. on how threshold concepts and knowledge about writing and knowledge transfer can be used to strengthen writing courses and programs.

23. Navigating Genres

KERRY DIRK

Abstract

In this chapter from *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing, Volume 1*, Kerry Dirk introduces students to genres as rhetorical responses to reoccurring or similar situations. After defining genre in the context of rhetoric and composition scholarship, she uses examples from popular culture, discussion from contemporary scholars, and personal experience to show students how genre awareness requires a rhetorical way of looking at writing. This chapter is meant not to teach students how to write in any one particular genre; rather, it is meant to help students start to see their own writing endeavors as texts that function within the context of genres.

This reading is available below or as a PDF.

There's a joke that's been floating around some time now that you've likely already heard.[1] It goes something like the following:

Q: What do you get when you rewind a country song?
A: You get your wife back, your job back, your dog back . . .

Maybe this joke makes you laugh. Or groan. Or tilt your head to the side in confusion. Because it just so happens that in order to get this joke, you must know a little something about country music in general and in particular country music lyrics. You must, in other words, be familiar with the country music genre.

Let's look into country music lyrics a bit more. Bear with me on this is if you're not a fan. Assuming I want to write lyrics to a country song, how would I figure out what lyrics are acceptable in terms of country songs? Listening to any country station for a short period of time might leave one with the following conclusions about country songs:

- Country songs tend to tell stories. They often have characters who are developed throughout the song.
- Country songs often have choruses that are broad enough to apply to a variety of verses.
- Country songs are often depressing; people lose jobs, lovers, and friends.
- Country songs express pride for the country style and way of life.
- Country songs are often political, responding to wars and economic crises, for example.

Given these characteristics, I would feel prepared to write some new country lyrics. But what would happen if I wanted to write a country song that didn't do any of the above things? Would it still be a country song?

You are probably already familiar with many genres, although you may not know them as such; perhaps your knowledge of genres is limited to types of books, whether mystery, horror, action, etc. Now I'm going to ask you to stick with me while I show you how knowledge of genres goes far beyond a simple discussion of types. My purposes are to expand your definition of genre (or to introduce you to a definition for the first time) and to help you start thinking about how genres might apply to your own writing endeavors. But above all, I hope to give you an awareness of how genres function by taking what is often quite theoretical in the field of rhetoric and composition and making it a bit more tangible. So why was I talking about country songs? I think that using such references can help you to see, in a quite concrete way, how genres function.

When I started writing this essay, I had some ideas of what I wanted to say. But first, I had to determine what this essay might look like. I've written a lot—letters, nonfiction pieces, scholarly articles, rants—but this was my first time writing an essay to you, a composition student. What features, I asked myself, should go into this essay? How personal could I get? What rhetorical moves might I use, effectively or ineffectively? I hoped that a similar type of essay already existed so that I would have something to guide my own writing. I knew I was looking for other essays written directly to students, and after finding many examples, I looked for common features. In particular, I noted the warm, personal style that was prevalent through every essay; the tone was primarily conversational. And more importantly, I noticed that the writer did not talk as an authoritative figure but as a coach. Some writers admitted that they did not know everything (we don't), and others even went so far as to admit ignorance. I found myself doing what Mary Jo Reiff, a professor who studies rhetoric and composition, did when she was asked to write about her experience of writing an essay about teaching for those new to the field of composition. She writes, "I immediately called on my genre knowledge—my past experience with reading and writing similar texts in similar situations—to orient me to the expectations of this genre" (157).

I further acknowledged that it is quite rare that teachers of writing get to write so directly to students in such an informal manner. Although textbooks are directed at students, they are often more formal affairs meant to serve a different purpose than this essay. And because the genre of this essay is still developing, there are no formal expectations for what this paper might look like. In my excitement, I realized that perhaps I had been granted more freedom in writing this essay than is typical of an already established, although never static, genre. As a result, I decided to make this essay a mix of personal anecdotes, examples, and voices from teachers of writing. Such an essay seems to be the most fitting response to this situation, as I hope to come across as someone both informative and friendly. Why am I telling you this? Because it seems only appropriate that given the fact that I am talking about genre awareness, I should make you aware of my own struggles with writing in a new genre.

I will admit that the word genre used to have a bad reputation and may still make some people cringe. Genre used to refer primarily to form, which meant that writing in a particular genre was seen as simply a matter of filling in the blanks. Anne Freadman, a specialist in genre theory, points out that "it is this kind of genre theory with its failures that has caused the discredit of the very notion of genre, bringing about in turn its disuse and the disrepair many of us found it in" (46). But genre theory has come a long way since then. Perhaps the shift started when the rhetorician Lloyd Bitzer wrote the following:

> Due to either the nature of things or convention, or both, some situations recur. The courtroom is the locus for several kinds of situations generating the speech of accusation, the speech of defense, the charge to the jury. From day to day, year to year, comparable situations occur, prompting comparable responses; hence rhetorical forms are born and a special vocabulary, grammar, and style are established. (13)

In other words, Bitzer is saying that when something new happens

that requires a response, someone must create that first response. Then when that situation happens again, another person uses the first response as a basis for the second, and eventually everyone who encounters this situation is basing his/her response on the previous ones, resulting in the creation of a new genre. Think about George Washington giving the first State of the Union Address. Because this genre was completely new, he had complete freedom to pick its form and content. All presidents following him now have these former addresses to help guide their response because the situation is now a reoccurring one. Amy Devitt, a professor who specializes in the study of genre theory, points out that "genres develop, then, because they respond appropriately to situations that writers encounter repeatedly" ("Generalizing" 576) and because "if each writing problem were to require a completely new assessment of how to respond, writing would be slowed considerably. But once we recognize a recurring situation, a situation that we or others have responded to in the past, our response to that situation can be guided by past responses" ("Generalizing" 576). As such, we can see how a genre like the State of the Union Address helps for more effective communication between the president and citizens because the president already has a genre with which to work; he/she doesn't have to create a new one, and citizens know what to expect from such an address.

The definition of genre has changed even more since Bitzer's article was written; genres are now viewed as even more than repeating rhetorical situations. Carolyn Miller, a leading professor in the field of technical communication, argues that "a rhetorically sound definition of genre must be centered . . . on the action it is used to accomplish" (151). How might this look? These actions don't have to be complex; many genres are a part of our daily lives. Think about genres as tools to help people to get things done. Devitt writes that:

> genres have the power to help or hurt human interaction,
> to ease communication or to deceive, to enable someone

to speak or to discourage someone from saying something different. People learn how to do *small talk* to ease the social discomfort of large group gatherings and meeting new people, but advertisers learn how to disguise *sales letters as winning sweepstakes entries.* (*Writing* 1)

In other words, knowing what a genre is used for can help people to accomplish goals, whether that goal be getting a job by knowing how to write a stellar resume, winning a person's heart by writing a romantic love letter, or getting into college by writing an effective personal statement.

By this point you might realize that you have been participating in many different genres—whether you are telling a joke, writing an email, or uploading a witty status on Facebook. Because you know how these genres function as social actions, you can quite accurately predict how they function rhetorically; your joke should generate a laugh, your email should elicit a response, and your updated Facebook status should generate comments from your online friends. But you have done more than simply filled in the blanks. Possibly without even thinking about it, you were recognizing the rhetorical situation of your action and choosing to act in a manner that would result in the outcome you desired. I imagine that you would probably not share a risqué joke with your mom, send a "Hey Buddy" email to your professor, or update your Facebook status as "X has a huge wart on his foot." We can see that more than form matters here, as knowing what is appropriate in these situations obviously requires more rhetorical knowledge than does filling out a credit card form. Devitt argues that "people do not label a particular story as a joke solely because of formal features but rather because of their perception of the rhetorical action that is occurring" (Writing 11). True, genres often have formulaic features, but these features can change even as the nature of the genre remains (Devitt, Writing, 48). What is important to consider here is that if mastering a form were simply a matter of plugging in content, we would all be capable of successfully writing anything

when we are given a formula. By now you likely know that writing is not that easy.

Fortunately, even if you have been taught to write in a formulaic way, you probably don't treat texts in such a manner. When approaching a genre for a the first time, you likely view it as more than a simple form: "Picking up a text, readers not only classify it and expect a certain form, but also make assumptions about the text's purposes, its subject matter, its writer, and its expected reader" (Devitt, Writing 12). We treat texts that we encounter as rhetorical objects; we choose be-tween horror movies and chick flicks not only because we are familiar with their forms but because we know what response they will elicit from us (nail-biting fear and dreamy sighs, respectively). Why am I picking popular genres to discuss? I think I agree with Miller when she argues the following:

> To consider as potential genres such homely discourse as the letter of recommendation, the user manual, the progress report, the ransom note, the lecture, and the white paper, as well as the eulogy, the apologia, the inaugural, the public proceeding, and the sermon, is not to trivialize the study of genres; it is to take seriously the rhetoric in which we are immersed and the situations in which we find ourselves. (155)

In other words, Miller is saying that all genres matter because they shape our everyday lives. And by studying the genres that we find familiar, we can start to see how specific choices that writers make result in specific actions on the part of readers; it only follows that our own writing must too be purposefully written.

I like examples, so here is one more. Many of you may be familiar with *The Onion*, a fictitious newspaper that uses real world examples to create humorous situations. Perhaps the most notable genre of *The Onion* is its headlines. The purpose of these headlines is simple: to make the reader respond by laughing. While many of the articles are also entertaining, the majority of the humor is produced through the headlines. In fact, the headlines are so

important to the success of the newspaper that they are tested on volunteers to see the readers' immediate responses. There are no formal features of these headlines besides the fact that they are all quite brief; they share no specific style. But they are a rhetorical action meant to bring about a specific response, which is why I see them as being their own genre. A few examples for those of you unfamiliar with this newspaper would help to explain what I'm saying. Here are a few of my personal favorites (politically charged or other possibly offensive headlines purposefully avoided):

- "Archaeological Dig Uncovers Ancient Race of Skeleton People"
- "Don't Run Away, I'm Not the Flesh-Eating Kind of Zombie"
- "Time Traveler: Everyone In The Future Eats Dippin' Dots"
- "'I Am Under 18' Button Clicked For First Time In History Of Internet"
- "Commas, Turning Up, Everywhere"
- "Myspace Outage Leaves Millions Friendless."
- "Amazon.com Recommendations Understand Area Woman Better Than Husband"
- "Study: Dolphins Not So Intelligent On Land"
- "Beaver Overthinking Dam"
- "Study: Alligators Dangerous No Matter How Drunk You Are"
- "Child In Corner To Exact Revenge As Soon As He Gets Out" (*The Onion*)

I would surmise with near certainty that at least one of these headlines made you laugh. Why? I think the success lies in the fact that the writers of these headlines are rhetorically aware of whom these headlines are directed toward—college students like you, and more specifically, educated college students who know enough about politics, culture, and U.S. and world events to "get" these headlines.

   And now for some bad news: figuring out a genre is tricky already, but this process is further complicated by the fact that two texts that might fit into the same genre might also look extremely

different. But let's think about why this might be the case. Devitt points out, "different grocery stores make for different grocery lists. Different law courts make for different legal briefs. And different college classes make for different research papers. Location may not be the first, second, and third most important qualities of writing, as it is for real estate, but location is surely among the situational elements that lead to expected genres and to adaptations of those genres in particular situations" ("Transferability" 218). Think about a time when you were asked to write a research paper. You probably had an idea of what that paper should look like, but you also needed to consider the location of the assignment. In other words, you needed to consider how your particular teacher's expectations would help to shape your assignment. This makes knowing a genre about much more than simply knowing its form. You also need to consider the context in which it is being used. As such, it's important to be aware that the research paper you might be required to write in freshman composition might be completely different than the research paper you might be asked to write for an introductory psychology class. Your goal is to recognize these shifts in location and to be aware of how such shifts might affect your writing.

Let's consider a genre with which you are surely familiar: the thesis statement. Stop for a moment and consider what this term means to you. Ask your classmates. It's likely that you each have your own definition of what a thesis statement should and should not look like. You may have heard never to start a thesis statement with a phrase like "In this essay." Or you might have been taught that a thesis statement should have three parts, each of which will be discussed in one paragraph of the essay. I learned that many good thesis statements follow the formula "X because Y," where "X" refers to a specific stance, and "Y" refers to a specific reason for taking that stance. For example, I could argue "School uniforms should be required because they will help students to focus more on academics and less on fashion." Now, whether or not this is a good thesis statement is irrelevant, but you can see how following the "X

because Y" formula would produce a nicely structured statement. Take this a step further and research "thesis statements" on the Internet, and you'll find that there are endless suggestions. And despite their vast differences, they all fit under the genre of thesis statement. How is this possible? Because it comes back to the particular situation in which that thesis statement is being used. Again, location is everything.

I think it's time to try our hand at approaching a genre with which I hope all of you are only vaguely familiar and completely unpracticed: the ransom note.

A Scenario

I've decided to kidnap Bob's daughter Susie for ransom. I'm behind on the mortgage payments, my yacht payments are also overdue, and I desperately need money. It is well known that Bob is one of the wealthiest people in Cash City, so I've targeted him as my future source of money. I've never met Bob, although one time his Mercedes cut me off in traffic, causing me to hit the brakes and spill my drink; the stain still glares at me from the floor of the car. The kidnapping part has been completed; now I need to leave Bob a ransom note. Let's look at a few drafts I've completed to decide which one would be most appropriate.

> *Ransom Letter 1:*
> If you ever want to see your daughter alive again, leave 1 million dollars by the blue garbage can at 123 Ransom Rd. at Midnight. Come alone and do not call the police.
> *Ransom Letter 2:*
> Hav daughter. Million $. Blu grbg can 123 Ransom Rd. 12AM. No poliz.
> *Ransom Letter 3:*
> Dear Bob, Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. You have a lovely house, and I very much enjoyed my recent

visit while you were out of town. Unfortunately, I have kidnapped your daughter. As I am currently unable to meet several financial demands, I am graciously turning to you for help in this matter. I am sure that we will be able to come to some mutually beneficial agreement that results in the return of your daughter and the padding of my wallet. Please meet with me at the Grounds Coffee House on First Street so that we may discuss what price is most fitting. Your daughter, meanwhile, remains in safe and competent hands. She is presently playing pool with my son Matt (a possible love connection?), and she says to tell you "Hi."

Yours truly,

Jim

P.S. Please order me a skim vanilla latte, should you arrive before I do.

Immediately, you can probably determine that ransom letter one is the best choice. But have you considered why? What does the first letter have that the other two are lacking? Let's first eliminate the most obvious dud—letter number three. Not only does it mimic the friendly, familiar manner of two friends rather than the threatening note of a deranged kidnapper, but it also suggests both that there is no rush in the matter and that the price is negotiable. Letters one and two are closer; they both contain the same information, but letter two fails to be as rhetorically strong as number one. The spelling errors and choppy feel might suggest that the writer of the note is not intelligent enough to get away with the kidnapping. The first letter is the most rhetorically strong because it is well written and direct. All of these letters would qualify as fitting the genre of ransom letter, but the first one most obviously fits the rhetorical situation.

It may be worthwhile to note some particular challenges you might have to approaching your writing genres as rhetorical situations. Perhaps you have come from a writing background

where you learned that certain rules apply to all writing. Just nod if these sound familiar:

- You must have a thesis statement at the end of the introduction.
- Every thesis statement should introduce three points of discussion.
- You cannot use "I" in writing.
- You cannot begin a sentence with a coordinating conjunction.
- Every paragraph should start with a topic sentence.

You get the point. These rules are appealing; they tell us exactly what to do and not to do with regard to writing. I remember happily creating introductions that moved from broad to specific (often starting with "In our world"), constructing three point thesis statements, and beginning paragraphs with "first," "second," and "third." I didn't have to think about audience, or purpose, or even much about content for that matter. All that really mattered was that essay followed a certain formula that was called good writing. But looking back, what resulted from such formulas was not very good; actually, it was quite bad. That is, of course, not to say that there aren't rules that come with genres; the difference is that the rules change as the genre changes, that no rules apply to all genres, and that genres require more effort than simply following the rules. Because genres usually come with established conventions, it is risky to choose not to follow such conventions. These similarities within genres help us to communicate successfully; imagine the chaos that would ensue if news broadcasts were done in raps, if all legal briefs were written in couplets, or if your teacher handed you a syllabus and told you that it must first be decoded. In sum, "too much choice is as debilitating of meaning as is too little choice. In language, too much variation results eventually in lack of meaning: mutual unintelligibility" (Devitt, "Genre" 53).

But on a brighter note, genres also help us to make more efficient decisions when writing, as we can see how people have approached

similar situations. Creating a new genre each time that writing was required would make the writing process much longer, as we would not have past responses to help us with present ones (Devitt, "Generalizing" 576). As a result, the more you are able to master particular genres, the better equipped you may be to master genres that you later encounter:

> When people write, they draw on the genres they know, their own context of genres, to help construct their rhetorical action. If they encounter a situation new to them, it is the genres they have acquired in the past that they can use to shape their new action. Every genre they acquire, then, expands their genre repertoire and simultaneously shapes how they might view new situations. (Devitt, *Writing* 203)

Taking what Devitt says into account, think back to the previous discussion of the research paper. If you already have some idea of what a research paper looks like, you do not have to learn an entirely new genre. Instead, you just have to figure out how to change that particular genre to fit with the situation, even if that change just comes from having a different teacher.

   Learning about genres and how they function is more important than mastering one particular genre; it is this knowledge that helps us to recognize and to determine appropriate responses to different situations—that is, knowing what particular genre is called for in a particular situation. And learning every genre would be impossible anyway, as Devitt notes that "no writing class could possibly teach students all the genres they will need to succeed even in school, much less in the workplace or in their civic lives. Hence the value of teaching genre awareness rather than acquisition of particular genres" (Writing 205). This approach helps to make you a more effective writer as well, as knowing about genres will make you more prepared to use genres that you won't learn in college. For example, I recently needed to write a letter about removing a late fee on a credit card. I had never written this particular type of letter before,

but I knew what action I was trying to accomplish. As a result, I did some research on writing letters and determined that I should make it as formal and polite as possible. The body of the letter ended up as follows:

> I have very much enjoyed being a card carrier with this bank for many years. However, I recently had a late fee charged to my account. As you will note from my previous statements, this is the first late fee I have ever acquired. I do remember making this payment on time, as I have all of my previous payments. I hope to remain a loyal customer of this bank for many years to come, so I would very much appreciate it if you would remove this charge from my account.

You can see that this letter does several things. First, I build credibility for myself by reminding them that I have used their card for many years. Second, I ask them to check my records to show further that I am typically a responsible card carrier. And third, I hint that if they do not remove the late fee, I might decide to change to a different bank. This letter is effective because it considers how the situation affects the genre. And yes, the late fee was removed.

Chances are that I have left you more confused than you were before you began this essay. Actually, I hope that I have left you frustrated; this means that the next time you write, you will have to consider not only form but also audience, purpose, and genre; you will, in other words, have to consider the rhetorical effectiveness of your writing. Luckily, I can leave you with a few suggestions:

- First, determine what action you are trying to accomplish. Are you trying to receive an A on a paper? Convince a credit card company to remove a late fee? Get into graduate school? If you don't know what your goal is for a particular writing situation, you'll have a difficult time figuring out what genre to use.
- Second, learn as much as you can about the situation for which you are writing. What is the purpose? Who is the audience? How much freedom do you have? How does the location affect

the genre?

- Third, research how others have responded to similar situations. Talk to people who have written what you are trying to write. If you are asked to write a biology research paper, ask your instructor for examples. If you need to write a cover letter for a summer internship, take the time to find out about the location of that internship.
- And finally, ask questions.

Discussion

1. What are some genres that you feel you know well? How did you learn them? What are their common rhetorical features?
2. What rules have you been told to follow in the past? How did they shape what you were writing?
3. How much freedom do you enjoy when writing? Does it help to have a form to follow, or do you find it to be limiting?

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Keywords

dispositions, **genre conventions**, **genre**, **literacy**

Author Bio

Kerry Dirk graduated from Virginia Tech in 2013 with a PhD in Composition and Rhetoric/Writing Studies. Today, she is the Director of Philanthropy at the Congregation for the Homeless, located in Woodinville, Washington.

24. Understanding Discourse Communities

DAN MELZER

Abstract

This chapter from *Writing Spaces: Readings About Writing, Volume 3* explains why the concept of **discourse communities** is so important for college writing and beyond. Dan Melzer explains how genres operate within discourse communities, why different discourse communities have different expectations for writing, and how to understand what qualifies as a discourse community. The article relates the concept of discourse community to a personal example from the author (an acoustic guitar jam group) and an example of the academic discipline of history. The article takes a critical stance regarding the concept of discourse community, discussing both the benefits and constraints of communicating within discourse communities. The article concludes with writerly questions students can ask themselves as they enter new discourse communities in order to be more effective communicators.

The reading is available below or as a PDF. The PDF includes additional teacher resources.

Last year, I decided that if I was ever going to achieve my lifelong fantasy of being the first college writing teacher to transform into an international rock star, I should probably graduate from playing the video game *Guitar Hero* to actually learning to play guitar.[1] I bought an acoustic guitar and started watching every beginning guitar instructional video on YouTube. At first, the vocabulary the online guitar teachers used was like a foreign language to me—terms like major and minor chords, open G tuning, and circle of fifths. I was overwhelmed by how complicated it all was, and the fingertips on my left hand felt like they were going to fall off from pressing on the steel strings on the neck of my guitar to form chords. I felt like I was making incredibly slow progress, and at the rate I was going, I wouldn't be a guitar god until I was 87. I was also getting tired of playing alone in my living room. I wanted to find a community of people who shared my goal of learning songs and playing guitar together for fun.

I needed a way to find other beginning and intermediate guitar players, and I decided to try a social media website called "Meetup.com." It only took a few clicks to find the right community for me—an "acoustic jam" group that welcomed beginners and met once a month at a music store near my city of Sacramento, California. On the Meetup.com site, it said that everyone who showed up for the jam should bring a few songs to share, but I wasn't sure what kind of music they played, so I just showed up at the next meet-up with my guitar and the basic look you need to become a

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guitar legend: two days of facial hair stubble, black t-shirt, ripped jeans, and a gravelly voice (luckily my throat was sore from shouting the lyrics to the Twenty One Pilots song "Heathens" while playing guitar in my living room the night before).

The first time I played with the group, I felt more like a junior high school band camp dropout then the next Jimi Hendrix. I had trouble keeping up with the chord changes, and I didn't know any scales (groups of related notes in the same key that work well together) to solo on lead guitar when it was my turn. I had trouble figuring out the patterns for my strumming hand since no one took the time to explain them before we started playing a new song. The group had some beginners, but I was the least experienced player.

It took a few more meet-ups, but pretty soon I figured out how to fit into the group. I learned that they played all kinds of songs, from country to blues to folk to rock music. I learned that they chose songs with simple chords so beginners like me could play along. I learned that they brought print copies of the chords and lyrics of songs to share, and if there were any difficult chords in a song, they included a visual of the chord shape in the handout of chords and lyrics. I started to learn the musician's vocabulary I needed to be familiar with to function in the group, like *beats per measure* and *octaves* and the *minor pentatonic scale*. I learned that if I was having trouble figuring out the chord changes, I could watch the better guitarists and copy what they were doing. I also got good advice from experienced players, like soaking your fingers in rubbing alcohol every day for ninety seconds to toughen them up so the steel strings wouldn't hurt as much. I even realized that although I was an inexperienced player, I could contribute to the community by bringing in new songs they hadn't played before.

Okay, at this point you may be saying to yourself that all of this will make a great biographical movie someday when I become a rock icon (or maybe not), but what does it have to do with becoming a better writer?

You can write in a journal alone in your room, just like you can play guitar just for yourself alone in your room. But most writers,

like most musicians, learn their craft from studying experts and becoming part of a community. And most writers, like most musicians, want to be a part of community and communicate with other people who share their goals and interests. Writing teachers and scholars have come up with the concept of "discourse community" to describe a community of people who share the same goals, the same methods of communicating, the same genres, and the same lexis (specialized language).

What Exactly Is a Discourse Community?

John Swales, a scholar in linguistics, says that discourse communities have the following features (which I'm paraphrasing):

1. A broadly agreed upon set of common public goals
2. Mechanisms of intercommunication among members
3. Use of these communication mechanisms to provide information and feedback
4. One or more genres that help further the goals of the discourse community
5. A specific lexis (specialized language)
6. A threshold level of expert members (24-26)

I'll use my example of the monthly guitar jam group I joined to explain these six aspects of a discourse community.

A Broadly Agreed Set of Common Public Goals

The guitar jam group had shared goals that we all agreed on. In the Meetup.com description of the site, the organizer of the group emphasized that these monthly gatherings were for having fun, enjoying the music, and learning new songs. "Guitar players" or "people who like music" or even "guitarists in Sacramento, California" are not discourse communities. They don't share the

same goals, and they don't all interact with each other to meet the same goals.

Mechanisms of Intercommunication Among Members

The guitar jam group communicated primarily through the Meetup.com site. This is how we recruited new members, shared information about when and where we were playing, and communicated with each other outside of the night of the guitar jam. "People who use Meetup.com" are not a discourse community, because even though they're using the same method of communication, they don't all share the same goals and they don't all regularly interact with each other. But a Meetup.com group like the Sacramento acoustic guitar jam focused on a specific topic with shared goals and a community of members who frequently interact can be considered a discourse community based on Swales' definition.

Use of These Communication Mechanisms to Provide Information and Feedback

Once I found the guitar jam group on Meetup.com, I wanted information about topics like what skill levels could participate, what kind of music they played, and where and when they met. Once I was at my first guitar jam, the primary information I needed was the chords and lyrics of each song, so the handouts with chords and lyrics were a key means of providing critical information to community members. Communication mechanisms in discourse communities can be emails, text messages, social media tools, print texts, memes, oral presentations, and so on. One reason that Swales uses the term "discourse" instead of "writing" is that the term "discourse" can mean any type of communication, from talking to writing to music to images to multimedia.

One or More Genres That Help Further the Goals of the Discourse
Community

One of the most common ways discourse communities share
information and meet their goals is through genres. To help explain
the concept of genre, I'll use music since I've been talking about
playing guitar and music is probably an example you can relate to.
Obviously there are many types of music, from rap to country to
reggae to heavy metal. Each of these types of music is considered a
genre, in part because the music has shared features, from the style
of the music to the subject of the lyrics to the lexis. For example,
most rap has a steady bass beat, most rappers use spoken word
rather singing, and rap lyrics usually draw on a lexis associated with
young people. But a genre is much more than a set of features.
Genres arise out of social purposes, and they're a form of social
action within discourse communities. The rap battles of today have
historical roots in African oral contests, and modern rap music
can only be understood in the context of hip hop culture, which
includes break dancing and street art. Rap also has social purposes,
including resisting social oppression and telling the truth about
social conditions that aren't always reported on by news outlets.
Like all genres, rap is not just a formula but a tool for social action.

The guitar jam group used two primary genres to meet the goals
of the community. The Meetup.com site was one important genre
that was critical in the formation of the group and to help it recruit
new members. It was also the genre that delivered information to
the members about what the community was about and where and
when the community would be meeting. The other important genre
to the guitar jam group were the handouts with song chords and
lyrics. I'm sharing an example of a song I brought to the group to
show you what this genre looks like.

Heart of Gold

Neil Young

Em   C D   G
I wanna live, I wanna give.

Em   C   D   G
I've been a miner for a heart of gold.

Em   C   D   G
It's these expressions, I never give.

Em   G
That keep me searchin' for a heart of gold.

C   G
And I'm gettin' old.

Em   G
That keep me searchin' for a heart of gold.

C   G
And I'm gettin' old.

Em   C   D   G
I've been to Hollywood, I've been to redwood.

Em   C   D   G
I've crossed the ocean for a heart of gold.

Em   C D   G
I've been in my mind, it's such a fine line.

Em   G
That keep me searchin' for a heart of gold.

C   G
And I'm gettin' old.

Em   G
That keep me searchin' for a heart of gold.

C   G
And I'm gettin' old.

Em7   D   E
Keep me searchin' for a heart of gold.

Em7   D   E
You keep me searchin' for a heart of gold.

Em 7   D   E
You keep my searchin' and I'm growing old.

Em   G   C G
I've been a miner for a heart of gold.

Em7

Figure 1: Lyrics and chord changes for "Heart of Gold" by Neil Young with a fingering chart for an E minor 7 chord

This genre of the chord and lyrics sheet was needed to make sure everyone could play along and follow the singer. The conventions of this genre—the "norms"—weren't just arbitrary rules or formulas. As with all genres, the conventions developed because of the social

action of the genre. The sheets included lyrics so that we could all sing along and make sure we knew when to change chords. The sheets included visuals of unusual chords, like the Em7 chord (E minor seventh) in my example, because there were some beginner guitarists who were a part of the community. If the community members were all expert guitarists, then the inclusion of chord shapes would never have become a convention. A great resource to learn more about the concept of genre is the essay "Navigating Genres" by Kerry Dirk in volume 1 of *Writing Spaces*.

A Specific Lexis (Specialized Language)

To anyone who wasn't a musician, our guitar meet-ups might have sounded like we were communicating in a foreign language. We talked about the root note of scale, a 1/4/5 chord progression, putting a capo on different frets, whether to play solos in a major or minor scale, double drop D tuning, and so on. If someone couldn't quickly identify what key their song was in or how many beats per measure the strumming pattern required, they wouldn't be able to communicate effectively with the community members. We didn't use this language to show off or to try to discourage outsiders from joining our group. We needed these specialized terms—this musician's lexis—to make sure we were all playing together effectively.

A Threshold Level of Expert Members

If everyone in the guitar jam was at my beginner level when I first joined the group, we wouldn't have been very successful. I relied on more experienced players to figure out strumming patterns and chord changes, and I learned to improve my solos by watching other players use various techniques in their soloing. The most experienced players also helped educate everyone on the

conventions of the group (the "norms" of how the group interacted). These conventions included everyone playing in the same key, everyone taking turns playing solo lead guitar, and everyone bringing songs to play. But discourse community conventions aren't always just about maintaining group harmony. In most discourse communities, new members can also expand the knowledge and genres of the community. For example, I shared songs that no one had brought before, and that expanded the community's base of knowledge.

Why the Concept of Discourse Communities Matters for College Writing

When I was an undergraduate at the University of Florida, I didn't understand that each academic discipline I took courses in to complete the requirements of my degree (history, philosophy, biology, math, political science, sociology, English) was a different discourse community. Each of these academic fields had their own goals, their own genres, their own writing conventions, their own formats for citing sources, and their own expectations for writing style. I thought each of the teachers I encountered in my undergraduate career just had their own personal preferences that all felt pretty random to me. I didn't understand that each teacher was trying to act as a representative of the discourse community of their field. I was a new member of their discourse communities, and they were introducing me to the genres and conventions of their disciplines. Unfortunately, teachers are so used to the conventions of their discourse communities that they sometimes don't explain to students the reasons behind the writing conventions of their discourse communities.

It wasn't until I studied research about college writing while I was in graduate school that I learned about genres and discourse communities, and by the time I was doing my dissertation for my PhD, I got so interested in studying college writing that I did a

national study of college teachers' writing assignments and syllabi. Believe it or not, I analyzed the genres and discourse communities of over 2,000 college writing assignments in my book *Assignments Across the Curriculum*. To show you why the idea of discourse community is so important to college writing, I'm going to share with you some information from one of the academic disciplines I studied: history. First I want to share with you an excerpt from a history course writing assignment from my study. As you read it over, think about what it tells you about the conventions of the discourse community of history.

Documentary Analysis

This assignment requires you to play the detective, combing textual sources for clues and evidence to form a reconstruction of past events. If you took A.P. history courses in high school, you may recall doing similar document-based questions (DBQs). In a tight, well-argued essay of two to four pages, identify and assess the historical significance of the documents in ONE of the four sets I have given you.

   You bring to this assignment a limited body of outside knowledge gained from our readings, class discussions, and videos. Make the most of this contextual knowledge when interpreting your sources: you may, for example, refer to one of the document from another set if it sheds light on the items in your own.

Questions to Consider When Planning Your Essay

- What do the documents reveal about the author and his audience?
- Why were they written?
- What can you discern about the author's motivation and tone? Is the tone revealing?

- Does the genre make a difference in your interpretation?
- How do the documents fit into both their immediate and their greater historical contexts?
- Do your documents support or contradict what other sources (video, readings) have told you?
- Do the documents reveal a change that occurred over a period of time?
- Is there a contrast between documents within your set? If so, how do you account for it?
- Do they shed light on a historical event, problem, or period? How do they fit into the "big picture"?
- What incidental information can you glean from them by reading carefully? Such information is important for constructing a narrative of the past; our medieval authors almost always tell us more than they intended to.
- What is not said, but implied?
- What is left out? (As a historian, you should always look for what is not said, and ask yourself what the omission signifies.)
- Taken together, do the documents reveal anything significant about the period in question? (Melzer 3-4)

This assignment doesn't just represent the specific preferences of one random teacher. It's a common history genre (the documentary analysis) that helps introduce students to the ways of thinking and the communication conventions of the discourse community of historians. This genre reveals that historians look for textual clues to reconstruct past events and that historians bring their own knowledge to bear when they analyze texts and interpret history (historians are not entirely "objective" or "neutral"). In this documentary analysis genre, the instructor emphasizes that historians are always looking for what is not said but instead is implied. This instructor is using an important genre of history to introduce students to the ways of analyzing and thinking in the discourse community of historians. Let's look at another history course in my research. I'm sharing with you an excerpt from the

syllabus of a history of the American West course. This part of the syllabus gives students an overview of the purpose of the writing projects in the class. As you read this overview, think about the ways this instructor is portraying the discourse community of historians.

A300: History of the American West

A300 is designed to allow students to explore the history of the American West on a personal level with an eye toward expanding their knowledge of various western themes, from exploration to the Indian Wars, to the impact of global capitalism and the emergence of the environmental movement. But students will also learn about the craft of history, including the tools used by practitioners, how to weigh competing evidence, and how to build a convincing argument about the past.

   At the end of this course students should understand that history is socially interpreted, and that the past has always been used as an important means for understanding the present. Old family photos, a grandparent's memories, even family reunions allow people to understand their lives through an appreciation of the past. These events and artifacts remind us that history is a dynamic and interpretive field of study that requires far more than rote memorization. Historians balance their knowledge of primary sources (diaries, letters, artifacts, and other documents from the period under study) with later interpretations of these people, places, and events (in the form of scholarly monographs and articles) known as secondary sources. Through the evaluation and discussion of these different interpretations historians come to a socially negotiated understanding of historical figures and events.

Individual Projects

More generally, your papers should:

1. Empathize with the person, place, or event you are writing about. The goal here is to use your understanding of the primary and secondary sources you have read to "become" that person–i.e. to appreciate their perspectives on the time or event under study. In essence, students should demonstrate an appreciation of that time within its context.
2. Second, students should be able to present the past in terms of its relevance to contemporary issues. What do their individual projects tell us about the present? For example, what does the treatment of Native Americans, Mexican Americans, and Asian Americans in the West tell us about the problem of race in the United States today?
3. Third, in developing their individual and group projects, students should demonstrate that they have researched and located primary and secondary sources. Through this process they will develop the skills of a historian, and present an interpretation of the past that is credible to their peers and instructors.

Just like the history instructor who gave students the documentary analysis assignment, this history of the American West instructor emphasizes that the discourse community of historians doesn't focus on just memorizing facts, but on analyzing and interpreting competing evidence. Both the documentary analysis assignment and the information from the history of the American West syllabus show that an important shared goal of the discourse community of historians is socially constructing the past using evidence from different types of artifacts, from texts to photos to interviews with people who have lived through important historical events. The discourse community goals and conventions of the different academic disciplines you encounter as an undergraduate shape everything about writing: which genres are most important, what counts as evidence, how arguments are constructed, and what style is most appropriate and effective.

The history of the American West course is a good example of the

ways that discourse community goals and values can change over time. It wasn't that long ago that American historians who wrote about the West operated on the philosophy of "manifest destiny." Most early historians of the American West assumed that the American colonizers had the right to take land from indigenous tribes—that it was the white European's "destiny" to colonize the American West. The evidence early historians used in their writing and the ways they interpreted that evidence relied on the perspectives of the "settlers," and the perspectives of the indigenous people were ignored by historians. The concept of manifest destiny has been strongly critiqued by modern historians, and one of the primary goals of most modern historians who write about the American West is to recover the perspectives and stories of the indigenous peoples as well as to continue to work for social justice for Native Americans by showing how historical injustices continue in different forms to the present day. Native American historians are now retelling history from the perspective of indigenous people, using indigenous research methods that are often much different than the traditional research methods of historians of the American West. Discourse community norms can silence and marginalize people, but discourse communities can also be transformed by new members who challenge the goals and assumptions and research methods and genre conventions of the community.

Discourse Communities from School to Work and Beyond

Understanding what a discourse community is and the ways that genres perform social actions in discourse communities can help you better understand where your college teachers are coming from in their writing assignments and also help you understand why there are different writing expectations and genres for different classes in different fields. Researchers who study college writing have discovered that most students struggle with writing when they first enter the discourse community of their chosen major, just

like I struggled when I first joined the acoustic guitar jam group. When you graduate college and start your first job, you will probably also find yourself struggling a bit with trying to learn the writing conventions of the discourse community of your workplace. Knowing how discourse communities work will not only help you as you navigate the writing assigned in different general education courses and the specialized writing of your chosen major, but it will also help you in your life after college. Whether you work as a scientist in a lab or a lawyer for a firm or a nurse in a hospital, you will need to become a member of a discourse community. You'll need to learn to communicate effectively using the genres of the discourse community of your workplace, and this might mean asking questions of more experienced discourse community members, analyzing models of the types of genres you're expected to use to communicate, and thinking about the most effective style, tone, format, and structure for your audience and purpose. Some workplaces have guidelines for how to write in the genres of the discourse community, and some workplaces will initiate you to their genres by trial and error. But hopefully now that you've read this essay, you'll have a better idea of what kinds of questions to ask to help you become an effective communicator in a new discourse community. I'll end this essay with a list of questions you can ask yourself whenever you're entering a new discourse community and learning the genres of the community:

1. What are the goals of the discourse community?
2. What are the most important genres community members use to achieve these goals?
3. Who are the most experienced communicators in the discourse community?
4. Where can I find models of the kinds of genres used by the discourse community?
5. Who are the different audiences the discourse community communicates with, and how can I adjust my writing for these different audiences?

6. What conventions of format, organization, and style does the discourse community value?

7. What specialized vocabulary (lexis) do I need to know to communicate effectively with discourse community insiders?

8. How does the discourse community make arguments, and what types of evidence are valued?

9. Do the conventions of the discourse community silence any members or force any members to conform to the community in ways that make them uncomfortable?

10. What can I add to the discourse community?

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Keywords

discourse community, **genre**

Author Bio

Dan Melzer is the Associate Director of First-Year Composition at the University of California, Davis. His research interests include writing across the curriculum, writing program administration, and multiple literacies. His articles have appeared in College Composition and Communication, Writing Program Administration, Kairos, The WAC Journal, and other publications.

25. Make Your "Move": Writing in Genres

BRAD JACOBSON; MADELYN PAWLOWSKI; AND CHRISTINE M. TARDY

Abstract

When approaching new genres, students often wonder what kind of information to include and how.[1] Rhetorical moves analysis, a type of genre analysis, offers a useful, practical approach for students to understand how writers achieve their goals in a genre through various writing strategies. In this chapter from *Writing Spaces: Readings About Writing, Volume 4*, students are introduced to moves analysis, first describing what it is and then explaining various strategies for analyzing moves. The chapter walks

students through moves analysis with both a familiar low-stakes genre (student absence emails) and a less familiar professional genre (grant proposals), demonstrating how such an analysis can be carried out. The goal of the chapter is to familiarize students with rhetorical moves analysis as a practical tool for understanding new genres and for identifying options that can help writers carry out their goals.

This reading is available below or as a PDF. The PDF includes additional appendices and teacher resources.

If you are like most students, you've probably had to miss a class at some point. Maybe you were sick, stayed up too late the night before, or just weren't prepared. When you've found yourself in this situation, have you emailed your professor about your absence? If so, how much information did you share? Did you include an apology, or maybe an explanation of how you plan to make up any missed work? You may not realize it, but the email written to a teacher in this situation can be considered a *genre*. You've probably heard the term genre used in relation to music, film, art, or literature, but it is also used to describe non-literary writing, like the writing we do in our personal lives, at school, and at work. These genres can be thought of as *categories of writing*. These categories are based on what the writing is trying to *do*, as well as who it is written for and the context it is written in (Dirk; Miller). For instance, a condolence card or message carries out the action (or goal) of sharing your sympathy with someone. A student absence email lets a teacher know about an absence and might also request information for how to make up a missed class.

You encounter many genres every day. In your personal life, these might include to-do lists, menus, political ads, and text messages to schedule a get-together. In school, you may write in genres like

proposals, lab reports, and university admission essays. People in professions often write in highly specialized genres: nurses write care plans; lawyers write legal briefs; scientists write research articles, and so on. (For a more in-depth introduction to the definition and functions of genre, check out Dirk's "Navigating Genres" chapter in *Writing Spaces* Vol. 1.)

Texts within a genre category aren't identical, but they often resemble each other in many ways. For example, they might use similar kinds of vocabulary and grammar, design features, content, and patterns for organizing their content. Because of these resemblances, we can often recognize texts as belonging to a particular genre—as in figure 1.

★★★★☆ 4/19/2020

The food was amazing! Had "The Burro" hands down one of the best carne asada burros I've had. Extremely huge could easily feed two people. Their salsa was amazing as well. Jalepeño crema was delicious! It was a little on the pricey side $80 for 5 entrees but certainly very top notch food.
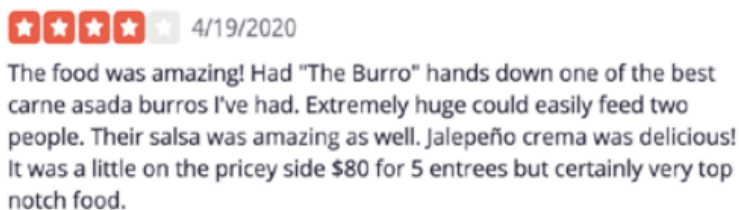
Figure 1: Four-star restaurant review of Boca Tacos & Tequila, posted April 19, 2020. Text reads: "The food was amazing! Had 'The Burro' hands down one of the best carne asada burros I've had. Extremely huge could easily feed two people. Their salsa was amazing as well. Jalepeño crème was delicious! It was a little on the pricey side $80 for 5 entrees but certainly very top notch food." Yelp; Yelp.com, 19 Apr. 2020, https://www.yelp.com/biz/boca-tacos-y-tequila-tucson

If you recognized this text as a consumer restaurant review, you likely have read similar reviews before, and you've started to get a sense of what they "look like." This is how genres work: When we repeatedly encounter texts within a genre, we get a sense of the language and content they tend to use, as well as how they arrange that language and content. Successful writers have a good idea of how to write effectively in particular genres— this means satisfying readers' expectations for the genre but maybe also making a text

fresh and interesting. Can you think of a time you had to write in a new or unfamiliar genre for the first time? You might have gotten stuck with where to start or what to include. Writing in a new genre can be hard if you don't yet know the expectations for content, language, and organization. In this chapter, we'll share a specific strategy that can help you through these kinds of challenges. More specifically, we will look at how to identify and analyze the *rhetorical moves* of a genre.

What Are Rhetorical Moves?

Most likely, the term *rhetorical moves* is new to you. It may sound intimidating, but it's just a (sort of) fancy phrase to describe something you probably already do. Rhetorical moves—also just called *moves*—are the parts of a text that carry out specific goals; they help writers accomplish the main action of the genre (Swales). For example, a typical wedding invitation in the United States includes moves like *inviting* ("You are invited to attend…") and *providing venue information* ("…at the Tucson Botanical Gardens"). These moves are necessary to carry out the genre's main action; without an *inviting* move, an invitation could easily fail to accomplish its goal, and without a *providing venue information* move, attendees won't know where to go! A wedding invitation can also include optional moves like *recognizing parents* ("Jordan and Jaime Taylor request your company at…") or *signaling appropriate attire* ("Black tie optional"). Optional moves often respond to specific aspects of a situation or give writers a way to express certain identities or personal goals. Wedding invitations in different countries or cultural communities can have different common moves as well. In China, for example, wedding invitations often include the character for *double happiness* (囍).

Even a text as short as a restaurant review can include multiple moves. The main action of a restaurant review is to tell other people about the restaurant so that they can decide whether to eat there or

not, so the moves that a writer includes work toward that goal. The review in Figure 1 includes three moves:

- evaluating the restaurant overall ("The food was amazing!")
- evaluating specific dishes ("...one of the best carne asada burros I've had...," "Their salsa was amazing...")
- providing details about the price ("It was a little on the pricey side...")

After looking at just *one* restaurant review, we don't really know if these are typical moves or if they are just unique to this one consumer's review. To understand what moves are *common* to consumer restaurant reviews (which might be a bit different than professional restaurant reviews), we need to look at many examples of texts in that genre. As a writer, it can be very useful to look for moves that are required (sometimes called *obligatory moves*), common, optional, and rare. You can also think about moves that never seem to occur and consider why that might be the case. For example, have you ever seen a wedding invitation mention whether this is someone's second (or third) marriage? Or that mentions how much the wedding is going to cost? Those particular moves would probably confuse some readers and not help achieve the goal of the genre!

Analyzing Rhetorical Moves

Analyzing rhetorical moves is the process of identifying moves in multiple samples of a genre, looking for patterns across these texts, and thinking critically about the role these moves play in helping the genre function. To get started with moves analysis, you just need a few strategies we'll show you throughout the rest of this chapter. We ourselves have used these strategies in situations where we had to write in unfamiliar genres. As a new professor, Madelyn recently had to write her first annual review report—a document used to

track her career progress. The instructions she was given were a bit vague and confusing, so she gathered samples of annual reviews from her colleagues to get a better sense of the typical length and type of content included in this genre. One sample she looked at used an elaborate chart, which made her quite nervous because she had no idea how to make this kind of chart for her own report! But after realizing that this chart was not included in the other samples, she decided this move was probably optional and decided to not include it. In this case, understanding the typical moves of the annual review report helped Madelyn avoid unnecessary stress and feel confident her report would meet readers' expectations.

Before trying to figure out a complicated or unfamiliar genre, it will help to practice first with something familiar like a student absence email. Having received hundreds of these emails as professors (and written a few ourselves), we know this genre is characterized by some typical rhetorical moves as well as a great deal of variation. Let's walk through the process of carrying out a rhetorical moves analysis.

Identifying Typical Moves of a Genre

The emails in Table 1 were all written by college students (referred to here by pseudonyms). We only share four samples here, but it's better to gather 5-10 or even more samples of a genre to really get a sense of common features, especially when you are working with a more complex or unfamiliar genre. To identify typical rhetorical moves, first, you'll want to identify the moves in each individual text you collect. Remember that a move is a part of the text that helps the writer carry out a particular function or action. For this reason, it is helpful to label moves with a verb or an "action" word. When you sense that the writer is doing something different or performing a new "action," you've probably identified another rhetorical move. A move can be one sentence long, an entire paragraph, or even longer,

and your interpretation of a move might differ from someone else's interpretation. That's okay!

Rhetorical Moves in Four Sample Absence Emails

Sample 1

Dear Dr. Pawlowski,

[1] I just wanted to tell you that I will be absent from class today. [2] I have completed my mid-term evaluation and I have started my annotated bibliography. If I have any other questions I will ask my study partner! [3] Thank you, and I will see you on Friday!

Sincerely,

Jay Johnson

Sample 2

Dear Professor,

[1] I am sorry but [2] today I am missing class [3] because I have to take my cat to the vet due to an emergency. [4] Could you let me know what I need to do to make up the missed material?

[5] Thank you for your understanding,

Layla

Sample 3

Good morning,

I hope you had a wonderful spring break. [1] I am still experiencing cold symptoms from the cold I caught during the start of spring break. It was mainly from digestive problems (bathroom issues) coming from medication that [2] I had trouble coming to class yesterday. [3] I would like to apologize for any inconvenience I might have caused.

[4] I am continually working on the final assignment that is due tomorrow. [5] If I am not able to turn it in on time, could I possibly have a 24 hour extension? If not, I understand. [6] Thank you as always and I hope to see you tomorrow.

Best Wishes,
Corey M.

Sample 4
Hi, [1] Sorry but [2] I won't be in class today.
Ali

Look at how we labeled the moves in these four samples. We did this by first reading each sample individually and thinking about how different parts achieve actions. We then labeled these parts with verb phrases to describe the writer's moves. In some texts, multiple sentences worked together to help the writer accomplish a particular goal, so we grouped those sentences together and labeled them as a single move (notice move 2 in Sample 1). Sometimes we found that a single sentence helped to accomplish multiple goals, so we labeled multiple moves in a single sentence (notice Sample 4). Don't worry if you feel like you aren't locating the "right" moves or labeling them appropriately; this is not an exact science! You might choose different labels or identify more or fewer moves than someone else analyzing the same samples. To find a fitting label for a move, it's helpful to ask, "What is the writer *doing* in this part of the text?" To keep consistency in your labeling, it might also help to ask, "Have I seen something like this before in a different sample?" Looking at how we labeled the moves, would you agree with our labels? Do you see any additional moves? Would you have broken up the samples differently?

After identifying moves in individual samples, the next step is to compare the samples, looking for similarities and differences to better understand what moves seem typical (or unusual) for the genre. Based on our labels in Table 1, what moves do you see most and least frequently? A table is useful for this step, especially when you are working with longer or more complex genres and want to visualize the similarities and differences between samples. In Table 2, we listed all of the moves found in the four samples, noted which samples included each move, and decided whether each move

seemed obligatory, common, optional, or rare for this particular genre based on how often it appeared. If we noticed the move in every sample, we labeled it as "obligatory," but if we only saw a move in one or two samples, we figured it might be more optional or rare. We need to be careful, however, about making definite conclusions about what is or is not a typical feature of a genre when looking at such a small set of texts. We would probably locate many more moves or develop a different analysis with a larger sample size. Nevertheless, check out our findings in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparing move across samples

Move	S. 1	S. 2	S. 3	S. 4	Obligatory, common, optional, or rare?
Informing the teacher that an absence occurred/will occur	√	√	√	√	Obligatory
Apologizing for absence		√	√	√	Common
Explaining reason for absence		√	√		Common
Requesting an accommodation			√		Optional or rare
Requesting information about missed material		√			Optional or rare
Taking responsibility for missed work	√		√		Common
Expressing gratitude	√	√	√		Common

Understanding How Moves Help Carry out the Genre's Social Actions

We now want to consider *how* certain moves help the genre function. Start by asking yourself, "What does the genre help the readers and writers *do*?" and "How do certain moves help carry

out these actions?" Keep in mind that a genre may serve multiple purposes. You might send an email to excuse yourself from an upcoming class, to explain a previous absence (see Sample 3), ask questions about missed material (see Sample 2), to request an extension on an assignment (see Sample 3), and so on.

Based on Table 1, at least one move could be considered essential for this genre because it is found in all four samples: informing the instructor about an absence. This move helps the writer make the *purpose* of the email explicit. Sometimes this simple announcement is almost all that an absence email includes (see Sample 4). Can you imagine trying to write an absence email without mentioning the absence? Would such an email even belong in this genre? Along with a general announcement of the absence, students often include information about when the absence occurred or will occur, especially if they need more information about missed material.

Some of the moves we labeled as optional or rare in Table 2 are not necessarily ineffective or inappropriate, but they might not always be needed depending on the writer's intentions or the context of the missed class. Sample 2 includes a request for information about missed material, and Sample 3 includes a request for an accommodation. Do the emails with requests leave a different impression than the samples without? Do the writers of requests carry them out in similar ways?

We could continue going through each move, looking for patterns and considering rhetorical effects by asking a) why each move is typical or not, b) what role each move plays in carrying out the genre's purpose(s), and c) how and why moves are sequenced in a particular way.

Identifying Options and Variations in Moves

Variation across genre samples is likely to occur because of differences in context, audience, and writers' preferences. But some genres allow for more variation than others. If you've ever written a

lab report, you likely received very specific instructions about how to describe the materials and methods you used in an experiment and how to report and discuss your findings. Other school genres, like essays you might write in an English or Philosophy course, allow for more flexibility when it comes to both content and structure. If you notice a lot of variation across samples, this might mean that the genre you are looking at is flexible and open to variations, but this could also indicate that you need to label the moves more consistently or that you are actually looking at samples of different genres.

Based on our observations and analysis, the student absence email appears to have some degree of flexibility in both content and organizational structure. There is variation, for example, in how *detailed* the students are in providing a reason for their absence. Sample 2 mentions an emergency vet visit, providing just enough detail to show that the absence was justifiable and unexpected. Sample 3 also includes an explanation for the absence, but the writer chose to include a far more personal and detailed reason (a cold caught on spring break and bathroom issues from medication? Perhaps TMI (too much information)?). There is also a great deal of variation in the structure of the emails or the sequence of moves. In Sample 3, the student doesn't mention their absence until the third sentence whereas all the other writers lead with this information. What other differences do you see? How do you think a professor would respond to each email? Understanding your options as a writer and learning how to identify their purposes and effects can help you make informed choices when navigating a new or unfamiliar genre.

Identifying Common Language Features

Writers make linguistic choices to carry out moves, and oftentimes you'll find similarities across samples of a genre. While there are

seemingly infinite features of language we could analyze, here are some to consider:

- verb tense
- passive/active voice
- contractions (e.g., it's, I'm, we're, you've)
- sentence types
- sentence structures
- word choice
- use of specialized vocabulary
- use of pronouns

To dig deeper into the linguistic features of moves, we could take a few different approaches. First, we could view the genre samples side-by-side and look for language-level patterns. This method works well when your genre samples are short and easy to skim. We noticed, for example, that all four student absence emails use first-person pronouns (I, me, my, we, us), which makes sense given that this genre is a type of personal correspondence. Would it be possible to write in this genre *without* using personal pronouns?

Our analysis could also focus on how language is used to carry out a single move across genre samples. Using this method, we noticed that in both of the samples that included requests to the teacher, the students use the auxiliary verb *could* to make their requests. In Sample 2, Layla asks, "Could you let me know what I need to do to make up the missed material?" In Sample 3, Corey asks, "Could I possibly have a 24-hour extension?" There are other possibilities for phrasing both questions more directly, such as "What do I need to do?" or "Can I have a 24-hour extension?" Why might it be beneficial to phrase requests indirectly in this genre?

You don't need to be a linguistic expert to analyze language features of a genre. Sometimes all it takes is noticing a word that seems out of place (like the use of the greeting "Hi" instead of "Dear Professor") or finding a phrase that is repeated across genre samples. Or you might start with a feeling you get while reading

samples of a genre: the samples might generally feel formal or you might notice a humorous tone. Noticing language features helps you more closely analyze how certain moves are carried out and *to what effect*.

Critiquing Moves

To critique means to offer a critical evaluation or analysis. By critiquing a genre, we are doing more than identifying its faults or limitations, though that can certainly be part of the process. We might also look for potential strengths of the genre and possibilities for shifting, adapting, or transforming it. The use of the greeting "Hi" in Sample 4 could be an interesting start to a critique about how formal this genre is or should be. While we understand why some professors find it too informal to be addressed with a "Hi" or "Hey," we also see this move as evidence of how the genre's norms and expectations are seemingly changing. We personally don't find these greetings as jarring or inappropriate as we might have 5-10 years ago. Our reactions might have to do with our individual teaching styles, but email etiquette may also be changing more broadly. To pursue this line of inquiry, we could collect more samples of student emails written to other professors and maybe even talk to those professors about their reactions to informal email greetings. Or we could talk to students about why they choose to use formal or informal greetings in these emails. To conduct a critique or analysis of a genre, it is sometimes useful to gather more samples or more information about the context in which the genre is used. Talking to actual users of the genre is often especially useful (see how Brad's students did this in the next section). Here are some questions to get you started on a critique of rhetorical moves (some have been adapted from Devitt, et al.'s *Scenes of Writing*):

- Do all moves have a clear purpose and help carry out the social actions of the genre?

- What is the significance behind the sequence of the moves?
- What are consequences for the writer or other users if certain moves are included, or not?
- Who seems to have freedom to break from common moves? Who does not?
- What do the moves suggest about the relationship between the writers and users of this genre? How might this relationship impact the inclusion/exclusion of certain moves?
- What do the moves suggest about the values of a broader community (i.e. a specific class, a specific institution, or the entire educational system of the region)?

A critique of moves might also lead you to find ways to express your own identity or bend more traditional conventions of a genre. For example, U.S. wedding invitations traditionally included a move which recognized the parents of the bride as the hosts of the wedding (e.g., "Mr. and Mrs. John Smith request the pleasure of your company at the marriage of their daughter [bride] to [groom]"). A critique of this move shows that it reflects a more gender-biased social view, in which a female is given to a male by her parents. Today, many (perhaps even most) couples omit this move entirely.

Applying Moves Analysis: Writing a Statement of Need

Moves analysis can help as you write in different classes or other personal or professional situations. Let's take a look at how we can use moves analysis to approach a complicated or unfamiliar genre. You can use the chart in the Appendix as you follow along.

 In one of Brad's writing courses, students used moves analysis when they wrote a grant proposal on behalf of a local nonprofit organization. Grant proposals are common in academic and professional contexts. The goal of a grant proposal (the action it hopes to accomplish) is to convince a funder to support a project or initiative financially. In other words, "give us money!" Each granting

agency—the organization with the money—has its own expectations in terms of format, organization, and even word count for proposals, but most include similar sections: a Statement of Need, Objectives for the project, Methods of implementing, Evaluation, and a proposed Budget ("How Do I Write a Grant Proposal?"). We can't discuss all of these sections here, so in these next few paragraphs, we'll walk you through a brief moves analysis of just the Statement of Need section (we'll call it the Statement), just as Brad's students did.

First, we need to understand what the Statement is hoping to accomplish and why it is important. According to Candid Learning, a support website for grant seekers, a Statement "describes a problem and explains why you require a grant to address the issue" ("How Do I Write"). This section lays out the stakes of the problem and proposes the solution. To learn more about how these Statements work, Brad's class reviewed several samples from Candid Learning's collection of successful grant proposals ("Sample Documents"). Let's take a look at some of the moves students identified in three samples. These proposals were requesting funds for educational development in Uganda (Proposal from Building Tomorrow), an interpreter training center (Proposal from Southeast Community College), and community-based art programming (Proposal from The Griot Project).

Identifying Typical Moves in Statements of Need

First, Brad and his students identified moves in the individual Statements, using verbs to describe them. Then, we compared moves across the samples. Here are three of the moves we found:

Connect Proposal to Broad Social Issue

The writers included statistics or other data from credible sources as a way to establish the need or problem and connect to broader societal issues. Here are a few examples of this move in action:

- UNICEF and USAIDS estimate that 42 million children in this region alone are without access to primary education. (Proposal from Building Tomorrow)
- A study, published in January of 2006 in the journal Pediatrics shows that ad hoc interpreters were much more likely than professionally trained interpreters to make errors that could lead to serious clinical consequences, concluding that professionally trained medical interpreters are essential in health care facilities. (Proposal from Southeast Community College)

Why do you think the writers reference respected sources, like UNICEF, USAIDS, and the journal *Pediatrics*? Brad's students thought this move could both help the grant writer build credibility with their reader and show how the project will impact a social problem that goes beyond their local context. We did not see this move in all of the samples, so we'd say this move is *common* but not necessarily obligatory for this genre.

<div align="center">

Demonstrate Local Need

</div>

Grant writers have to show the local problem their project is going to solve and why it's needed. For example:

- Officials in the Wakiso District of Uganda…estimate that 55% of the district's 600,000 children do not have access to education. (Proposal from Building Tomorrow)
- Statewide, 143,251 people speak a language other than English at home. In Lancaster County, that number is 24,717, up 260% since 1990 (U.S. Census 1990, 2000, 2005). (Proposal from Southeast Community College)
- As community constituents, we have observed a lack of after school and summer enrichment projects that utilize the power of art as a means of community unification. (Proposal from The Griot Project)

Students decided this move is *obligatory* because it's in all of the

samples. This makes sense because grant writers need to show why their project is important. Referencing outside sources appears to be *common* within this move, but not required. Why do you think referencing outside sources could be effective, given this move's role in the genre?

Identify Solution and/or Impact

At some point in the Statement, usually at the end, the grant writer explains how their proposed project will meet the need they identified:

> By opening doors to new, accessible neighborhood classrooms, BT can help reduce the dropout rate, provide children with the opportunity to receive a valuable education, and be an instrumental partner in building a better tomorrow. (Proposal from Building Tomorrow)

Brad's students noticed this move in all of the Statements. Why do you think this move seems to be *obligatory*?

Understanding How Moves Help Carry out the Genre's Social Actions

Given what we know about grant proposals and the Statement, these moves seem to be rhetorically effective when sequenced in the order described above: connect to a societal problem, demonstrate local need, and identify a solution or describe the impact of the proposed project. Using these three basic moves helps writers show that their proposed work is important and that they have a plan to solve a problem with the grant money. Understanding the Statement in this way led Brad's students to conduct further research into issues like food scarcity and access to health care that affected their partner organizations so they could make connections to social issues in their Statements.

Identifying Options and Variations in Moves

The three moves identified were used in most of the grant proposals Brad's students read. But students did notice variation. Remember that even when moves seem obligatory or common, they won't necessarily be found in the same order. For example, one proposal identified the local need before connecting to a broader issue, and The Griot Project's proposal did not include the *connecting* move at all, instead focusing solely on local knowledge to make their case. Why do you think this might be? Here, it may help to learn more about the audience. The Griot Project's grant proposal was submitted to Neighborhood Connections, an organization that provides "money and support for grassroots initiatives in the cities of Cleveland and East Cleveland." When the grant writers say, "As community constituents, we have observed...," they are localizing their efforts and showing how their project can be considered a "grassroots initiative." Understanding the audience can be one factor in understanding variation among samples.

Identifying Common Language Features

When students looked across the samples, they noticed personal pronouns like I, *we*, or *us* were *optional* or *rare*. In fact, the only personal pronoun was in the *demonstrating local need* move, where one organization referenced their own observation ("we have observed") to demonstrate the local need. However, they shifted back to third person when *identifying the impact* ("the Griot Project will improve"), like the other samples. Why do you think the writers included themselves so explicitly in the text when *demonstrating the local need*, while the rest of the samples maintained a more distant position? What might be gained with this choice, and why might some writers hesitate? Why do you think all of the writers used third person pronouns when *identifying the organization's impact*?

Students also noticed a common sentence structure in the

identifying move, which we called "*By x-ing*." Each of the grant writers used a single sentence and a *By x-ing* phrase to connect the proposed intervention to an outcome. For example, "*By opening* doors...BT can help reduce the dropout rate..." (emphasis added). Why do you think this sentence structure seems to be common within this move?

Critiquing Moves

Staff members from an organization supporting economic development on Native American sovereign lands reminded members of Brad's class that writing a grant proposal means representing an organization and the people and communities it serves. With this in mind, they asked students to emphasize the resilience of the community rather than perpetuate negative stereotypes in the grant proposals; they didn't want a pity campaign. As a result of this conversation, students decided to highlight local conditions like a lack of grocery stores and access to transportation before introducing statistics about obesity and diabetes rates. They also included pictures of happy families to counter stereotypical images of poverty. In this way, critique of the genre led to subtle, yet important, transformation.

Clearly, a moves analysis like this could go on for a while! Remember, we're not looking for the "right" answer—we're trying to understand the options that we have as we begin to contribute our own examples to the genre.

Producing and Transforming Genres using Moves Analysis

Carrying out a moves analysis is more than just an academic exercise. You can use this process whenever you need to write in a new genre. Maybe you are applying for summer internships and you are writing a cover letter for the first time. Instead of starting

from what you *think* a cover letter might look like, you can find several samples and conduct a moves analysis to identify features of this genre. You might also want to try pushing the boundaries a bit. Sometimes, playing with moves or incorporating additional moves in a genre can lead to interesting innovations or new uses for a genre. For each writing situation, you'll want to decide whether it makes sense to take some risks and be innovative or to stick with more typical approaches. Conducting a moves analysis can be your first step to considering how to carry out your goals, and maybe even expressing your individuality, in a new genre.

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Keywords

rhetorical moves, **genre analysis**, **genre**

Author Bios

Brad Jacobson is an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Texas at El Paso focusing on high school to college writing transitions and culturally-sustaining approaches to writing pedagogy, assessment, and policy. His work has appeared in peer-reviewed journals such as the *Journal of Writing Assessment* and *Writing Program Administration*.

Madelyn Pawlowski is an Assistant Professor of English at New Mexico University. She specializes in teacher development, genre studies, and language ideologies,

practices, and policies. Her work appears in journals such as *Composition Forum* and numerous edited collections.

Christine M. Tardy is a Professor of English at the University of Arizona. She teaches courses in the undergraduate English program, MA-TESL program, and SLAT PhD program. Her research focuses on the areas of second language writing, genre and discourse studies, English for Academic Purposes (EAP)/Writing in the Disciplines (WID), and the politics and policies of the English language, particularly in institutional contexts. Her work appears in numerous edited collections and in journals such as *Written Communication*, *Research in the Teaching of English*, and *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*.
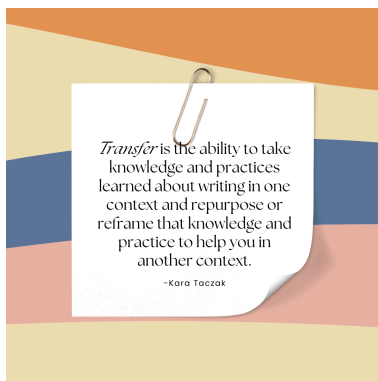
REFLECTION, REVISION, AND TRANSFER

Section Overview

The purpose of a writing class – or any class for that matter – is to teach content and skills that you can use in other contexts, that you can *transfer* for further use. However, we've learned through extensive research that this process of transfer is not automatic. You might learn something in the context of a class, but you won't necessarily be able to use that content or those skills unless you purposefully reflect on what you've learned and actively engage in the process of transfer. To do this, we ask you to use **metacognition**, literally thinking about your thinking. Metacognition is important to use throughout the writing process – most processes really! – but it is particularly important during the **revision** process. Particularly if you are revising something you wrote at the beginning of the semester, you may think about your composition, the act of writing, and of yourself differently than you did just a couple of months ago. You'll have lots of opportunities during your class to be metacognitive – to consider who you are as a writer, what experiences have shaped the choices you make in your composition, and how you want to develop your writing skills for future use. The thing about **reflection**, revision, and metacognition is that these processes can feel sort of strange if you haven't been asked to do them in the context of a class before, or you may feel like you have to perform a certain kind of reflection, as Sandra Giles writes about in her beautiful essay, "Reflection Writing and the Revision Process: What Were You Thinking?" The key is to remember that there isn't a "correct" reflection on writing, and revision may take your writing

in a new direction. Be as engaged and curious as you can about your writing and that of the writing and writers around you. This more than anything will help you be a more effective, reflective writer.

The first two chapters in this section address revision:

- "Grammar, Rhetoric, and Style" by Craig Hulst
- "Reflective Writing and the Revision Process: What Were You Thinking?" by Sandra L. Giles

Transfer is the ability to take knowledge and practices learned about writing in one context and repurpose or reframe that knowledge and practice to help you in another context.

–Kara Taczak

The last two chapters address transfer, arguably the primary purpose of education. These chapters consider how to get the most out of your classes as well as some of the fascinating research on transfer:

- "Writing Knowledge Transfers Easily" by Ellen C. Carillo
- "The Importance of Transfer in Your First Year Writing Course" by Kara Taczak

26. Grammar, Rhetoric, and Style

CRAIG HULST

Abstract

Craig Hulst's article from *Writing Spaces; Readings on Writing, Volume 3* focuses on grammar, specifically on understanding that grammar is much more than just the rules that we have been taught. Rather, grammar can be used rhetorically—with an understanding of the writing situation and making appropriate choices regarding the structure of the sentences, the use of punctuation, using active or passive voice, etc. In other words, this chapter focuses on using grammar to influence a piece of writing's style, rather than focusing on the correctness of the grammar. Readers are encouraged to look at the writing that they see in their casual or research reading and evaluate the grammar of those pieces to gain a better understanding of how they can control their own use of grammar.

This reading is available below or as a PDF. The PDF includes additional teacher resources.

Grammar[1]. The mere word makes adults weep, children run and

hide, and dogs howl.[1] All right, perhaps I am exaggerating just a bit; not all of us hate grammar. There are even people who actually like grammar. However, the general aversion to the word "grammar" is such that the word is hardly ever used in polite company. And, if your composition professor is anything like me, she or he tries to avoid the word in your class.

Yet grammar should not be so disrespected. Believe it or not, most people like grammar until their junior high school English teacher gets ahold of them and presents grammar as a set of rules, a set of "Thou shalt not" commandments that you must abide by or be doomed to wander in the darkness of a poor grade. Max Morenberg, author of the book *Doing Grammar*, writes:

> We are born to love language and everything associated with it— rhythm, rhyme, word meanings, grammar. If you want to make a three-year-old child roll on the floor laughing, just tell her a riddle, or alliterative words, or read her Dr. Seuss's lilting rhythms and rhymes about cats in hats or elephants who are 'faithful, one hundred percent' or Sam I Am eating green eggs and ham on a boat with a goat. Listen to a child in a crib entertaining himself by repeating sounds and syllables, playing with language. Think about the games you played in kindergarten by creating strange words like Mary Poppins' supercalifragilisticexpialodotious. Keep a ten-year old entertained on a car trip by producing odd

sentences in a 'Mad Libs' game. Then ask an eighth grader what subject she hates most. The answer invariably will be grammar. We're born to love grammar. We're taught to hate it. (vii-viii)

When young and learning how to use language, we learn grammar through trial and error. When my daughters were around two years old, they (constantly) wanted me to pick them up. They would come up to me, hold up their arms, and I would ask them, "Do you want me to hold you?" Eventually, they would come up to me, hold up their arms, and say, "hold you." They learned the construction "hold you" to mean "hold me." I would correct them and explain to them "if you want me to pick you up, you say 'hold me.'" Before too long they caught on and started saying "hold me" when they wanted me to pick them up. They learned by mirroring my speech and by receiving feedback on their grammar. As we grow older, we still learn through trial and error, but we also learn the rules. Now, instead of a parent's gentle correction, we are informed of our errors through the fiery correction of a teacher's red pen.

Grammar, the way that it is typically taught, is a collection of rules that we are supposed to follow, and it is these rules that most of us have issues with. After all, we know how to speak; we form words and sentences intuitively, and people understand our meaning. So, who are these rule-mongering grammarians that think that they can tell us that we are doing it wrong? Or who force us, as my middle school English teacher did, to endlessly diagram sentence after sentence? Why do they take something that we love as children and warp it to the point that we can't stand it?

Grammar doesn't have to be this way. It shouldn't be this way. We shouldn't need someone to tell us that we are wrong, and then to make us memorize a bunch of rules in order to speak or write. What grammar should be is a tool to help us better communicate with our audience—a tool that we are controlling, rather than one that controls us. Grammar should be a tool that we use to fit our language to our purpose and our audience.

Grammar and Its Rhetorical Use

The rules are there for a reason. Grammar rules are concerned with correctness—to make sure that we are following the accepted guidelines of the language. However, grammar isn't all about rules. Instead, grammar is about making meaning. People understand us because we are using grammar—we are arranging our words in a certain order, and because of that, our audience understands us. For example, if I said, "store went to Jim the," you'd probably ask, "What?" But if I used the same words and arranged the words according to the grammar that I absorbed at a young age, I would say, "Jim went to the store." By arranging the words according to what those listening to me expect from my grammar, my audience would know exactly what I meant. And this awareness of what the audience needs is the heart of what I am talking about—that grammar has a *rhetorical* use.

Grammar simply means "a system that puts words together into meaningful units" (Morenberg 4). We've already seen how that works in the earlier example of "Jim went to the store." As we create lengthier and more complex sentences, we incorporate punctuation such as commas and semicolons, consider pronoun/antecedent connections, carefully think about verb shifts and a host of other issues that can affect the meaning of our words. This is what most people think of when they hear the word grammar. However, this doesn't have to be that big of a concern, as grammar is best learned by using the language, rather than through systematic study of the rules. In fact, I have had many older, so-called non-traditional students in my composition classes throughout the years, and they are generally more adept at grammar usage than my "traditional" eighteen to twenty-year-old students. This is not because they have studied the rules of grammar more thoroughly; most of my older students confess that they haven't thought about grammar for many years. This is simply because they have used the language, and have experience using it in many different contexts, for a greater length of time.

Rhetoric is a word that most of us have heard, but we may not really understand what it means. It is a word that is often thrown around negatively, and often in political discussions, such as, "Well, the president may think that way, but I'm not falling for his rhetoric." But the term really shouldn't have such a negative connotation. Simply defined, rhetoric is "a way of using language for a specific purpose." The *rhetorical situation* of a piece of writing is everything surrounding it—who the audience is, the purpose for writing it, the genre of the writing, etc. Knowing this helps us know how to use language to accomplish the purpose of the writing, and grammar is part of that use of language. English professor Laura R. Micciche expands on the rhetorical role of grammar:

> The grammatical choices we make—including pronoun use, active or passive verb construction, and sentence construction—represent relations between writers and the world they live in. Word choice and sentence structure are an expression of the way we attend to the words of others, the way we position ourselves in relation to others. (719)

When we write, we can carefully choose the grammar that we use to make our writing effective at conveying our meaning, but also give the audience a sense of our own personality. This brings us to a third word that needs to be defined: *Style*.

Grammar and Style

Style is perhaps the most visual aspect of rhetoric—we see authors' style in their writing. Style refers to the choices that an author makes—choices about punctuation, word usage, and grammar—and those choices are influenced by the rhetorical situation that the author finds herself in. For example, consider the following sentences:

- Katelyn was concerned that Chloe worked late every night.

- It concerned Katelyn that every night Chloe worked late.
- Chloe worked late every night, and Katelyn was concerned.
- Every night Chloe worked late, and that concerned Katelyn.

Each of these sentences say the same thing, and the grammar is "correct" in each, but the sentence an author chooses depends on the style she wishes to use. The first sentence is the most straightforward, but the last two put the emphasis on Chloe rather than on Katelyn, which might be what the author wants to do. Sometimes the style within a specific rhetorical situation is prescribed for us; for example, we might be told that we cannot use "I" in a paper. Sometimes the style is expected, but we aren't necessarily told the rhetorical situation's rules; we might be expected to use the active voice rather than the passive voice in our papers. And sometimes the situation is wide open, allowing us to make the grammatical style choices we like.

Also wrapped up in this issue of style is the concept of standard and preferred usage. *Usage* is simply the way we expect words to be used—and this doesn't always follow the rules. For example, a famous line from the original *Star Trek* series tells us that the Enterprise's mission is "to boldly go where no man has gone before." This seems right—but there is a split infinitive in the phrase (no need to worry about what a split infinitive is right now). To abide by the rule, the line should say, "to go boldly where no man has gone before." But that doesn't sound as right to most of us, so a decision was made to break the rule and write the line according to the common usage of adding an adverb before the verb.

What usage is preferred is also dependent on the rhetorical situation of the text. As an example of the differences between standard and preferred usage, consider contractions. Most of the time when we speak, and often in informal writing, it is perfectly fine to use contractions like "can't," "isn't," or "aren't;" contractions are standard usage. You may have been told in your composition class that using contractions is okay in your papers, but using contractions is not preferred in many rhetorical situations, as in a

formally written research paper. We use the words "I" and "you" all the time when we speak, but we will find many writing situations where they aren't acceptable (i.e. preferred). Knowing what usage is preferred takes a little insight into the rhetorical situation—you can read examples of the type of writing that you are asked to do, you can question friends who have already taken the course, you can seek advice from books or the internet, or you can ask your instructor. Since grammar, style, and usage are so closely related, and quite possibly they have already been introduced to you as the same thing, throughout this essay I will often refer to these types of style choices as grammar choices.

All Together Now

When we write, we are entering into a conversation with our reader, and the grammatical choices that we consciously make can show our readers that we understand what they want from us, and that we are giving them what they expect. In your academic writing, the rhetorical situation demands that you make grammar choices that are appropriate for college-level writers. Unfortunately, these grammar choices are not static; they will change—perhaps only slightly, perhaps greatly—as your writing situation changes, as you write for different teachers, courses, or disciplines. In your other writing, the rhetorical situation may call for an entirely different set of grammar choices.

Here's an example of how the rhetorical situation affects grammar usage. You need to express an idea concerning the need to recycle. In the first rhetorical situation, you are speaking to your friends, people that you have known since you were five years old. In such a situation, it might be acceptable for you to say, "It ain't rocket science, bonehead. Recycle that junk and save the Earth." If you're speaking to your mother, you might say, "Mom, that can go in the recycling bin instead. Let's save the planet." If you are writing about this for an academic audience, you might instead say, "We must

always consider the consequences of our actions. Throwing recyclable materials in the trash results in overflowing landfills, land and water pollution, and an increased strain on raw materials. However, recycling glass, metal, and paper reduces our consumption of these materials as well as lowers the fossil fuel energy needed to create new products." The example should not suggest that longer sentences are more correct, although the academic audience example is considerably longer than the other two. Hopefully, if I have done it right, the academic audience example is longer simply because I am proving my point, not because I'm trying to sound smart by using more words. But the grammar has also changed. In the first example, I used "ain't," which is not considered grammatically correct for most academic audiences, but the use of which is quite common in many varieties of spoken English. In the second example I used the contraction "can't," which, again, in many academic writing situations would be frowned upon. In the final example, I have attempted to use "standard" grammar, the grammar that the academic rules say I should use, as I know that that particular audience would expect me to do so.

In many academic writing situations, the work is assessed, in part, on how well the writer adheres to the rules. If I used the style and grammar of the first example in a paper for my Environmental Science class, you can imagine what could happen. Writing an academic paper as if I was talking to my friends would probably negatively affect my grade. However, the poor grade wouldn't mean, "your grammar is wrong," even if my instructor phrased it that way. Instead, what the grade would mean is that I did not use the appropriate grammar required for the rhetorical situation.

Using Grammar Rhetorically for Style

Grammarian and textbook author Martha Kolln asks us to look at sentences as a series of slots into which we place words (5). We

know what to put into certain slots; for example, in the "subject" slot we know we need a noun or a pronoun, and in the "verb" slot we need, well, a verb. Knowing just these two slots, I can make a good sentence: "I laughed." As sentences get more and more sophisticated, more slots become available. For example, adding an adverb slot, I can create the following sentence: "I laughed loudly." This is a basic element of the rules—the rules tell us what we are allowed to put into the slots.

So then, how do we move past the rules? How does a writer use grammar rhetorically? First and foremost, you use grammar this way by being conscious of the choices that you are making. Remember, when you write, you aren't simply putting words on paper; you are constructing a conversation with a reader. You make conscious choices about your topic, your title, and your word choice, as well as many other choices, in order to carry on that conversation—grammar is just part of the many choices that you can use to your advantage when you are using language for your specific purpose. It might help you to see how this is done by looking at works that have been written for a variety of audiences and trying to figure out why the authors made the grammatical choices that they did.

Throughout the rest of this essay, I will present several examples of writing, and I will look at what each author has chosen to put into their sentence slots and why they made those choices. The first example is a paragraph from the manual for the video game *Fallout 3*:

> Nuclear war. The very words conjure images of mushroom clouds, gas masks, and bewildered children ducking and covering under their school desks. But it's the aftermath of such a conflict that truly captures our imagination, in large part because there's no real-world equivalent we can relate to. Mankind may have witnessed the horror of the atomic bomb, but thankfully we've somehow succeeded in

not blowing up the entire planet. At least, not yet. (*Vault Dweller's Survival Guide* 3)

This paragraph violates many of the rules that I learned as a developing writer. For example, I see the contractions *it's*, *there's*, and *we've*, and a conjunction, *but*, starts a sentence. I see the preposition *to* ending a sentence—a definite no-no, if I remember my grammar rules. Also, as I write this on my computer, my word processor is very kindly informing me that there are two fragments in this paragraph. I believe that Ms. Herrema, my eighth grade English teacher, would cringe if she read this paragraph in a student paper. Yet I think it unlikely that you noticed all of these "errors" in the paragraph as you read it. Why didn't you? Is it because you are ignorant of the rules of grammar? Absolutely not! Assuming that you didn't notice them, you didn't notice them because taken all together, the paragraph flowed well. The fragment sentence, *Nuclear war*, didn't bother you—in fact, it probably grabbed your attention. The contractions didn't bother you because it sounded like someone was speaking to you. And they were.

The intended audience of the writer is those who would buy and play video games. (That might include you—it does include me.) As such, the author knowledgeably chose the language, the grammar, of the game manual in order to maintain the interest of the audience. We speak with contractions; the author uses contractions. We speak in fragments; the author uses them. Notice that the author is using the fragments ominously. He (or she, but probably they—much professional writing is team written) begins with *Nuclear war*. Culturally, we have, for the past seventy years or so, lived with the knowledge that a nuclear war could happen. Those two words conjure up such dark and depressing images that all the author needs to do is say them, and we're hooked. Likewise, the last sentence of the paragraph is also a fragment, ominous, and attention grabbing: *At least, not yet*. We have dodged this atomic bullet until now, but it could still happen—and that is what the author wishes to leave us with.

Let's look at how the commas are used in this paragraph. The first commas that we see are in the list: *mushroom clouds, gas masks, and bewildered children.* Why does the author put those commas there? Is it because the rules tell him to? Yes—and no. Sure, the rules tell us to put those commas in there, but if we're relying on the rhetorical use of grammar, we'll also use them in exactly the same way. A comma indicates a pause in a sentence, a pause that the audience needs in order to get the meaning the author intends to give them. Read that sentence out loud without the commas: *The very words conjure images of mushroom clouds gas masks and bewildered children ducking and covering under their school desks.* Without the commas, it sounds weird. Your audience might even see this as fiveitem list of mushroom, clouds, gas, masks, and bewildered children, rather than the three-item list that it is. If the author's meaning is for the audience to see mushroom clouds and gas masks and bewildered children, regardless of the rules, he would add a comma to make them pause, just a bit, at certain points.

Let's move from the popular to the academic in this next example:

> The typewriter is effectively a lost technology, occupying a strange, interstitial space in the broader field of media history, a fulcrum between the movable type of modern print culture and the malleable digital information of postmodern electronic culture. I argue that consideration of the typewriter as a writing system thus provides critical purchase on this field precisely to the extent that the machine itself is ephemeral and ultimately obsolete. (Benzon 93)

Did you get all that? You probably noticed the difference in vocabulary between this paragraph and the passage from game manual. This author is definitely writing for a different audience; in this case, he is writing for English scholars and educators. If we look at the first sentence as a series of slots, we see *typewriter* in the subject slot, *is* in the verb slot, and *technology* in the object slot. But we also see *effectively* and *lost* in the sentence, occupying two

optional slots. *Lost* is positioned in an adjective slot and describes *technology*. What kind of technology? *Lost* technology. *Effectively* is positioned in an adverb slot, and as such it modifies the verb. *Is* what? Is *effectively*. We could have eliminated these two modifiers and the sentence would have made sense. But Benzon, the author, did not want to say that "The typewriter is a technology." He wanted to say that it was *effectively a lost* technology. Typewriters still exist, and people still use them, although they are *effectively a lost technology*.

Notice, too, that there are other optional slots that were not filled. *Typewriter*, as a noun, has an optional adjective slot, too. But instead of describing the typewriters, Benzon chooses not to fill in that slot. Doing so might restrict the noun—adding an adjective to describe what type of typewriters are lost technology could limit the meaning. Adding an adjective like *red*, *old*, or *dusty* would say that typewriters that are blue, new, or clean are not lost technology.

Benzon also chooses to use the grammatical device of parallelism in the phrase, "a fulcrum between the movable type of modern print culture and the malleable digital information of postmodern electronic culture." *Movable type* runs parallel to *malleable digital information*. In both situations, we see nouns (*type* and *information*) preceded by filled adjective slots. i and *malleable* even sound similar. Benzon opted to fill in another adjective slot before *information* and told us that it was *digital* information but decided not to do so before *type*. This is acceptable, of course, because *type* does not need any additional description, but we certainly need to know what sort of information is malleable.

Finally, we see in this example that Benzon uses *I*. This convention is generally acceptable in the discipline of the humanities, and knowing that his audience would accept this, Benzon has decided to use *I*. He also uses the active voice, writing, "I argue that consideration of the typewriter as a writing system..." The author, *I*, is doing something, arguing. (In this case, my middle school English teacher's advice to write in the active voice has been justified.) Had I not told you that both the use of *I* and the active voice were

acceptable in the humanities, analyzing the previous paragraph would have shown that this was true.

And now let's try one more, this time from an academic article from the sciences:

> Animals were randomly assigned to three treatment groups with five pigs per group in a completely randomized design. All pigs were fed the basal diet during the initial 7 day period. Pigs were then fed treatment diets during the next three 7 day periods and all pigs received the basal diet during the final two 7 day periods. (Stewart et al. 169)

This excerpt comes from an article in the *American Journal of Animal and Veterinary Sciences*, so who do you think is the intended audience? If you said, "circus clowns," you might want to try again.

Obviously, we see vocabulary that is intended for veterinarians or students of veterinary medicine. The main reason that I have offered this passage to you, aside from the fact that I enjoy torturing people with language, is that we can see two differences between this piece of academic writing and the previous piece. The first is that there is no use of I. Why didn't the authors say, "*We fed* the pigs the basal diet during the initial 7 day period?" The reason is that, unlike in the humanities disciplines, the use of the personal pronoun is not expected by a science audience. Using it would be counter to the expectations of the audience, so it isn't used. (Score one for the middle school English teacher who told me not to use *I*.)

The second difference from the Benzon passage is that the subjects of the sentences aren't doing anything; this passage is written in the passive voice. Whereas Benzon could say, "I argue," which showed the active subject *I* doing something (arguing), in this piece, the pigs are passive receptors of the food. They sit there; food is given to them. If this was recast in active voice, we might end up with, "All pigs *ate* the basal diet during the initial 7 day period." Unlike the humanities disciplines, the sciences have a tendency to prefer the passive voice. Again, if I hadn't just told you these two conventions of science writing, had you rhetorically analyzed the

piece, analyzed its audience, purpose, and grammar, you would have seen that these conventions exist.

If you'd like a fourth example, consider this essay that you are reading. Ask yourself why I made the grammatical choices that I did. I use "you," I use contractions, I tend to use the active voice. There a few fragment sentences in here—the first sentence of the essay is a fragment. Why would I write with these rule violations?

Did you notice the "errors" I listed above as you read through the paper? I am guessing that you did not, or at least you did not catch all of them. If I have done my job right, I have successfully entered into a conversation with you—a first year writing student—and spoken to you using a grammar that is comfortable and appropriate for you. How did I do?

With these four examples, I've only given you a taste of how looking at grammar choices rhetorically can help you understand an author's intended audience, that audience's expectations, and how the author, by choosing his or her grammar to reflect those needs, attempted to enter into a relationship with the audience. You could spend quite a bit of time on any of those examples and pull even more insights from the grammar that the authors use, but given the scope of this essay, I believe that I can now safely let you go, believing that you now have a solid understanding of how writers—and that includes you—make careful choices with their grammar and use it as a tool to more effectively communicate with their intended audience.

Note

1. Throughout this essay, I will use some simple grammar terms such as noun, pronoun, adjective, adverb, and so on. I am, perhaps wrongly, assuming that you will understand these terms. If I have erred in my assumption, please accept my apologies. There are many ways to discover the meanings of these terms, the first of

which is your instructor. Other resources include handbooks, internet sources, and your friends.

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Keywords

grammar, **rhetoric**, **style**, **genre**

Author Bio

Craig Hulst is a Senior Affiliate Professor of English at Grand Valley State University. He earned his PhD in English Composition from Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

27. Reflective Writing and the Revision Process: What Were You Thinking?

SANDRA L. GILES

Abstract

In her article from *Writing Spaces; Readings on Writing, Volume 1*, Sandra Giles explains to students that reflective writing involves their thinking about their own thinking. They may be asked to reflect about their audience and purpose for a piece of writing. They may write about their invention, drafting, revision, and editing processes. They may self-assess or evaluate their writing, learning, and development as writers. These activities help cement learning. They also help writers gain more insight into and control over composing and revising processes by helping them gain critical distance and by providing a mechanism for them to do the re-thinking and re-seeing that effective revision requires. The article gives examples of student reflective writing, explains how they function in a student's learning, and gives scholarly support for why these kinds of activities are effective.

This reading is available below or as a PDF.

"Reflection" and "reflective writing" are umbrella terms that refer to any activity that asks you to think about your own thinking.[1] As composition scholars Kathleen Blake Yancey and Jane Bowman Smith explain, reflection records a "student's process of thinking about what she or he is doing while in the process of that doing" (170). In a writing class, you may be asked to think about your writing processes in general or in relation to a particular essay, to think about your intentions regarding rhetorical elements such as audience and purpose, or to think about your choices regarding development strategies such as comparison-contrast, exemplification, or definition. You may be asked to describe your decisions regarding language features such as word choice, sentence rhythm, and so on. You may be asked to evaluate or assess your piece of writing or your development as a writer in general. Your instructor may also ask you to perform these kinds of activities at various points in your process of working on a project, or at the end of the semester.

A Writer's Experience

The first time I had to perform reflective writing myself was in the summer of 2002. And it did feel like a performance, at first. I was a doctoral student in Wendy Bishop's Life Writing class at Florida State University, and it was the first class I had ever taken where

we English majors actually practiced what we preached; which is to say, we actually put ourselves through the various elements of process writing. Bishop led us through invention exercises, revision exercises, language activities, and yes, reflective writings. For each essay, we had to write what she called a "process note" in which we explained our processes of working on the essay, as well as our thought processes in developing the ideas. We also discussed what we might want to do with (or to) the essay in the future, beyond the class. At the end of the semester, we composed a self-evaluative cover letter for our portfolio in which we discussed each of our essays from the semester and recorded our learning and insights about writing and about the genre of nonfiction.

My first process note for the class was a misguided attempt at goodstudent-gives-the-teacher-what-she-wants. Our assignment had been to attend an event in town and write about it. I had seen an email announcement about a medium visiting from England who would perform a "reading" at the Unity Church in town. So I went and took notes. And wrote two consecutive drafts. After peer workshop, a third. And then I had to write the process note, the likes of which I had never done before. It felt awkward, senseless. Worse than writing a scholarship application or some other mundane writing task. Like a waste of time, and like it wasn't real writing at all. But it was required.

So, hoop-jumper that I was, I wrote the following: "This will eventually be part of a longer piece that will explore the Foundation for Spiritual Knowledge in Tallahassee, Florida, which is a group of local people in training to be mediums and spirituals healers. These two goals are intertwined." Yeah, right. Nice and fancy. Did I really intend to write a book-length study on those folks? I thought my professor would like the idea, though, so I put it in my note. Plus, my peer reviewers had asked for a longer, deeper piece. That statement would show I was being responsive to their feedback, even though I didn't agree with it. The peer reviewers had also wanted me to put myself into the essay more, to do more with first-person point of view rather than just writing a reporter-style

observation piece. I still disagree with them, but what I should have done in the original process note was go into why: my own search for spirituality and belief could not be handled in a brief essay. I wanted the piece to be about the medium herself, and mediumship in general, and the public's reaction, and why a group of snarky teenagers thought they could be disruptive the whole time and come off as superior. I did a better job later—more honest and thoughtful and revealing about my intentions for the piece—in the self-evaluation for the portfolio. That's because, as the semester progressed and I continued to have to write those darned process notes, I dropped the attitude. In a conference about my writing, Bishop responded to my note by asking questions focused entirely on helping me refine my intentions for the piece, and I realized my task wasn't to please or try to dazzle her. I stopped worrying about how awkward the reflection was, stopped worrying about how to please the teacher, and started actually reflecting and thinking. New habits and ways of thinking formed. And unexpectedly, all the hard decisions about revising for the next draft began to come more easily.

And something else clicked, too. Two and a half years previously, I had been teaching composition at a small two-year college. Composition scholar Peggy O'Neill taught a workshop for us English teachers on an assignment she called the "Letter to the Reader." That was my introduction to reflective writing as a teacher, though I hadn't done any of it myself at that point. I thought, "Okay, the composition scholars say we should get our students to do this." So I did, but it did not work very well with my students at the time. Here's why: I didn't come to understand what it could do for a writer, or how it would do it, until I had been through it myself.

After Bishop's class, I became a convert. I began studying reflection, officially called metacognition, and began developing ways of using it in writing classes of all kinds, from composition to creative nonfiction to fiction writing. It works. Reflection helps you to develop your intentions (purpose), figure out your relation to your audience, uncover possible problems with your individual

writing processes, set goals for revision, make decisions about language and style, and the list goes on. In a nutshell, it helps you develop more insight into and control over composing and revising processes. And according to scholars such as Chris M. Anson, developing this control is a feature that distinguishes stronger from weaker writers and active from passive learners (69–73).

My Letter to the Reader Assignment

Over recent years, I've developed my own version of the Letter to the Reader, based on O'Neill's workshop and Bishop's class assignments. For each essay, during a revising workshop, my students first draft their letters to the reader and then later, polish them to be turned in with the final draft. Letters are composed based on the following instructions:

> This will be a sort of cover letter for your essay. It should be on a separate sheet of paper, typed, stapled to the top of the final draft. Date the letter and address it to "Dear Reader." Then do the following in nicely developed, fat paragraphs:
>
> 1. Tell the reader what you intend for the essay to do for its readers. Describe its purpose(s) and the effect(s) you want it to have on the readers. Say who you think the readers are.
>
>   ◦ Describe your process of working on the essay. How did you narrow the assigned topic? What kind of planning did you do? What steps did you go through, what changes did you make along the way, what decisions did you face, and how did you make the decisions?
>   ◦ How did comments from your peers, in peer workshop, help you? How did any class activities on style, editing, etc., help you?

2. Remember to sign the letter. After you've drafted it, think about whether your letter and essay match up. Does the essay really do what your letter promises? If not, then use the draft of your letter as a revising tool to make a few more adjustments to your essay. Then, when the essay is polished and ready to hand in, polish the letter as well and hand them in together.

Following is a sample letter that shows how the act of answering these prompts can help you uncover issues in your essays that need to be addressed in further revision. This letter is a mock-up based on problems I've seen over the years. We discuss it thoroughly in my writing classes:

Dear Reader,

This essay is about how I feel about the changes in the financial aid rules. I talk about how they say you're not eligible even if your parents aren't supporting you anymore. I also talk a little bit about the HOPE scholarship. But my real purpose is to show how the high cost of books makes it impossible to afford college if you can't get on financial aid. My readers will be all college students. As a result, it should make students want to make a change. My main strategy in this essay is to describe how the rules have affected me personally.

I chose this topic because this whole situation has really bugged me. I did freewriting to get my feelings out on paper, but I don't think that was effective because it seemed jumbled and didn't flow. So I started over with an outline and went on from there. I'm still not sure how to start the introduction off because I want to hook the reader's interest but I don't know how to do that. I try to include many different arguments to appeal to different types of students to make the whole argument seem worthwhile on many levels.

I did not include comments from students because I want everyone to think for themselves and form their own opinion. That's my main strategy. I don't want the paper to be too long and bore the reader. I was told in peer workshop to include information from other students at other colleges with these same financial aid problems. But I didn't do that because I don't know anybody at another school. I didn't want to include any false information.

Thanks,

(signature)

Notice how the letter shows us, as readers of the letter, some problems in the essay without actually having to read the essay. From this (imaginary) student's point of view, the act of drafting this letter should show her the problems, too. In her first sentence, she announces her overall topic. Next she identifies a particular problem: the way "they" define whether an applicant is dependent on or independent of parents. So far, pretty good, except her use of the vague pronoun "they" makes me hope she hasn't been that vague in the essay itself. Part of taking on a topic is learning enough about it to be specific. Specific is effective; vague is not. Her next comment about the HOPE scholarship makes me wonder if she's narrowed her topic enough. When she said "financial aid," I assumed federal, but HOPE is particular to the state of Georgia and has its own set of very particular rules, set by its own committee in Atlanta. Can she effectively cover both federal financial aid, such as the Pell Grant for example, as well as HOPE, in the same essay, when the rules governing them are different? Maybe. We'll see. I wish the letter would address more specifically how she sorts that out in the essay. Then she says that her "real purpose" is to talk about the cost of books. Is that really her main purpose? Either she doesn't have a good handle on what she wants her essay to do or she's just throwing language around to sound good in the letter. Not good, either way.

When she says she wants the readers to be all college students,

she has identified her target audience, which is good. Then this: "As a result, it should make students want to make a change." Now, doesn't that sound more in line with a statement of purpose? Here the writer makes clear, for the first time, that she wants to write a persuasive piece on the topic. But then she says that her "main strategy" is to discuss only her own personal experience. That's not a strong enough strategy, by itself, to be persuasive.

In the second section, where she discusses process, she seems to have gotten discouraged when she thought that freewriting hadn't worked because it resulted in something "jumbled." But she missed the point that freewriting works to generate ideas, which often won't come out nicely organized. It's completely fine, and normal, to use freewriting to generate ideas and then organize them with perhaps an outline as a second step. As a teacher, when I read comments like this in a letter, I write a note to the student explaining that "jumbled" is normal, perfectly fine, and nothing to worry about. I'm glad when I read that sort of comment so I can reassure the student. If not for the letter, I probably wouldn't have known of her unfounded concern. It creates a teaching moment.

Our imaginary student then says, "I'm still not sure how to start the introduction off because I want to hook the reader's interest but don't know how to do that." This statement shows that she's thinking along the right lines—of capturing the reader's interest. But she hasn't quite figured out how to do that in this essay, probably because she doesn't have a clear handle on her purpose. I'd advise her to address that problem and to better develop her overall strategy, and then she would be in a better position to make a plan for the introduction. Again, a teaching moment. When she concludes the second paragraph of the letter saying that she wants to include "many different arguments" for "different types of students," it seems even more evident that she's not clear on purpose or strategy; therefore, she's just written a vague sentence she probably thought sounded good for the letter.

She begins her third paragraph with further proof of the problems. If her piece is to be persuasive, then she should not

want readers to "think for themselves and form their own opinion." She most certainly should have included comments from other students, as her peer responders advised. It wouldn't be difficult to interview some fellow students at her own school. And as for finding out what students at other schools think about the issue, a quick search on the Internet would turn up newspaper or newsletter articles, as well as blogs and other relevant sources. Just because the official assignment may not have been to write a "research" paper doesn't mean you can't research. Some of your best material will come that way. And in this particular type of paper, your personal experience by itself, without support, will not likely persuade the reader. Now, I do appreciate when she says she doesn't want to include any "false information." A lot of students come to college with the idea that in English class, if you don't know any information to use, then you can just make it up so it sounds good. But that's not ethical, and it's not persuasive, and just a few minutes on the Internet will solve the problem.

This student, having drafted the above letter, should go back and analyze. Do the essay and letter match up? Does the essay do what the letter promises? And here, does the letter uncover lack of clear thinking about purpose and strategy? Yes, it does, so she should now go back and address these issues in her essay. Without having done this type of reflective exercise, she likely would have thought her essay was just fine, and she would have been unpleasantly surprised to get the grade back with my (the teacher's) extensive commentary and critique. She never would have predicted what I would say because she wouldn't have had a process for thinking through these issues—and might not have known how to begin thinking this way. Drafting the letter should help her develop more insight into and control over the revising process so she can make more effective decisions as she revises.

How It Works

Intentions—a sense of audience and purpose and of what the writer wants the essay to do—are essential to a good piece of communicative writing. Anson makes the point that when an instructor asks a student to verbalize his or her intentions, it is much more likely that the student will have intentions (qtd. in Yancey and Smith 174). We saw this process in mid-struggle with our imaginary student's work (above), and we'll see it handled more effectively in real student examples (below). As many composition scholars explain, reflective and self-assessing activities help writers set goals for their writing. For instance, Rebecca Moore Howard states that "writers who can assess their own prose can successfully revise that prose" (36). This position is further illustrated by Xiaoguang Cheng and Margaret S. Steffenson, who conducted and then reported a study clearly demonstrating a direct positive effect of reflection on student revising processes in "Metadiscourse: A Technique for Improving Student Writing." Yancey and Smith argue that self-assessment and reflection are essential to the learning process because they are a "method for assigning both responsibility and authority to a learner" (170). Students then become independent learners who can take what they learn about writing into the future beyond a particular class rather than remaining dependent on teachers or peer evaluators (171). Anson echoes this idea, saying that reflection helps a writer grow beyond simply succeeding in a particular writing project: "Once they begin thinking about writing productively, they stand a much better chance of developing expertise and working more successfully in future writing situations" (73).

Examples From Real Students

Let's see some examples from actual students now, although for the sake of space we'll look at excerpts. The first few illustrate

how reflective writing helps you develop your intentions. For an assignment to write a profile essay, Joshua Dawson described his purpose and audience: "This essay is about my grandmother and how she overcame the hardships of life. [. . .] The purpose of this essay is to show how a woman can be tough and can take anything life throws at her. I hope the essay reaches students who have a single parent and those who don't know what a single parent goes through." Joshua showed a clear idea of what he wanted his essay to do. For a cultural differences paper, Haley Moore wrote about her mission trip to Peru: "I tried to show how, in America, we have everything from clean water to freedom of religion and other parts of the world do not. Also, I would like for my essay to inspire people to give donations or help in any way they can for the countries that live in poverty." Haley's final draft actually did not address the issue of donations and focused instead on the importance of mission work, a good revision decision that kept the essay more focused.

In a Composition II class, Chelsie Mathis wrote an argumentative essay on a set of controversial photos published in newspapers in the 1970s which showed a woman falling to her death during a fire escape collapse. Chelsie said,

> The main purpose of this essay is to argue whether the [newspaper] editors used correct judgment when deciding to publish such photos. The effect that I want my paper to have on the readers is to really make people think about others' feelings and to make people realize that poor judgment can have a big effect. [. . .] I intend for my readers to possibly be high school students going into the field of journalism or photojournalism.

Chelsie demonstrated clear thinking about purpose and about who she wanted her essay to influence. Another Comp II student, Daniel White, wrote, "This essay is a cognitive approach of how I feel YouTube is helping our society achieve its dreams and desires of becoming stars." I had no idea what he meant by "cognitive approach," but I knew he was taking a psychology class at the same

time. I appreciated that he was trying to integrate his learning from that class into ours, trying to learn to use that vocabulary. I was sure that with more practice, he would get the hang of it. I didn't know whether he was getting much writing practice at all in psychology, so I was happy to let him practice it in my class. His reflection showed learning in process.

My students often resist writing about their composing processes, but it's good for them to see and analyze how they did what they did, and it also helps me know what they were thinking when they made composing decisions. Josh Autry, in regards to his essay on scuba diving in the Florida Keys at the wreck of the Spiegel Grove, said, "Mapping was my preferred method of outlining. It helped me organize my thoughts, go into detail, and pick the topics that I thought would be the most interesting to the readers." He also noted, "I choose [sic] to write a paragraph about everything that can happen to a diver that is not prepared but after reviewing it I was afraid that it would scare an interested diver away. I chose to take that paragraph out and put a few warnings in the conclusion so the aspiring diver would not be clueless." This was a good decision that did improve the final draft. His earlier draft had gotten derailed by a long discussion of the dangers of scuba diving in general. But he came to this realization and decided to correct it without my help—except that I had led the class through reflective revising activities. D'Amber Walker wrote, "At first my organization was off because I didn't know if I should start off with a personal experience which included telling a story or start with a statistic." Apparently, a former teacher had told her not to include personal experiences in her essays. I reminded her that in our workshop on introductions, we had discussed how a personal story can be a very effective hook to grab the reader's attention. So once again, a teaching moment. When Jonathan Kelly said, "I probably could have given more depth to this paper by interviewing a peer or something but I really felt unsure of how to go about doing so," I was able to scold him gently. If he really didn't know how to ask fellow students their opinions, all he had to do was ask me. But his statement shows an accurate

assessment of how the paper could have been better. When Nigel Ellington titled his essay "If Everything Was Easy, Nothing Would Be Worth Anything," he explained, "I like this [title] because it's catchy and doesn't give too much away and it hooks you." He integrated what he learned in a workshop on titles. Doing this one little bit of reflective thinking cemented that learning and gave him a chance to use it in his actual paper.

How It Helps Me (the Instructor) Help You

Writing teachers often play two roles in relation to their students. I am my students' instructor, but I am also a fellow writer. As a writer, I have learned that revision can be overwhelming. It's tempting just to fiddle with words and commas if I don't know what else to do. Reflection is a mechanism, a set of procedures, to help me step back from a draft to gain enough distance to ask myself, "Is this really what I want the essay (or story or poem or article) to do? Is this really what I want it to say? Is this the best way to get it to say that?" To revise is to re-vision or re-see, to re-think these issues, but you have to create a critical distance to be able to imagine your piece done another way. Reflection helps you create that distance. It also helps your instructor better guide your work and respond to it.

The semester after my experience in Bishop's Life Writing Class, I took a Fiction Writing Workshop taught by Mark Winegardner, author of *The Godfather Returns* and *The Godfather's Revenge*, as well as numerous other novels and short stories. Winegardner had us create what he called the "process memo." As he indicated in an interview, he uses the memo mainly as a tool to help the workshop instructor know how to respond to the writer's story. If a writer indicates in the memo that he knows something is still a problem with the story, then the instructor can curtail lengthy discussion of that issue's existence during the workshop and instead prompt peers to provide suggestions. The instructor can give some pointed advice, or possibly reassurance, based on the writer's concerns that,

without being psychic, the instructor would not otherwise have known about. Composition scholar Jeffrey Sommers notes that reflective pieces show teachers what your intentions for your writing actually are, which lets us respond to your writing accurately, rather than responding to what we think your intentions might be ("Enlisting" 101–2). He also points out that we can know how to reduce your anxiety about your writing appropriately ("Behind" 77). Thus, without a reflective memo, your teacher might pass right over the very issue you have been worried about.

The Habit of Self-Reflective Writing

One of the most important functions of reflective writing in the long run is to establish in you, the writer, a habit of self-reflective thinking. The first few reflective pieces you write may feel awkward and silly and possibly painful. You might play the teacher-pleasing game. But that's really not what we want (see Smith 129). Teachers don't want you to say certain things, we want you to think in certain ways. Once you get the hang of it and start to see the benefits in your writing, you'll notice that you've formed a habit of thinking reflectively almost invisibly. And not only will it help you in writing classes, but in any future writing projects for biology class, say, or even further in the future, in writing that you may do on the job, such as incident reports or annual reports for a business. You'll become a better writer. You'll become a better thinker. You'll become a better learner. And learning is what you'll be doing for the rest of your life. I recently painted my kitchen. It was a painful experience. I had a four-day weekend and thought I could clean, prep, and paint the kitchen, breakfast nook, and hallway to the garage in just four days, not to mention painting the trim and doors white. I pushed myself to the limit of endurance. And when I finished the wall color (not even touching the trim), I didn't like it. The experience was devastating. A very similar thing had happened three years before when I painted my home office a color I now call

"baby poop." My home office is still "baby poop" because I got so frustrated I just gave up. Now, the kitchen was even worse. It was such a light green it looked like liver failure and didn't go with the tile on the floor. Plus, it showed brush marks and other flaws. What the heck?

But unlike three years ago, when I had given up, I decided to apply reflective practices to the situation. I decided to see it as time for revision-type thinking. Why had I wanted green to begin with? (Because I didn't want blue in a kitchen. I've really been craving that hot dark lime color that's popular now. So yes, I still want it to be green.) Why hadn't I chosen a darker green? (Because I have the darker, hotter color into the room with accessories. The lighter green has a more neutral effect that I shouldn't get sick of after six months. Perhaps I'll get used to it, especially when I get around to painting the trim white.) What caused the brush strokes? (I asked an expert. Two factors: using satin finish rather than eggshell, and using a cheap paintbrush for cut-in-areas.) How can they be fixed? (Most of the brush strokes are just in the cut-in areas and so they can be redone quickly with a better quality brush. That is, if I decide to keep this light green color.) Is the fact that the trim is still cream-colored rather than white part of the problem? (Oh, yes. Fix that first and the other problems might diminish.) What can I learn about timing for my next paint project? (That the cleaning and prep work take much longer than you think, and that you will need two coats, plus drying time. And so what if you didn't finish it in four days? Relax! Allow more time next time.) Am I really worried about what my mother will say? (No, because I'm the one who has to look at it every day.) So the solution? Step one is to paint the trim first and then re-evaluate. Using a method of reflection to think back over my "draft" gives me a method for proceeding with "revision." At the risk of sounding like a pop song, when you stop to think it through, you'll know what to do.

Revision isn't just in writing. These methods can be applied any time you are working on a project—of any kind—or have to make decisions about something. Establishing the habit of reflective

thinking will have far-reaching benefits in your education, your career, and your life. It's an essential key to success for the life-long learner.

Discussion

1. Define what metacognitive or reflective writing is. What are some of the prompts or "topics" for reflective writing?
2. Have you ever been asked to do this type of writing? If so, briefly discuss your experience.
3. Why does reflective writing help a student learn and develop as a better writer? How does it work?
4. Draft a Letter to the Reader for an essay you are working on right now. Analyze the letter to see what strengths or problems it uncovers regarding your essay.

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Keywords

reflective writing, **reflection**, **self-assessment**, **evaluation**, **metacognition**

Author Bio

Sandra Giles has been teaching college-level English since 1991 and has been at ABAC since 1997. She's a native of Tifton, having learned to drive in the rodeo parking lot, and graduated ABAC herself in 1987. She holds a PhD in English from Florida State University, specializing in Creative Writing and Rhetoric-Composition. Other than reading and writing, hobbies and interests include dance, tai chi,

singing, herb gardening, and letting her three cats in and out from the porch.

28. Bad Idea About Writing: "Writing Knowledge Transfers Easily"

ELLEN C. CARILLO

Abstract

Coming from the essay compilation *Bad Ideas About Writing*, the title of Ellen Carillo's essay, "Writing Knowledge Transfers Easily," may be misleading until you read it in its entirety. Her argument is that for writing knowledge to transfer—move from one class, situation, or paper to another, we have to work really hard. Ultimately, Carillo recommends that faculty and students work together to be metacognitive about writing – that is, to be acutely aware of our thinking throughout the process.

This reading is available below, as a PDF, or as a podcast.

It may not be an exaggeration to say that the very notion of writing instruction is based on a myth. Writing courses, like courses in many—maybe all—fields, are arranged in what we would call a vertical curriculum with students enrolling first in introductory courses like freshman English. This course may be followed by a research-writing or similarly advanced writing course and then, perhaps, by a more intense writing course that often serves as

a capstone seminar in the student's major. Certainly, there are variations of this model, but the structure is largely consistent across American post-secondary institutions in that students are expected to take introductory writing courses before taking more advanced ones. The reason curricula are designed in this way is so that students apply what they learn in those introductory courses to the more advanced courses that follow. This sounds like common sense, no? Yet, it is a myth that students will automatically apply— or transfer (the term most often used in educational psychology and composition studies) what they learn in their lower-level writing courses to their upper-level ones. They simply won't.

Anecdotally, writing instructors see this all the time: students entering a second-semester writing course as if they had no previous college-level writing course (let alone one linked to that second-semester course), or students struggling with the writing component of their senior seminars despite their taking the required introductory writing courses and writing-intensive course(s) in their majors. Any number of variables might account for the experiences these anecdotes describe, but research corroborates that students don't automatically transfer what they have learned about writing from one class into the next. The key word here is "automatically." Transfer is not impossible, but it shouldn't be taken for granted. It is a bad idea for writing programs and instructors to simply rely on curricula design to do their work for them—students will continue to be unprepared for their next writing course, let alone a course where writing is only one of the components.

Before describing the research that indicates why writing programs and instructors should not assume that knowledge transfer will automatically occur, it is perhaps wise to define the term *transfer* and offer some of its history. Transfer is a concept that has been studied for years by educational and cognitive psychologists, only recently becoming an interest of those in composition studies who teach and research writing development. Educational psychologists Gavriel Salomon and David Perkins define

transfer as "instances in which learning in one context or with one set of materials impacts on performance in another context or with other related materials." Research on transfer dates to the turn of the 20th century. Educational psychologists Edward Thorndike and Robert Woodworth conducted the earliest experiments in 1901. They found transfer to be rare and only successful when there were identical elements in the situations or contexts. Less than a decade later, educational psychologist Charles Judd challenged these findings and showed that if the learner was capable of understanding the abstract principle informing the problem or idea, she would be able to apply it in a different context even if all the same elements were not present. Judd showed that transfer was, in fact, possible in situations that were not characterized by identical elements and that the learner herself was an important component in the process.

While Judd showed that transfer was possible, he did not prove that it was automatic; it is the automaticity of transfer that is too often assumed in the teaching of writing. There is simply no basis for that assumption. Writing professors Anne Beaufort and Elizabeth Wardle both found in their research that even when students described their first-year writing courses as valuable, they were largely unable to generalize its teachings and thus imagine how that writing connected to other courses. For example, Wardle explains that students "did not appear to make even near connections of those skills, much less transfer those skills to very different contexts... no students suggested they were being asked to write a persuasive paper to be able to write persuasively in other courses."

Although Judd's experiments in 1908 indicated that transfer was possible, it would take nearly a century for those who teach and study writing to begin thinking about what to do about this. In fact, it was less than a decade ago that these scholars regularly began asking questions such as: If transfer is possible, are there certain ways we can teach writing to promote transfer?

The affirmative answer to this question is the antidote to this bad

idea. Curricula must be redesigned with the concept of transfer in mind, and instructors must be trained to teach toward the goal of transfer. No matter how one teaches for transfer, the one consistent recommendation for doing so involves incorporating metacognitive exercises into writing courses. Metacognition literally means thinking about thinking, so metacognitive exercises in the classroom would ask students to think about what they are thinking and learning. These exercises give students opportunities to reflect on what they are learning about writing and—as such— potentially position students to transfer what they are learning. The same applies to everyone who suspects they will want to or need to transfer something they are learning to a future context. It would be useful to reflect on that learning and even anticipate where else it might be useful for people to transfer that knowledge to other situations since it will not automatically transfer.

Most recently, Kathleen Yancey and her colleagues tested the benefits of deliberately teaching for transfer. They found that students in courses with instructors who taught for transfer did transfer their writing skills and knowledge more regularly than students who were in other types of writing courses. My sense is that more studies that corroborate these findings are on their way. If that's the case, and these studies are taken as seriously as they should be, colleges and universities will see the emergence of new curricula and teaching practices that no longer perpetuate the myth of automatic transfer. The broader implications of studies on teaching for transfer are just as striking. By studying transfer, all of us come to a better understanding about how we and others learn in our everyday lives and what types of learning experiences facilitate transfer not just in academic contexts but across all the contexts we inhabit, including—but certainly not limited to—school, home, and work.

Further Reading

For foundational work on the transfer of learning from the field of education, see David Perkins and Gavriel Salomon's article "Are Cognitive Skills Context Bound?" and summarizing encyclopedia entry, "Transfer of Learning." Building upon this work, scholars in rhetoric and composition have written extensively about how learning transfers from one writing course or writing situation to another. For scholarly books on problems of transfer, see Anne Beaufort's *College Writing and Beyond*, my book *Securing a Place for Reading in Composition: The Importance of Teaching for Transfer*, Kathleen Blake Yancey, Liane Robertson, and Kara Taczak's *Writing Across Contexts*, and Rebecca Nowacek's *Agents of Integration: Understanding Transfer as a Rhetorical* Act. For journal articles, see Linda Bergmann and Janet Zepernick's "Disciplinarity and Transference: Students' Perceptions of Learning to Write," Christiane Donahue's "Transfer, Portability, Generalization: (How) Does Composition Expertise 'Carry'?," Julie Foertsch's "Where Cognitive Psychology Applies: How Theories about Memory and Transfer Can Influence Composition Pedagogy," Dana Lynn Driscoll's "Connected, Disconnected, or Uncertain: Student Attitudes about Future Writing Contexts and Perceptions of Transfer from First-Year Writing to the Disciplines," and Gerald Nelms and Rhonda Leathers Dively's "Perceived Roadblocks to Transferring Knowledge from First-Year Composition to WritingIntensive Major Courses: A Pilot Study."

Keywords

composition studies, **metacognition**, **transfer**, **vertical curriculum**

Author Bio

Ellen C. Carillo, Ph.D. is an associate professor at the University of Connecticut and the writing program coordinator at its Waterbury Campus. Her administrative work involves directing the Writing Center, supervising the first-year writing program, and supporting faculty who teach writing-intensive courses across the disciplines. She has written a book, as well as articles and chapters about the importance of teaching for transfer. She incorporates this approach into the literature and writing courses she teaches. Ellen has earned two grants to explore transfer in different settings and has served as an advisor for graduate students who are completing dissertations on transfer.

29. The Importance of Transfer in Your First Year Writing Course

KARA TACZAK

Abstract

In this essay from *Writing Spaces: Readings About Writings, Volume 4*, Kara Taczak explores the importance of transfer in first year writing.[1] Transfer is the ability to take writing knowledge and practices from one context and use it to repurpose or reframe it in a new/different writing context. To help students better understand how to effectively transfer, this essay examines three common misconceptions about writing–(1) writing is natural; (2)

writing is a one size fits all model; and (3) there is nothing more to learn about writing–and then revises them into "truths" about writing–(1) writing is a process; (2) purpose, genre, and audience inform the writing situation; and (3) there's always something more to learn about writing in order to help explain how to effectively and successfully transfer knowledge and practices from past and current writing experiences forward.

This reading is available below or as a PDF. The PDF includes additional teacher resources.

Growing up, a thought that haunted me was fading into the fashion cracks of Steubenville High School. I never wanted to fit in with my fashion choices necessarily, but I never wanted to *not* fit in either, so it was about finding the balance in my outfits. My mama encouraged me to mix my patterns and to wear bold colors. I'd scour the pages of *Vogue* and *Glamour* for the latest trends; I'd try on outfits in front of the mirror for an hour or more attempting to perfect the look of the day. Now, years later, there is still a part of me reaching for the neon green Sketchers to pair with the floral romper; the style I started to hone as a high schooler continues to be a part of my style today. Style tends to be something that you develop the more you learn about fashion, which comes from reading through magazines, following influencers on social media, practicing different looks for different events and occasions, and so on. In short, style comes about much like any learning does—through practice, experiences, knowledge, and reflection, and an understanding of what to "transfer" forward into each situation.

Similarly, honing your writing practices are much like honing your style; just as you figure out what outfit matches what occasion, you have to figure out what and how to frame each writing situation based on what you know about the situation. So similar to how

you assess what to wear based on the occasion—certain occasions call for cozy loungewear and others call for sparkly, glamorous dresses—you assess each writing situation to understand what it's asking of you about how to approach it. For example, if you email your professor with the same tone and attitude as you might your bestie and get an angry response, you will determine that you shouldn't email your professor as you would your bestie.

Style takes time to develop, much like your writing practices take time to develop, and with each new occasion, you understand more about your individual style and you understand more about what can be appropriate, when, and where. Such as, if an occasion calls for a three-piece suit, you assess the situation. You decide what part of your style you can "transfer" in appropriately—a pop of color with a tie, a whimsical pair of socks, or something that shows *your* style while also dressing for the occasion. By "transferring" a part of your style into this specific occasion, you moved it forward. The same is true with writing—you can "transfer" writing practices forward into different writing situations to help you figure out what to do. But what does "transfer" actually mean? And why is it important for you and your writing?

Let's break it down: *transfer* is the ability to take knowledge and practices learned about writing in one context and repurpose or reframe that knowledge and practice to help you in another context. This can happen at the same time—concurrently—or it can happen in the future.

So, for example, you might have transferred writing knowledge and practices you learned in your high school English course (one context) to your college entrance exam (a new, different context). Understanding transfer and its relationship to writing is particularly important in college. Why? For a couple reasons: first, writing is arguably one of the most important practices to engage with and learn more about in college, and second, so much of what we do nowadays is done in the written form. You will write in your future whether it's in another college class, for a co-curricular club, for a job or your future career, or even for social media. In one way or

another, you *will* write. But, like some unique style choices, writing can be misunderstood and misconceptions about it can be formed. And these misconceptions impact your ability to successfully and effectively transfer writing knowledge and practices forward.

The Importance of Transfer in First Year Writing

First year writing tends to be one or two courses that you take during your first or second semester as a first year student in college. The goal of any first year writing course should be to teach for transfer; in other words, to teach you writing concepts, knowledge(s), and practices to carry forward and help you repurpose or reframe other writing contexts (basically, to help you understand other/future writing situations). Doing so helps you to become a more effective writer, able to assess a writing situation and understand what it's asking of you. First year writing, simply put, teaches you *about* writing and attempts to prepare you for in-school and out-of-school writing tasks. Thus, transfer is so important in first year writing because it's attempting to teach you to be a more effective writer for your future (and this future could be the near future, as in another class, or the distant future, as in your career).

When we think of transfer, we hope it's successful or effective at moving writing practices forward. The example I gave in the introduction of using knowledge and practices from your high school English course to write your college entrance essay could be an example of what's called "positive transfer" and since you are reading this essay, chances are you effectively transferred that knowledge and practice from one context to another—in other words, you positively moved knowledge and practices forward. But there can also be two less-positive types of transfer:

1. Negative transfer, when the knowledge or practice used negatively impacts your ability to effectively perform in the

new context (Perkins and Salomon). For example, if you've been used to writing the 5-paragraph essay for most of your life, this is your default response to any and all academic writing situations, so when your philosophy professor asks you to write a reflective letter, you write her a 5-paragraph essay without giving it much thought. You receive a C- on the assignment and are crushed and angry. You did what you always have done; how could it be "wrong?" It's "wrong" because the writing you provided doesn't match what the situation asked of you. This is an example of negative transfer.

2. Resistance transfer, when the writer's past experiences with writing encourage a resistance to new learning often resulting in a roadblock (Robertson et al.; Yancey et al.). This roadblock can manifest in many ways from general types of resistances to fear of failure—different types of students harness the roadblock in different ways depending upon what their prior experiences with writing looked like.

You might find yourself in one or both of these categories without even realizing it. So how can you build upon these and move forward? The first step is simple: acknowledge them. When you actively acknowledge something—whether by saying it out loud in a discussion or by writing about it in a reflection—it becomes real in a way that it was not before. You acknowledge the need to learn more. The next steps include developing that learning and first year writing can help you with that.

Our lives revolve around writing: writing for social media, writing for school, writing for a job; in short, writing allows us to communicate with any number of specific audiences. And we know from research that the ability to effectively respond to writing situations determines success in college and beyond. In the next sections, we'll walk through some of the bigger misconceptions about writing and how they encourage negative or resistance transfer. We'll also look at how to flip or revise the misconceptions into "truths" about writing—certainties about writing that help you

further develop your ability as a writer so that you may be able to successfully and effectively transfer.

Common Misconceptions about Writing and Their Revised Truths

Much like your style, writing can get a bad rap, and thus, there are some common misconceptions about it. These misconceptions can hinder your ability as a writer to effectively respond to a writing situation, and these misconceptions closely connect to your prior experiences with writing: "prior" experiences are experiences or learning(s) you've had in the past that have helped shape your understanding and awareness on/about a topic. And because misconceptions are so closely connected to your prior experiences with writing, they can lead to negative and/or resistance transfer because both impede your ability to learn.

Below, I outline three common misconceptions (there are, of course, many more misconceptions about writing, but these are the three that come up the most in my own research on transfer and with my first year students). Then, following each misconception, are what I call "(revised) 'truths,'" or ways to push back on the misconceptions and build upon them, allowing you the opportunity to more readily transfer.

Misconception #1: Writing Is Natural

Before you begin any writing task, what do you think about? What do you actually *do* before you start writing? How do you understand what's being asked of you as the writer?

You may be thinking: "Well, I don't really think about anything" or "Hm. I don't actually do anything except just start writing" and you wouldn't be alone in these assumptions. Many students believe that their writing happens naturally or without a process (or as many students have said: "Unconsciously"). In other words, a lot of students believe that they don't need to think about the writing task before they actually begin writing it. They believe that writing

is a natural process. But recent research in composition studies, or the study of writing and the practices of it, argues that writing is *not* natural: "It's useful to remember that writing is not natural because writers tend to judge their writing processes too harshly—comparing them to the ease with which they usually speak" (Dryer 29). Thus, if writing is not natural, then a writer *must* think about their writing before beginning to help them understand what's even being asked of them and then how to effectively respond to the situation. And, as I explain below, we know from years of research that writing is a process. This process is non-linear and complicated. It looks different for everyone and to create an effective piece of writing, and as my mentor once taught me, you have to trust that process. In other words, you have to follow that process all the way through from messy start to complex finish.

(Revised) Truth #1: Writing Is a Process

Since writing is not natural, this means you need to develop a process in which you respond to the various writing situations. The process you develop helps you figure out how to frame or reframe various writing tasks. For example, the process might include doing a quick audience profile (depending upon the audience), asking questions about purpose, googling the conventions of the genre, drafting the genre, and reflecting upon what worked and didn't work. Everybody's writing process looks a little different because we all have different writerly identities (who you are as a writer and how you understand how to *be* a writer); a writerly identity helps make your writing yours, and it should transcend all writing situations. For example, no matter what genre Stephen King writes in, you always know it's Stephen King because his writerly identity includes using a specific type of tone, phrasing, and other things that are unique to him as a writer.

We know from decades' worth of research that writing is a process, and you have to learn to trust that process. This means

that you start to trust yourself as a writer. The process helps you to better understand what's being asked of you and how you might effectively respond to that writing situation. Part of this includes drafting—from brainstorming ideas to generating rough, working drafts to digging into who your audience is and what they expect—and often peer review or having your peers look over and review your writing to help you figure out what to do in revision. Most writers' process(es) includes drafting, some form of peer review, and editing. But really, your process is yours to figure out what works best for you.

So, what does your writing process look like? Take a moment and try two things:

1. Reflect back on a writing situation where you felt most proud of the writing. What did you do to create it? Why did that particular piece of writing make you proud? What do you wish you could have done differently and/or changed?
2. Draw out your writing process. Yes, literally draw it out. What does it look like for you to create a piece of writing that you are proud of? What do you need? What space are you in? Who helps you? Respond to these questions by drawing them out so you can visually see what your writing process looks like.

Figuring out what your process is and what it looks like helps you to become a more effective writer, and over time, the more you begin to trust your process, the more you'll understand who you are as a writer (and develop your writerly identity). Then, it's this process (or processes) that can transfer into other writing contexts, informing them and helping you better understand how to approach them.

Misconception #2: Writing Is One Size Fits All

How do you respond to a text message from your bestie? How do you compose an Instagram post? How do you figure out what kind

of caption and hashtags to use for your TikTok video? How do you write a 1000- word essay?

High school teaches you how to write in a specific genre: the 5-paragraph essay (or 5- paragraph theme) because it can be helpful for the type of writing that you do while in high school. However, the 5-paragraph essay cannot be used as a blanket genre or a one size fits all model. Why? Because not all writing situations are one and the same. All writing situations ask something different of you. For example, in the four questions above, each one has a different purpose, a different audience, and a different genre, which means to effectively respond to each one, you need to understand what each purpose is, who your audience is, and what the genre conventions are. This can be difficult because "people act in multiple, interacting systems of activity where writing that seems the 'same' as what one has read or written before is in practice very different—and not only in the formal features, the 'how' of writing" (Russell and Yañez 359). What this means is, because you are being asked to write in multiple situations at the same time, it might appear that you should respond to them all in the same way as you've previously done before, when, really, each writing situation is unique and requires its own individual and specific response.

When you practice one type of writing for so long, it can be difficult to build onto that existing, prior knowledge, since up to that point the one size fits all model has worked so well (whether it worked well to get a good grade, to pass the test, or simply to get you through). And when something has worked well, it can be difficult to build upon because you are unsure of how to revise those practices. To do so requires an understanding that there is more to learn.

(Revised) Truth #2: Purpose, Genre, and Audience Inform the Writing Situation

As the Russell and Yañez quote suggests, one of the biggest

problems with Misconception #2 is that it doesn't account for the different specifics that make each writing situation its own. All writing situations ask different things of you, the writer. An easy way to break it down is to ask yourself:

- What is the *purpose* of the writing situation? What is the situation asking you specifically to do?
- What is the *genre*? And what are the specific conventions of that genre (what makes an email different from a rhetorical analysis and different from a text message?)?
- Who is the *audience*? What do you know about the audience?

In short, there are different types of writing situations and each one has a specific *purpose* with a specific *genre* and a specific *audience*. These are considered "key terms" or terms that help you better comprehend how to respond to a writing situation. These terms also start to give you a vocabulary to help you articulate an understanding of writing. Research from writing studies shows that when students don't have a vocabulary to explain their writing practices, they have a difficult time transferring knowledge or practices forward (Jarratt et al.). The vocabulary, or key terms, provide you with a way to talk (and write) about writing.

Building on the two activities above, take a minute to respond to these questions:

1. What are your key terms for writing—terms that help you define what writing is and how you understand it?
2. Define the terms.
3. Where did each term come from? Where did you learn it? What terms do you need to add from this course?
4. Where/how do these terms fit into your writing process drawing from above? Do you need to revise your drawing?

Key terms, such as purpose, audience, and genre, help provide a way for you to better understand the writing situation and to articulate

that understanding. Before you begin to write, think through how to define each key term in response to the writing situation, thereby allowing yourself a chance to dig into the expectations of the situation and more effectively respond. These key terms become part of your process; thus, by having a set of key terms, you create a framework that you can transfer forward.

Misconception #3: There's Nothing More to Learn

What classes were you most excited to take your first year in college? What classes were you dreading?

You might be thinking, "Well, I didn't exactly want to take first year writing…" and many others would probably agree with you. Even though first year writing is a class that the majority of students across the country (no matter the institution that they are at) *have* to take, it is also one that many of students do not *want* to take. Why? Because a lot of students believe that there's nothing more to learn with writing—that the knowledge and practices learned during their K-12 education is all they need to be successful and effective writers. Some also believe that every writing class and every academic writing opportunity only presents them with the exact same type of material over and over again so that they are merely relearning the same thing they learned previously.

These perceptions about writing lead to some pretty deep-rooted emotional responses to first year writing courses, from anger to indifference to bitterness. As a result, out of these three misconceptions about writing, this one is the hardest to work on and move past. Why? Because if you enter into a class believing you don't have anything to learn or you'll only be learning the same thing you already know, you've already set yourself up to not learn anything. Belief is a very powerful tool, and the ways in which it's ingrained in prior experiences with writing affect the way a writer responds to a writing task. For example, and as many writing scholars have argued, if a writer approaches a writing situation as

"something they already know how to produce" (i.e. a 5-paragraph essay) without giving it much attention or thought, then their prior experiences have impacted their ability to truly look at and assess what the writing situation is asking of them and then they simply respond with a 5-paragraph essay.

Pushing past and building onto these prior experiences can be incredibly difficult, especially if the belief is also connected to value (i.e. grades). I've seen students respond to a new writing situation like, "Eh, whaddaya know? I've gotten As up to this! My writing works." Writing then is connected to a grade instead of being connected to the actual situation. The thinking is more "how do I receive a 'good' grade" as opposed to "how to do I effectively respond to what's being asked of me?" This may work for a moment or even longer in college, but what happens when you graduate? What happens when you no longer receive a letter grade for your writing? These prior experiences and learning(s)—especially the ones rooted in beliefs, attitudes, and dispositions—negatively affect your ability to transfer (Driscoll and Wells). So, it's important to try and challenge them and to build upon them, but doing so requires feeling a little uncomfortable, which means you have to open yourself up to learning more about writing.

(Revised) Truth #3: **There's Always Something More to Learn About Writing**

There's always more to learn about writing but many students assume that once writing is "learned," it's learned for always and forever. But as a writing scholar explains, "Writers never cease learning to write, never completely perfect their writing ability, as long as they encounter new or unfamiliar life experiences that require or inspire writing" (Rose 61). This suggests you are going to continue to evolve as a writer (the more you learn) and that life will continue to bring about new writing experiences.

A good example of this is in your first year writing course. You are

going to be presented with new and different terms, concepts, and practices about writing and, in order to understand them more fully, you will be asked to write about them. Writing about writing (which is very meta and requires reflection) encourages you to mindfully engage with your learning because it puts the learning back on you, the writer, to figure out what it all means. This, of course, is not easy, and it requires you (a) to trust the process (see above) and (b) to have the right attitude, that, yes, there is more to learn about writing. Dispositions, just like beliefs, are incredibly powerful and having a positive engaging attitude sets yourself up to not only learn more but to also successfully transfer what you learn in your first year writing course to other writing contexts and experiences (Driscoll and Wells).

To become a more competent, effective writer requires a commitment to learning more and a commitment to writing more. Writing is not going away; just because you pass through a first year writing course (or set of courses), writing doesn't magically cease to exist. In fact, writing will span your lifetime in various ways and through a variety of modes, mediums, and genres; allowing yourself to learn more about it helps you to become a better, more effective writer and teaches you how to transfer knowledge and practices forward to help repurpose and reframe different writing situations and contexts. In short, by learning more about writing, you set yourself up for success in the future both in college and beyond.

Don't Fade into the [Transfer] Cracks: A Conclusion

I never faded into the fashion cracks of Steubenville High School, and I definitely don't fade into any fashion cracks today—you wanna know why? Because I know that style evolves and continues to take time to develop, and I know there's more for me to learn about fashion by watching influencers, browsing magazines, and taking risks at various occasions. That's my process for honing my style; it's evolved a bit as I've grown older (as it should), but it's still my

process. It helps me to understand each occasion and to know what from my style to transfer into that occasion.

The same is true about you and writing: you don't want to fade into the transfer cracks. What does that mean? For example, believing there's nothing left to learn with writing—there is always more to learn about yourself as a writer and about writing more generally. Like I continue to evolve with my style, you will continue to evolve as a writer the more you learn and the more you write. You will also learn how to hone your writing process(es), which in turn will help you be able to figure out what's being asked of you in the writing situation and more effectively transfer writing knowledge and practices. Acknowledging and building on the common misconceptions about writing allows you to bridge your prior with your current experiences and learning(s) so that transfer is possible.

First year writing is an important part of your college career—it offers you valuable writing knowledge and practices that can transfer forward into other college classes and beyond.

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Author Bio

Kara Taczak is Teaching Professor at the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences of Denver University. She received her Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Composition from Florida State University in 2011.

APPENDIX A: DOCUMENTATION STYLES (MLA & APA)

When producing an academic text you are likely to need to apply either MLA or APA style. This section will provide you with a basic understanding of both aforementioned styles.

In "Formatting Your Paper in MLA," Melanie Gagich gives some basic tips on how to affect MLA style when formatting your document.

John Brentar and Emilie Zickel, in "MLA: Works Cited Entries," provide easily understood advice on how to affect MLA in-text citations.

A Works Cited example is provided by Emilie Zickel and John Brentar in "MLA: Works Cited Examples."

In "Formatting Your Paper in APA," Melanie Gagich gives formatting tips for APA style.

In "Applying APA Citations: In-text Citations," Melanie Gagich goes over the basics of APA in-text citations, which do markedly differ from MLA.

And, in "Applying APA Citations: References," Melanie Gagich presents foundational information about APA Reference page construction.

Appendix A: Documentation Styles will feature **Composing Processes**, **Reading**, and **Information Literacy**. Chapters 48, 49, 50, and 51 address proper MLA formatting procedures (Information Literacy), and in Chapters 52, 53, and 54, readers will be introduced to another type of formatting protocol, APA, which is used primarily in the social sciences. All together, these chapters emphasize the importance of appropriate documentation styles for first-year writing courses.

30. Formatting Your Paper in MLA

MELANIE GAGICH

Understanding Documentation Styles

There are many types of documentation styles; however, the two you will likely use most consistently in college writing classes are MLA and APA. You might think that it doesn't matter which one you choose… but it does. A documentation style dictates how a manuscript is formatted, the way you cite outside sources inside the text (signal phrases and parenthetical citations), the way you cite bibliographic information (Works Cited or References), and the style of writing that you use. Below you will find beginning information about MLA style. To get more information about APA style visit the Purdue OWL website.

Modern Language Association (MLA)

The Modern Language Association began in 1883 as a "discussion and advocacy group for the study of literature and modern languages" ("Modern Language Association"). The style was created by this group in 1951 in order to provide scholars in this field with a set of shared writing and citation guidelines. MLA is mostly used in the humanities, such as English and modern languages.

With MLA style, you should always use Times New Roman 12-point font (unless otherwise directed by your instructor) and one-inch margins. The entire manuscript should also be double-

spaced. Below is an annotated example of other important features you should consider and include in your MLA manuscripts:
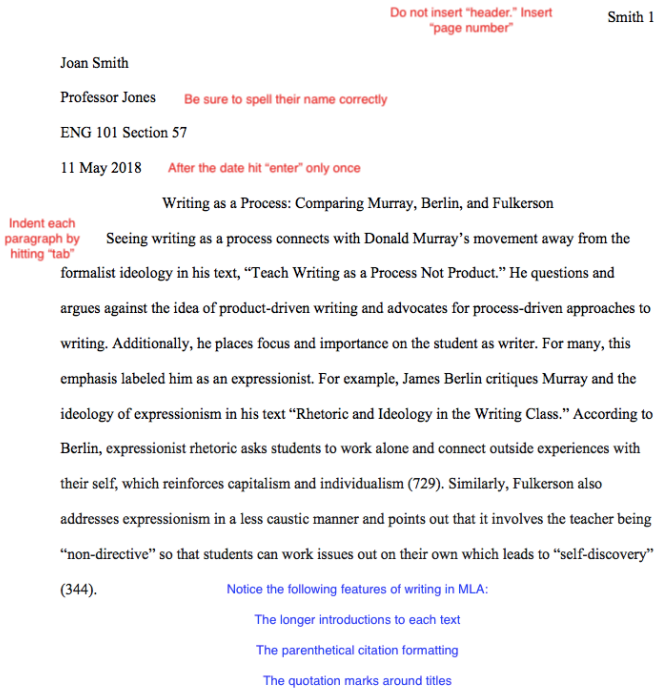
Do not insert "header." Insert "page number"

Smith 1

Joan Smith

Professor Jones   Be sure to spell their name correctly

ENG 101 Section 57

11 May 2018   After the date hit "enter" only once

Writing as a Process: Comparing Murray, Berlin, and Fulkerson

Indent each paragraph by hitting "tab"   Seeing writing as a process connects with Donald Murray's movement away from the formalist ideology in his text, "Teach Writing as a Process Not Product." He questions and argues against the idea of product-driven writing and advocates for process-driven approaches to writing. Additionally, he places focus and importance on the student as writer. For many, this emphasis labeled him as an expressionist. For example, James Berlin critiques Murray and the ideology of expressionism in his text "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class." According to Berlin, expressionist rhetoric asks students to work alone and connect outside experiences with their self, which reinforces capitalism and individualism (729). Similarly, Fulkerson also addresses expressionism in a less caustic manner and points out that it involves the teacher being "non-directive" so that students can work issues out on their own which leads to "self-discovery" (344).

Notice the following features of writing in MLA:
The longer introductions to each text
The parenthetical citation formatting
The quotation marks around titles

Figure 1: MLA Sample PDF

Works Cited

Berlin, James. "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class." *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory: A*

Reader, edited by Victor Villanueva, NCTE, 2003, pp.717-737.   *Chapter from an anthology*

Fulkerson, Richard. "Four Philosophies of Composition." *College Composition and*

Communication, vol. 30, no. 4, 1979, pp. 343-348.   *An article from a printed journal*

Murray, Donald. "Teach Writing as a Process Not Product." *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory: A*

Reader, edited by Victor Villanueva, NCTE, 2003, pp. 3-6.   *Chapter from an anthology*

Hanging Indent

Works Cited Info:

Works Cited receives its own page. It is part of your essay, not separate.

Use hanging indents

Alphabetize the Works Cited Entries

Italicize the publication (journal, book, website, magazine, etc.)

Place quotations marks around the title and use title caps

For more help with MLA, please visit the OWL of Purdue's MLA Guide.

31. MLA: In-Text Citations

JOHN BRENTAR AND EMILIE ZICKEL

We use in-text citations, also called parenthetical citations, to give our readers brief yet specific information about where in the original source material we found the idea or words that we are quoting or paraphrasing. In order to determine what the in-text citation should look like, we have to know what kind of source we are using. Use the following questions to help you determine source type:

- Is our source print or digital?
  - **Print sources** are any sources that are on paper or were originally printed on paper, even if you found a copy of it from an online research database like Academic Search Complete. These sources have page numbers. These page numbers need to appear in your in-text citations.
  - **Web/digital sources**, in many instances, do not have page numbers. Do not make them up! Page 1 of your computer screen is *not* the same as an actual page 1 in a print source.
- Do we have a named author or not?
- Is the source paginated (i.e., does it have page numbers in its original or current format)? Or is it a digital source without page numbers?

The basics of in-text citation

A complete in-text citation in MLA format includes three components: signal phrase, the original source material (quoted or paraphrased), and an in-text citation. In MLA, we do not use the word "page" or the abbreviations "p." or "pg." before the page

numbers. For those sources with page numbers—books and articles which were originally published in print publications, even if you accessed them using a research database like Academic Search Complete—place the page number in the citation.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://mtsu.pressbooks.pub/engl1010/?p=1182#h5p-2

In the examples that follow, you can find explanations of how to cite the following:

- print articles that have authors and page numbers
- print articles that have no authors, but page numbers
- digital articles that have authors but no page numbers
- digital articles that have no authors and no page numbers
- sources that have multiple authors

All of the examples are interactive; if you click on the "+", explanations will appear.

Citations for sources with authors and pages

The first time that you mention a source in a paper, **you need to introduce the source.** For this introduction, you can include the author's full name and a bit of description about the text that this author or these authors produced.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://mtsu.pressbooks.pub/engl1010/?p=1182#h5p-3

After that first time (which, more formally, would be called successive mentions of the source), you can give only the last name. If you name the authors in the signal phrase, you do not need to add the author(s)' names in the parenthetical citation, too.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://mtsu.pressbooks.pub/engl1010/?p=1182#h5p-4

If you do not name your author(s) in a signal phrase, then you must place the last name(s) only in the citation. In doing so, do not place a comma between the author name(s) and the page number.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://mtsu.pressbooks.pub/engl1010/?p=1182#h5p-5

Citations for sources with no authors, but page numbers

If your source does not list an author, then you must refer to the work by its title. If you name the title of the source in your signal phrase, give the entire title exactly as it appears in the source.

> ▣ *An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:*
> *https://mtsu.pressbooks.pub/engl1010/?p=1182#h5p-6*

If you do not mention the article title in your signal phrase, then you must place a shortened version of it in your in-text citation.

> ▣ *An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:*
> *https://mtsu.pressbooks.pub/engl1010/?p=1182#h5p-7*

Citations for sources with no page numbers (i.e., web-based sources outside of research databases)

Some sources have no page numbers. The prime examples are web-based sources. When you cite an online source and name the author(s) in your signal phrase, there will be no in-text citation, as there are no page numbers for web articles.

> *An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:*
> *https://mtsu.pressbooks.pub/engl1010/?p=1182#h5p-8*

If you are citing a web-based article and do not mention your author(s) in your signal phrase, then you must place the last name(s) in a citation (again without page numbers).

> *An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:*
> *https://mtsu.pressbooks.pub/engl1010/?p=1182#h5p-9*

If you are citing a web-based article with no author, you can use the article title in a signal phrase.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://mtsu.pressbooks.pub/engl1010/?p=1182#h5p-10

You can also use a shortened version of the article title in your citation if you do not name the article title in a signal phrase.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://mtsu.pressbooks.pub/engl1010/?p=1182#h5p-11

Whereas previous editions of MLA allowed writers to refer to paragraph numbers for works without page numbers, it now instructs writers not to refer to paragraph numbers unless the work contains explicitly numbers its paragraphs.

Citations for sources with multiple authors

If your source has one or two authors, list all the authors in either your signal phrase or in-text citation.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://mtsu.pressbooks.pub/engl1010/?p=1182#h5p-12

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://mtsu.pressbooks.pub/engl1010/?p=1182#h5p-13

However, if your source has more than two authors, you should list only the first author followed by the abbreviation "et al." (short for the Latin phrase *et alii*, literally "and others").

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://mtsu.pressbooks.pub/engl1010/?p=1182#h5p-14

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

https://mtsu.pressbooks.pub/engl1010/?p=1182#h5p-15

32. MLA: Works Cited Entries

The Modern Language Association (MLA) system of documentation governs how writers format academic papers and cite the sources that they use. This system of formatting and citation is used most by academic disciplines in the arts and humanities.

Citations

Citations according to MLA consist of two elements:

1. in-text citations (also called parenthetical citations),

2. and a bibliography called a Work Cited (or Works Cited, if multiple sources are cited).

Writers use in-text citations to acknowledge that they have used ideas from external sources to help develop their essays. Those in-text citations refer to the full bibliographic references. Whenever you use sources, whether in direct quotation or in paraphrase, you must use in-text citations. Writers very often combine in-text citations with attributive signal phrases to make clear to the reader exactly what material has come from what source. Every in-text citation you make will be keyed to an entry in your Works Cited list, through which you will supply your reader with the full bibliographic information for your sources.

Works Cited Entries

The following are rules for your Works Cited page:

- Every source that you quote, paraphrase, or summarize in an essay must be included in your Works Cited list.
- Your Works Cited list should always be on its own new page, after the end of the text of the essay.
- At the start of your list, at the top margin of the page, include a heading containing the words Work (or Works) Cited, centered, without bolding, italics, quotations marks, or all-caps.
- Works Cited entries are in the same font and double spacing as the rest of the paper.
- Unlike the text of the essay, works cited entries do not begin with an indentation. Rather, they use hanging (also known as reverse) indentation, in which the first line of an entry is not indented, but all successive lines are indented by .5".
- Sources need to be listed in alphabetical order by the first letter in each entry.
  - If you have a source with no author, then that source will be alphabetized according to the first letter of its title.
  - The entries will not be numbered or presented as a series of bulleted points.

General order of content in a Works Cited Entry

MLA specifies that certain elements appear in a certain order in a work cited entry. Each element will be followed by a specific piece of punctuation. When you cite sources, never take the information

from the cover of the source; rather, always refer to title pages. Here are each of the elements and additional information about them:

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https://mtsu.pressbooks.pub/engl1010/?p=1105#h5p-1

33. MLA: Works Cited Examples

Here is a model Works Cited, with correct spacing and formatting. You can click on the "+" to get more information about the formatting and structure of the Works Cited.

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> *https://mtsu.pressbooks.pub/engl1010/?p=1108#h5p-20*

For step-by-step guidance in looking at what several common types of Works Cited entries need to include, click below.

> 🖳 *An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:*
> *https://mtsu.pressbooks.pub/engl1010/?p=1108#h5p-21*

A Final Note about Works Cited Entries

Sometimes you may have difficulty deciding whether a source has

been published in a magazine or a scholarly journal; after all, the word "journal" appears in the names of some magazines (for example, *Library Journal*). Here are some tips that can help you:

- Look at the kind of paper (especially useful if you have a hard copy). Magazines are printed on glossy paper; scholarly journals on matte paper.
- Consider the graphics. Magazines print color graphics; if a journal article has graphics, they will be black and white and usually in the form of tables or graphs.
- Search for the citations. Only rarely will magazines have in-text citations and bibliographies; journals will almost always have them.
- Notice the advertisements. Magazines usually have color advertisements; if journals have ads, they will be for other works published by the same publisher as the journal.

34. Formatting Your Paper in APA

American Psychological Association (APA)

The American Psychological Association, established in 1892, is "the largest scientific and professional organization of psychologists in the United States" with approximately 117,000 members ("American Psychological Association"). The American Psychological Association created their style guide in 1929 and is most often used in the social sciences, such as psychology, education, and linguistics. Scholars in English rarely use APA; however, scholars in the field of Composition and Rhetoric do. For more help with APA please visit the OWL of Purdue's APA Guide.

Your APA paper should always use Times New Roman, 12 point font, and one-inch margins. The entire manuscript should also be double spaced.

Formatting the Title Page (page 1)
To format the title page, follow the proceeding steps:

1. Insert the "Running head: ABBREVIATED TITLE" and page # in the right hand corner on page one.

   ◦ *Tip*: Choose "Different First Page" in Microsoft Word and Google Docs. For help visit http://libanswers.walsh.edu/faq/147891

2. Scroll down to the center of the page and center the following:

- ◦ Your Name
- ◦ Title of Your Paper
  - ▪ Use title caps
  - ▪ No quotation marks, italics, underline, etc.
- ◦ University Affiliation

Running head: MAKING ROOM FOR STUDENTS   1

Making Room for Students and Teachers: Extending the Work in Multimodal Composition

Student Name

University Affiliation

Figure 1: Example of an APA title page

Formatting the Abstract Page (page 2)

Follow the steps listed below to format the abstract page:

1. Create a new page. This page should include the header (i.e. the abbreviated title of your work) without the words "Running head."
2. Center the word "Abstract" with no bold, underline, or quotation marks.
3. Hit enter and do not indent. Write a short (150-250 words) summary of your paper.

MAKING ROOM FOR STUDENTS   2

Abstract

This paper examines student perceptions of multimodal affordances and limitations using a combination of studies and literature from the field in order to extend the conversation pertaining to new pedagogical approaches to teaching multimodal composition. This paper also argues that in addition to scaffolding the multimodal curriculum, the inclusion of low-stake student surveys can create a new pedagogical practice that promotes classroom dialogue and requires instructor flexibility. More specifically, the paper suggests that surveys could help make room in the first-year writing composition classroom for students and teachers to discuss problems associated with technology, react to varying levels of student motivation, and explore specific target audiences.

Figure 2: Example of an APA abstract page

Formatting the Beginning of Your Written Content (page 3)

To start the body of your text follow the proceeding steps:

1. Create a new page. This page (and all those that follow) should also include the header without the words "Running head."

2. At the top of the new page, center and write the full title of your work. Do not use bold, underline or quotation marks. After the title, hit enter once, indent your paragraph ½ inch, and begin writing.

Levels 1-3 Headings

APA uses various levels of headings to distinguish sections in an essay. According to the OWL of Purdue, "[t]he levels are organized by levels of subordination, and each section of the paper should start with the highest level of heading." The highest level of heading is 1 and the lowest is 5. However, in this section, only levels 1 through 3 are discussed.

Level 1 Heading

- Level 1 Heading (Centered, Bolded, Title Caps)
- Shows the *section* title (e.g. Literature Review, Methods, Results, Implications)
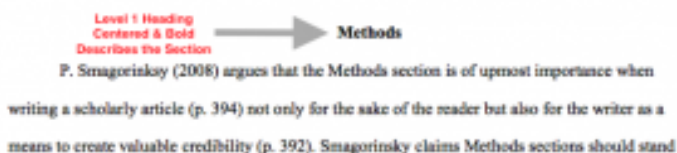
Figure 3: Image of Heading 1 example

Level 2 Heading

- Level 2 Heading (Left-Justified, Bolded, Title Caps)
- Shows subsection titles (e.g. main ideas/topics)
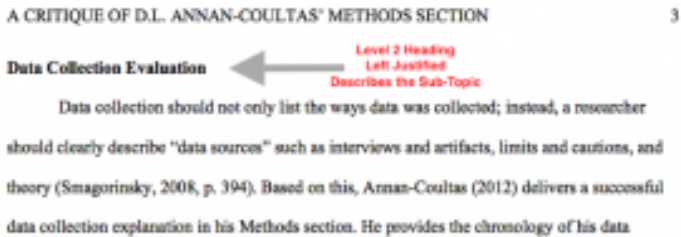
Figure 4: Image of Heading 2 example

Level 3 Heading

- Level 3 Heading (Indented, bold, lower-case, period)
- Shows subsections of subsections (e.g. sub-topics of topics)

Level 3 Heading
Indented, bold
Lower case,
period

The classroom setting. Each ENG 102 course contains no more than twenty-five students. The study took place in four ENG 102 classes held on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays for fifty minutes in the fall semester of 2019. All four sections were held in the same classroom, a classroom equipped with an instructor computer at the front of the room, an overhead projector, a white board, and WiFi. Students were required to bring laptops or tablets to every class session (stated on the class syllabus) and students who did not have personal access to this hardware could rent it at the university's Mobile Campus facility that provides students with the opportunity to rent laptops for free (Gagich, 2018; *Mobile Campus Laptop Loan*

Figure 5: Image of Heading 3 example

35. APA: In-Text Citations

The purpose of this section is to provide you with information and examples pertaining to APA style in-text citations. It begins with parenthetical citations (those that use parentheses to denote citations in the text), moves into signal phrases citations (those that cite information within sentences), and concludes with a visual annotated example of in-text citations.

Parenthetical Citations

When including parenthetical citations, be sure to place a comma between information and place a period after the parenthesis.

If there is an author, then place the author's last name and year of publication inside:

- *Example of a parenthetical citation with an author*: (Smith, 2010).

If there is no author, then place the source title (with quotation marks and title caps) and the year inside:

- *Example of a parenthetical citation with no author*: ("Cats are Great," 2011).

When citing two or more authors in a parenthetical citation, use an ampersand (&) in place of the word "and."

- *Example of the use of an ampersand*: (Kirchoff & Cook, 2016).

When citing two authors, include both of their names in each citation.

- *Example of citing two authors*: (DePalma & Alexander, 2015).

When citing three or more authors, include all of their names the first time you cite them. For each citation following the first, use the first author's last name and "et al."

- *Example of the first use*: (Anderson, Atkins, Ball, Millar, Selfe, & Selfe, 2006).
- *Example of citations following the first*: (Anderson et al., 2006).

If you're directly quoting, then include page numbers.

- *Example direct quote cited with a parenthetical citation with an author*: Multimodal composing offers students opportunities to make meaning and communicate using affordances that "could expand that notion of control beyond words on a page" (Takayoshi & Selfe, 2007, p. 2).

Paraphrased information does not require the use of page numbers.

- *Example paraphrased information*: Some universities have developed laptop programs requiring students to either own or lease laptops (Fried, 2008).

Use semi-colons to demonstrate the use of multiple authors. This is especially useful when many authors have similar arguments or have found similar results.

- *Example of paraphrased information from multiple authors*: Education embraced emotion research from psychology and argued that emotion affects learning (Efklides & Volet, 2005; Pekrun, 2006; Pekrun, Frenzel, & Peery, 2007)

Signal Phrase Citations

Using **signal phrases** to cite information means that you add the citation to your sentence(s). This also means that you do not need an additional parenthetical citation.

Insert the author's name and year into your sentence to act as a signal phrase.

- *Example of paraphrased information using a signal phrase*: Sheppard (2009) argues that there is a need for students to adapt to this changing digital landscape.
- *Example of a direct quote using a signal phrase*: Moran (2003) argues that some teachers think "technology is good and that it will bring good" (p. 344).

Do not use an ampersand (&) in signal phrases; instead, use the word "and."

- *Example using a signal phrase for two authors*: Kirchoff and Cook (2016) argue that some overlook the importance of teaching basic computer literacy skills when teaching multimodal composition.

Example of APA Style In-Text Citations

Figure 1: In-text citations in a sample APA essay

For more information about APA style in-text citations, please visit the OWL of Purdue.

36. APA: References

APA is a common documentation style used in the social sciences (e.g. psychology, sociology, education, criminology), business, nursing, linguistics, and composition. While the style, organization, and formatting of APA differ from MLA, similarities between the two styles remain. For example, to avoid plagiarism, provide readers with important source-related information, and give credit where credit is due, you must include bibliographic information at the end of the document (the Reference page) and in-text citations in the form of signal phrases and/or parenthetical citations. You should also double-space the entire document, use Times New Roman, 12 point font, and 1-inch margins on all sides.

The remainder of this section provides basic information pertaining to creating the Reference page. Information about formatting your paper and/or incorporating APA headings can be found at the OWL of Purdue.

Reference Page Entries

The following are rules for your APA Reference page:

- Every source that you quote, paraphrase, or summarize in an essay must be included in your Reference page.
- The Reference page should appear on its own page. It should include the header (i.e. abbreviated title with the page number in the righthand corner) without the words "Running head."

- At the start of your list, at the top margin of the page, center the word "References." Do not bold, italicize, or use quotations

marks. Do not change the font, font size, or color.

- Reference page entries are in the same font and double spacing as the rest of the paper.
- Like MLA, Reference page entries use hanging (also known as reverse) indentation: the first line of an entry is not indented, but all successive lines are indented by .5".
- Sources need to be listed in alphabetical order by the first letter in each entry.

  ◦ If you have a source with no author, then that source will be alphabetized according to the first letter of its title.
  ◦ The entries will not be numbered or presented as a series of bulleted points.

Examples of Reference Page Entries

Formatting an Article from an Academic Journal with DOI

Author's last name, first initial. middle initial. (Year, Month Date Published). Title of the article. *Title of the Academic Journal*, *Volume* # (Issue #), page numbers, DOI.

Werner, C. L. (2015). Speaking of composing (frameworks): New media discussions, 2000-2010. *Computers and Composition*, 37, 55-72. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.compcom.2015/06.005

Formatting an Article from an Academic Journal with no DOI

Author's last name, first initial. middle initial. (Year, Month Date Published). Title of the article. *Title of the Academic Journal*, *Volume* # (Issue #), page numbers, Retrieved from URL.

Yancey, K. B. (2004). Made not only in words: Composition in a

new key. *College Composition and Communication, 56*(2), 297-328. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/4140651

Formatting an Article from an online magazine

Author, A. A., & Author, B. B. (Date of publication). Title of article. *Title of Online Periodical, volume number*(issue number if available). Retrieved from https://www.someaddress.com/full/url/

Wong, A. (2015, April). Digital natives, yet strangers to the web. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/04/digital-natives-yet-strangers-to-the-web/390990/

Formatting an Article from a Website with an Author

Last, F. M. (Year, Month Date Published). Article title. Retrieved from URL.

Braziller, A. & Kleinfeld, E. (2015). Myths of multimodal composing. Retrieved from http://www.digitalrhetoriccollaborative.org/2015/09/03/myths-of-multimodal-composing/

Example with an Organization as Author

National Council of Teachers of English. (2005, November). *Position statement on multimodal literacies*. Retrieved from http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/multimodalliteracies

Formatting an Article from a Website with No Author

Title. (Year, Month Date Published). Retrieved from URL.

Mobile campus laptop loan program (2019). Retrieved from https://www.csuohio.edu/services-for-students/mobile-campus

What is the DOI?

DOI stands for "digital object identifier," and it helps categorize scholarly articles. However, not all scholarly articles will have a DOI. If that is the case, then you should provide the URL where you retrieved the article.

Sample Reference Page

Figure 1: Image of an APA reference page with instructional comments

APPENDIX B: WRITING AND RESEARCH SKILLS

Appendix B offers you some additional assistance with reading sources, integrating evidence, and paragraph development.

In "Troubleshooting: Body Paragraph Development," John Lanning and Sarah M. Lacy give directions for how to better develop body paragraphs.

"Reading Popular Sources," by Melanie Gagich and Emilie Zickel, discusses types of popular sources and how to read and evaluate them.

Svetlana Zhuravlova, in "Additional Synthesis Examples," provides tips on how to synthesize.

Melanie Gagich and Emilie Zickel discuss reading and evaluating tips for scholarly sources in "Reading Academic Sources."

In "Signal Phrases," John Lanning and Amanda Lloyd, explain signal phrases in detail and offer examples.

Robin Jeffrey and Melanie Gagich share tips on when to summarize, when to paraphrase, and when to quote, as well as rules for each, in "Paraphrasing, Summarizing, and Quoting."

In Appendix B: Writing and Research Skills, targeted objectives are **Composing Processes**, **Reading**, and **Information Literacy**. Chapters 55, 57, 59, 60, and 61 all address the mechanics of integrating research and writing development at the sentence and paragraph level (Composing Processes). And, in Chapters 56 and 58—both of which target source evaluations, readers will learn about the nuances of cultivating writing and research skills for first-year writing (Reading and Information Literacy).

37. Troubleshooting: Body Paragraph Development

Developing a paragraph can be a difficult task for many students. They usually approach the task with certain ideas firmly in mind, most notably that a paragraph is 5-6 sentences and the paragraph is about what they are talking about, which isn't necessarily a bad place to start. But when pushed to explain more specifically what constitutes a good paragraph or how to present the information they will discuss, problems begin to emerge. If you are struggling to craft a fully developed paragraph, you might find the following step-by-step approach helpful.

Perhaps the easiest way to think about a "fully developed" paragraph is to think of writing each paragraph in 6 different steps rather than a certain amount of sentences. These steps can be helpful in not only understanding the criteria needed in a paragraph or how they connect to one another to create a conversation in your paper but also to ensure that your audience understands your purpose in presenting this paragraph.

Focusing on the number of sentences may limit how you express the idea being discussed. However, this doesn't mean that the information can be presented without a plan in mind; you should begin with understanding what a paragraph needs to "be" and "do."

Goals of the Paragraph: What it should "be"

While there is no "right way" to develop a paragraph, the following

is a list of certain criteria that **an academic** paragraph should work to be:

- **Unified:** Every sentence presented works to explain the main idea for the paragraph.
- **Coherent**: You present the information in a logical order that allows the audience to understand your purpose.
- **Developed:** To achieve this, you must provide enough information so that the audience has a clear understanding of the main idea expressed in the topic sentence.

Developing the Paragraph: Creating what it should "do"

The following is a list of things that your paragraph should do:
  1. **Establish the Main Idea (Topic)**.

- It is important to begin a paragraph with a clear, concise, and limited topic sentence. Many problems with unity and coherency begin with a faulty or vague topic sentence. Being able to recognize the parts of a topic sentence will help you maintain a unified paragraph. If we break a basic topic sentence down, there are two distinct parts:

    The topic being discussed + Your approach to the topic

- Too often, students focus on the wrong part of the topic sentence. They believe that the topic or subject (or sub-claim) is the most important part of the sentence since "that is what I am talking about." This is where the trouble with unity begins. There are many ways to discuss the topic, so conceivably any

information related to that topic could end up in the paragraph. Ultimately, the unity breaks down and the reader will not understand the significance of your idea because the information may be having two different conversations, instead of one.

- When there are two different approaches to the same sub-claim, the conversation jumps from one to another, dissolving any unity to the paragraph. However, there is only one way to discuss your approach related to the sub-claim, and it is through that lens that we look at all the information presented in the paragraph and how we determine if the information belongs in the paragraph or not.

2. Provide an Explanation

- This step may be a bit of a trap. Many students are often tempted to reach for their research and begin providing support for the **main idea**. However, this isn't always the best option. Many times when students do this, they are using their research/ support to do the thinking for them. Before reaching for the research, students should **provide an explanation** regarding their topic sentence.
- You can also think of this section as a link between the topic sentence and supporting evidence where you provide any necessary contextual information for the evidence.
- The main focus of any paragraph should be what you have to say. If you are putting forth this idea in support of your thesis, the audience is going to want to know what you think about it–what is important or significant about this main idea. They may not fully understand the topic sentence the way you intend them to, so explain your reasoning to the reader.

3. Provide Support/ Evidence

- Now that your audience should have a better understanding of

the main idea/ topic, you are ready to **provide support/ evidence**. You want to be very selective when deciding what textual support to include in the paragraph. Not all evidence is the same, and not all evidence achieves the same goals (thinking ethos/ logos/ pathos here). The textual support should help to reinforce or illustrate more about your topic sentence for the reader, helping them understand it in a more complete way.

- Whether your support takes the form of a direct quote or a paraphrase, it must be properly embedded and documented.

4. Interpret the Support/ Evidence

- This is often one of the more difficult aspects for students and a step in the development that they overlook. No matter how clear you think the textual support provided is, it does not speak for itself. The reason is that the audience may not understand how you intend them to interpret the information and how that relates back to supporting the main idea of the paragraph. When you **explain how this information is relevant to your topic sentence**, why it is important or significant, you need to offer insight to that information.
- Don't simply follow up your support with a single sentence that begins with a phrase like "This proves" or "Meaning" and then restate what the evidence said. Know why you included this information and why it is important to your paragraph.   You need to connect the dots for your reader, so they see exactly how that information is providing support, and helping your main idea.
- The bulk of the information should be coming from you, not your sources. Your audience wants to what it is that you think, your perspective on the idea, and how you intended to link it back to the thesis.

5. Repeat Steps 3 and 4, if necessary

- If you have more than one piece of textual support that you want to include, you need to repeat the two previous steps to fully develop your paragraph. You will want to vary your evidence. If you use statistics, then you may want to include expert testimony. If the first piece of evidence focuses on logic, you want to tap into one of the other appeals such as pathos to bring a full view of the issue to your reader. However, you don't want to keep simply repeating this sequence: evidence should be used to help achieve your purpose, not to fill space.

6. Connect to the thesis statement

- When you feel that your audience has a clear understanding of your idea and its significance to your thesis, you can wrap up the paragraph in different ways:
  - emphasize the importance of understanding the idea.
  - make a connection to previous and/or forthcoming ideas.
  - overall ensure that the information is being related directly back to the main purpose of the essay as defined in your thesis statement.

While this is not the only way to write a paragraph, it can be a helpful guide and/or model when you need a structure to begin shaping and organizing your ideas, to help you compose a unified, coherent, well-developed paragraph.

38. Reading Popular Sources

What is a Popular Source?

When we say that a source is "popular," it does not necessarily mean "well-liked."

Popular sources are articles that are written for a general audience. These sources are published so that members of the general public can access, read, and understand the content. There is little jargon or highly specific or technical vocabulary.

Sometimes popular sources are freely available to the public, and sometimes the content is available only with a paid subscription.

Popular sources include newspaper articles, magazine articles, websites, webpages, letters to the editor, blog posts and more.

Reading Newspaper Articles, Magazine Articles, and Website Articles

"Fake news!" "Media bias!"

We hear charges like these often, mostly in reference to the types of popular sources that we can find on the internet, on TV, on the radio, or in print. We should not be tempted to write off all popular sources as somehow "bad." We should, however, be willing to evaluate any popular source's authority and credibility before choosing to accept its validity or choosing to include it in an academic assignment.

How can we evaluate newspaper, magazine, and website sources? Use rhetorical reading skills to understand both the text and its context before you incorporate it into any assignment.

Understand the Context

A main part of grasping the context is knowing information about the publisher and author. Consider the following questions as prompts that will help you to better understand these elements:

   Publisher. Who published this article? Remember that a publisher is not always the same as the author of a particular text. Does the publishing source cater to a particular audience? Does the publisher have some sort of ideological identity or bias? A bit of research on who published the article you are looking at (which newspaper, magazine, website, or organization) can give you some insight into any purpose or agenda that may shape the content of the article.

   Author. Is the author an expert on the topic? A journalist? Someone who has direct experience with the topic or someone who is offering second-hand commentary or analysis?

Assess the Quality of the Text

Identify the author's main claim. Use the following questions to help you pay attention to how the author supports their claim:

- Do you see relevant, evidence-based support or just emotional examples?
- Do you see statistics used consistently and fairly, with an explanation of where they came from?
- Does the author consider opposing viewpoints, and if so, how thoroughly?
- Do you see logical fallacies in the author's argument?

Assess the Quality of the Explanation, if the article is explanatory

Identify the author's thesis. Use the following questions to help you determine how balanced the author's explanation is:

- Do they present all sides equally so as to avoid clear judgment?
- Does the author effectively summarize the sources used? (Please note that magazine and newspaper writing style does not require the types of in-text citations that we use in our papers).

Currency

Depending on the information you are using, the currency of the site could be vital. Check for the date of publication or the date of the latest update. Most of the links on a website should also still work; if they no longer do, that may be a sign the site is too out of date to be useful.

Relevance

Perhaps the article is interesting or easy to read. But is there something about the text itself or its context that makes it useful for your assignment?

39. Additional Synthesis Examples

How do you synthesize?

Synthesis is a common skill we practice all the time when we converse with others on topics that we have different levels of knowledge and feeling about. When you argue with your friends or classmates about a controversial topic, like abortion or affirmative action or gun control, your overall understanding of the topic grows as you incorporate their ideas, experiences, and points of view into a broader appreciation of the complexities involved. In professional and academic writing, synthesizing requires you to seek out this kind of multi-leveled understanding through reading, research, and discussion. Though, in academic writing, this is another kind of discussion: you set the goal for the discussion, organize the discussion among the authors of your found researched materials, orchestrate the progress of the discussion, provide comments, and build logical guidance for your audience (readers of your Synthesis Essay), and finally you draw your conclusion on the topic.

Synthesis Steps

Step 1: Determine the goal(s) for your discussion, such as reviewing a topic or supporting an argument:

For example: *How to motivate people to make healthier food choices?*

Step 2: Organize the discussion among the authors of your found researched materials:

All authors agree that junk food is damaging to people's health. For example, Authors Doctor X and Doctor Z and Nurse-dietitian Y publish results of their researches to show that eating junk food causes obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and other illnesses that drastically shorten lifespan.

Step 3: Continue to lead the discussion among the authors of your sources:

Alerted by the appalling data about the damages inflicted by junk food consumption, researchers from the University of … conducted a survey. The majority of the respondents (XX%) admit that they are aware of the risks of relying on unhealthy food. However, XX% respond that this food is cheaper and so affordable. XX% also argue that this kind of food is convenient: easy to cook ("just heat and eat"), while XX% say their school-age children give preference to this kind of food compared to home-made choices. In response, Doctor X suggests…

Step 4: Provide comments and build logical guidance for your audience:

Analysis of processed food ingredients and its production technologies provided by Doctor Nutritionist N in his article "… … … "will make the survey respondents challenge and reconsider their priorities in food choices…"

Step 5: Summarize the most vivid of the authors' examples and explanations (like here: link the illustrations to the above survey data you mentioned earlier):

To continue in the discussion: *Pediatrician M and Children Psychologist K, in their article "… … … …" explain to parents their children's preferences in food choices … In addition to this, Source N gives examples of activities organized by … in …* (now, you summarize some of those examples and comment on them).

Step 6: Finally, draw your unique conclusion on the topic: in fact, the answer to your research question:

Overall, education as well as behavior promoting activities in a

family, at school, at work-place, and in a community will not only teach people to make healthier, daily food choices, but also give them a clearer vision of the long term outcomes and benefits of such choices – benefits that will both improve their health and lower their monetary expenses.

40. Reading Academic Sources

Academic sources (also called scholarly sources) are different from the popular sources that many of us read each day. We are constantly exposed to "popular" media – news websites, TV channels, magazines and newspapers. It is often in college that we first get exposure and access to scholarly articles and books.

An Academic Source (Scholarly Source) is material that is

- **authoritative**, meaning the article has been produced by an expert in their field (often this means that a person has a Ph.D. in their field and/or works as a researcher or professor at colleges or universities), and therefore has the authority that expertise affords;
- **peer-reviewed**, meaning the article has been rigorously read and reviewed by other experts or authorities in that same field and is published only after that rigorous review;
- and **published in a Scholarly Research Journal**, meaning these articles are published for an audience who is also highly involved in that academic discipline (often other people who have Ph.D.s in the same field or are pursuing studies within it).

Academic articles are often published in special journals that focus on one academic discipline or one topic of study. While in recent years some freely accessible open-source peer reviewed journals have begun publishing, most scholarly research journals require a paid subscription. As a college student, you have access to many academic articles because your university pays for access to academic research databases that give students and faculty members access to these scholarly research journals.

Academic articles tend to be more challenging to read than

popular sources. They often contain academic jargon, highly specialized vocabulary that is used within a particular academic field. They tend to be longer than a typical popular source article in a newspaper or magazine. They may contain many in-text citations, diagrams, tables, or other visual representations of data. While academic articles can be intimidating to read, there are strategies that you can use to effectively engage these challenging texts, as Karen Rosenberg discusses in her essay, "Reading Games: Strategies for Reading Scholarly Sources."

Considerations for Evaluating Academic Sources

There are ways in which academic articles can be critiqued and evaluated just like popular articles. While academic sources are often deemed credible because they come out of a rigorous process of peer review-before-publication and are written both by and for the academic community, we should still take time to examine and evaluate such sources before we use them. Yes, even scholarly sources contain embedded biases.

To evaluate an academic source you will consider the author, length of article, date of publication, and relevance. The following are questions and prompts that will help you evaluate each of these elements.

Author

How prolific is the author in his or her field? Has he or she written extensively on the topic that is addressed in this paper? Often you can check the Works Cited to see if the author has any previous publications on the topic addressed in the current paper. If so, that could be an indication of the author's long-term commitment to this research topic or question.

Length of the Article

Sometimes articles will be labeled in academic databases as

"scholarly articles" even though they are only a couple of pages long. If your article seems rather short and does not follow the general structure of an academic article (Abstract, Literature Review, Methodology, Results, Discussion, Conclusions, List of Works Cited), then you should spend time considering whether or not the article is a relevant or credible source for the purposes of your assignment? Is there a more thorough or detailed source that you could use?

Date of Publication

How current is the article? If you are looking for a historical perspective on your topic, then an older article may be useful. But if you need current information and your article is 10 or 15 years old, is it as relevant and useful for your assignment?

Relevance

Perhaps you have a wonderful academic article that is authoritative, credible, interesting, full of credible and compelling research. But if the article is not answering your research question or the assignment question in any meaningful way, perhaps the source is not relevant to you. Just because a source is "good" does not mean that it is good for your particular assignment.

Joe Moxley's article "Questions to Evaluate the Authority of the Researcher's Methods," is an excellent resource for thinking about how to approach a critique of scholarly work. His article can be found by clicking on the hyperlink above and by going directly to the *Writing Commons* website.

41. Signal Phrases

A **signal phrase**, also known as an attributive tag, is a device used to smoothly integrate quotations and paraphrases into your essay. It is important to use signal phrases to clearly attribute supporting evidence to an author and to avoid interrupting the flow of an essay. Signal phrases can also be used as meaningful transitions, moving your readers between your ideas and those of your sources.

A basic signal phrase consists of an author's name and an active verb indicating how the author is presenting the material. A signal phrase may also include information explaining an author's credentials and/or affiliations as well as the title and/or publisher of the source **text**.

Referring to the Author within a Signal Phrase

In many instances, a signal phrase should contain only the last name of the author or authors of the source text (as opposed to the author's first *and* last name). For instance, APA style guidelines require no reference to an author's first name at any point in an essay and few if any gender-specific pronouns. But in MLA papers, if you are referring to an author for the first time in your essay, you should include that author's first name (you might also want to include the author's credentials and the title of the source—see "Types of Signal Phrases" below). Any future

signal phrase should refer to the author by last name only or with a pronoun when it's perfectly clear to whom that pronoun refers. Consider the following examples:

- Michael Pollan observes that "Americans today are having a national conversation about food and agriculture that would have been impossible to imagine even a few short years ago" (29).
- Pollan continues, "But the national conversation unfolding around the subject of food and farming really began in the 1970s" (29).
- He then specifies, "I would argue that the conversation got under way in earnest in 1971, when [Wendell] Berry published an article in The Last Whole Earth Catalogue" (29).

Notice how each signal phrase verb is followed by a comma (or the word "that"), which is then followed by one space before the opening quotation mark.

In essays written according to MLA and APA guidelines, it is acceptable to refer to the author as "the author" as long as it is perfectly clear to whom you are referring. In APA, it is common to see general references to "researchers."

Signal Phrase Verb Tense

In the examples above, notice how the signal phrase verbs are written in present tense. When you are asked to write a paper that follows MLA guidelines, signal phrases should always be written in present (not past) tense. When writing a paper using APA style, signal phrase verbs should be written in past tense. Consider the following example:

- Pollan (2009) observed that "Americans today are having a national conversation about food and agriculture that would have been impossible to imagine even a few short years ago" (p. 29).

Notice how APA in-text citations also differ from MLA style in that APA citations include the year of publication and the page number is preceded by a "p."

Varying Your Verbs

You should also vary your signal phrase verbs (rather than simply using "states" throughout your entire essay) in order to maintain your readers' interest and to indicate the author's intended use of the excerpted material. See below for examples of strong signal phrase verbs.

Types of Signal Phrases

In most instances, the first time the author is mentioned in an MLA-style essay, as well as including the author's first *and* last name in a signal phrase, it is also a good idea to include the author's credentials and the title of the source.

While providing the author's credentials and title of the source are the most common types of signal phrases, there are others we should be aware of. In the examples below, the information relevant to the type of signal phrase is underlined.

Type: Author's credentials are indicated.

Example: Grace Chapmen, Curator of Human Health & Evolutionary Medicine at the Springfield Natural History Museum, explains…

Purpose: Presenting an author's credentials should help build credibility for the passage you are about to present. Including the author's credentials gives your readers a reason to consider your sources.

Type: Author's *lack of* credentials is indicated.

Example: Matthew Spencer, whose background is in marriage counseling, not foreign policy, claims…

Purpose: Identifying an author's lack of credentials in a given area can help illustrate a lack of authority on the subject matter and persuade the audience not to adopt the author's ideas. Pointing to an author's lack of credentials can be beneficial when developing your response to counter-arguments.

Type: Author's social or political stance, if necessary to the content, is explained.

Example: Employing nonviolent civil disobedience, Roland Hayes, prominent civil rights activist, preaches…

Ralph Spencer, who has ties to the White Nationalist movement, denies…

Purpose: Explaining the author's social or political stance can help a reader to understand why that author expresses a particular view. This understanding can positively or negatively influence an audience. Be careful to avoid engaging in logical fallacies such as loaded language.

Type: Publisher of the source is identified.

Example: According to a recent CNN poll…

Purpose: Identifying the publisher of the passage can help reinforce the credibility of the information presented and you can capitalize on the reputation/ credibility of the publisher of the source material.

Type: Title of the Source is included.

Example: In "Understanding Human Behavior," Riley argues …

Purpose: Informs the reader where the cited passage is being pulled from.

Type: Information that establishes context is presented.

Example: In a speech presented during a Free Speech rally, Elaine Wallace encourages …

Purpose: Presenting the context that the original information was presented can help the audience understand the author's purpose more clearly.

MLA Signal Phrase Verbs

Acknowledges	Counters	Notes
Admits	Declares	Observes
Agrees	Denies	Points out
Argues	Disputes	Reasons
Asserts	Emphasizes	Refutes
Believes	Finds	Rejects
Claims	Illustrates	Reports
Compares	Implies	Responds
Confirms	Insists	Suggests
Comments	Maintains	Thinks
Contends	Mentions	Writes

APA Signal Phrase Verbs

Acknowledged	Countered	Noted
Admitted	Declared	Observed
Agreed	Denied	Pointed out
Argued	Disputed	Reasoned
Asserted	Emphasized	Refuted
Believed	Found	Rejected
Claimed	Illustrated	Reported
Compared	Implied	Responded
Confirmed	Insisted	Suggested
Commented	Maintained	Thought
Contended	Mentioned	Wrote

42. Paraphrasing, Summarizing, and Quoting

While quoting may be the first thing that many people think of when they think about integrating sources, paraphrasing, summarizing, and citing data are also ways to incorporate information from outside materials into your essays or projects.

Paraphrasing

Paraphrases allow you to describe specific information from a source (ideas from a paragraph or several consecutive paragraphs) *in your own words*. They are like translations of an author's original idea. Paraphrases often include attributive tags or signal phrases to let your readers know where the paraphrased material begins. With this move, you retain the detail of the original thought, but you express it in your own way. The following are some facts that will help you better make this rhetorical move:

- Paraphrases of the text should be expressed in your own words, with your own sentence structure, in your own way. You should not simply "word swap", that is, replace a few words from the original with synonyms.
- If you must use a few of the author's words within your paraphrase, they must have quotation marks around them.
- Paraphrases should be followed by parenthetical citations.
- As with a quote, you need to explain to your reader why the paraphrased material is significant to the point you are making in your paper.

Summarizing

Summaries allow you to describe general ideas from a source. Summaries are shorter than the original text, and you do not express detailed information as you would with a paraphrase. The following are some tips to apply when summarizing:

- Any summaries of the text should not include direct wording from the original source. All text should be in your words, though the ideas are those of the original author.
- A signal phrase should let your readers know where the summarized material begins.
- If you are offering a general summary of an entire article, there is no need to cite a specific page number.

Quoting

Direct quotes are portions of a text taken word for word and placed inside of a work. Readers know when an author is using a direct quote because it is denoted by the use of quotation marks and an in-text citation.

Example:

In his seminal work, David Bartholomae argues that "Every time a student sits down to write for us, he has to invent the university for the occasion-invent the university..."(4).

Direct quotes might also be formatted as a "block quote," which occurs if the borrowed language is longer than four (4) lines of text. In MLA, A block quote requires the author to indent the borrowed language by 1/2 an inch, place the citation at the end of the block, and remove quotation marks.

Example:

In his seminal work, David Bartholomae argues that

Every time a student sits down to write for us, he

has to invent the university for the occasion-invent the university, that is, or a branch of it, like History or Anthropology or Economics or English. He has to learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community. (4)

Be sure to be careful when directly quotes because failing to write the text exactly as it appears in the original text is not an ethical use of direct quotes. Also, failing to bracket the quote with quotation marks and/or citing it inside the text is also unethical and both mistakes are a form of plagiarism.

When Should I Use Direct Quotes?

Generally, direct quotes should be used sparingly because you want to rely on your own understanding of the material and avoid over-relying on another's words. Over quoting does not reinforce your credibility as an author; however, you should use direct quotes when "the author you are quoting has coined a term unique to her or his research and relevant within your own paper"(The Owl of Purdue).

The Basics of Quoting Directly

The following are tips to apply when directly quoting material:

- All quoted material should be enclosed in quotations marks to set it off from the rest of the text. The exception to this is block quotes, which require different formatting.
- Quoted material should be an accurate word-for-word reproduction from the author's original text. You cannot alter

any wording or any spelling. If you must do so, you must use a bracket or an ellipsis (see number 2 in the section below).
- A clear signal phrase/attribution tag should precede each quotation.
- A parenthetical citation should follow each quotation.

The Hard Part: Integrating Quotes into Your Writing

You, as the author of your essay, should explain the significance of each quotation to your reader. This goes far beyond simply including a signal phrase. Explaining the significance means indicating how the quoted material supports the point you are making in that paragraph. Remember: just because you add a quote does not mean that you have made your point. Quotes never speak for themselves. How and why does that quoted material make the point you think it does? Here are some helpful phrases for explaining quoted materials. "X" is the author's last name:

- (quoted material). What X's point demonstrates is that . . .
- (quoted material). Here, X is not simply stating _____, she is also demonstrating _____.
- (quoted material). This is an example of _____ because _____.
- (quoted material). This statement clearly shows _____ because _____.

Sometimes, in order to smoothly integrate quoted material into your paper, you may need to remove a word or add a word to make the quote make sense. If you make any change to quoted material, it must be formatted correctly using an ellipsis or brackets:

- Use brackets [these are brackets] to change a word. "Inserting or Altering Words in a Direct Quotation" explains what brackets are and how to use them.

- Use an ellipsis (this is an ellipsis…) to indicate omissions. "Omitting Words from a Direct Quotation" explains what brackets are and how to use them.

When in doubt, strive to allow your voice—not a quote from a source—to begin each paragraph, precede each quote, follow each quote, and end each paragraph. Quotes that are integrated well into a paper allow you to control the paper. That is what a reader wants to see: your ideas and the way that you engage sources to shape and discuss your ideas.

43. Advanced Research Resource: An Introduction to Coding Streams of Language

CHERYL GEISLER AND JASON SWARTS

Abstract

Cheryl Geisler's and Jason Swarts' open-access book *Coding Streams of Language* offers a detailed, in-depth consideration of how to conduct research on language. The book is helpful to writers of all levels, and the first chapter, below, provides an overview of how and why to examine language patterns. They also articulate their research commitments, a useful consideration for researchers of all expertise and experiences levels.

This reading is available below, and as a PDF.

Chapter 1. An Introduction to Coding Streams of Language

In this chapter, we provide you with an intro- duction to coding streams of language. Be- ginning with a rationale for coding language, we also detail our commitments on several methodological issues. We then explain how to use this book, inviting you to adapt it in whole or in part to develop an appropriate analytic workflow, to choose your tools, and to follow its procedures. We close by articulating our aspirations, the challenges

we have tried to address, and the sometimes technical quan- dries on which we have tried to provide some guidance. For those readers familiar with the 2004 *Analyzing Streams of Language*, we have also included a list of what is new.

Some Preliminaries: What Coding Is

Coding is the analytic task of placing non-numeric data into descriptive categories, assigning them to *codes*. The data that we will be concerned with cod- ing in this book is *verbal data*, data in the form of words that usually combine to make up what we like to call a *stream of language*, a stream that we as read- ers or writers, listeners or speakers experience as a flow over time. When we code verbal data, we analyze this flow, breaking it up into a categorical array, using a set of codes. We do this analysis to answer research questions, to better understand what the language is saying, doing, or revealing about the participants or about the situation in which the language has been used.

Any kind of verbal data can be coded. Varying in length, verbal data include the single word responses participants give in questionnaires, the quick posts that participants make in response to news articles, the full texts published in books, articles, and essays—and anything in between. Verbal data may come from con- versations that need to be transcribed in order to be analyzed. Or they may come in print form, which may need to be scanned and converted using optical charac- ter recognition (OCR). And, increasingly, verbal data come in digital form, har- vested from the web, sent in tweets, or published in digital databases. In most of these cases, verbal data are copious; words come fast and cheap in many contexts. They tell us a lot about what is going on, but we need to work to understand their underlying patterns. This is the work of coding streams of language.Usually when we refer to coding, we are referring to an analytic process guided by a set of procedures—a procedural coding scheme—that tells the analyst how to categorize a segment of verbal data by defining and illustrating the use of

each coding category. This is the primary kind of coding we deal with in this book. But we will also introduce readers to two other kinds of coding: automated coding, which uses digital searches to automatically identi- fy members of a coding category, and enumerative coding schemes, which list all of the members of its coding categories. As we shall see in Chapter 4, these three kinds of coding can be used on their own or in combination.

Methodological Approaches to Verbal Data Analysis

Because verbal data are so ubiquitous, many different methodological approaches have been developed to deal with them. Figure 1.1 shows one attempt at displaying complex relationships among these approaches. While coding is an analytic technique used in many fields, it has primarily been developed in the field of communication studies under the term *content analysis* and in the social sciences, more broadly, under the term *qualitative research.*

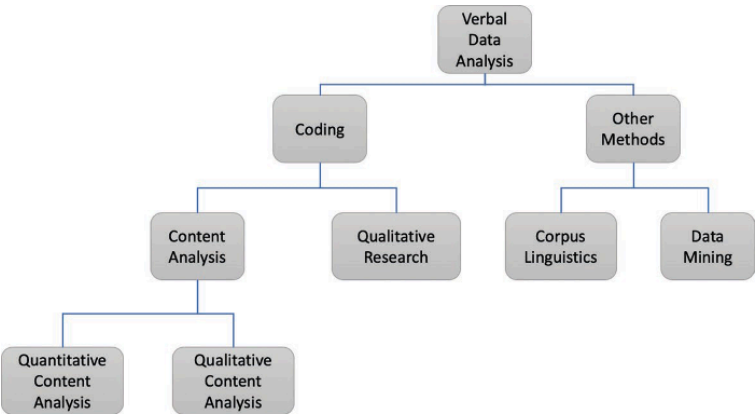

Figure 1.1: Taxonomy of approaches to verbal data analysis.

Traditional quantitative content analysis attempts to remove interpretation from coding. Often used for studies of media coverage, it provides coders with procedures using exact word

matches or unambiguous judgments and uses quantification to look at overall patterns. By contrast, qualitative researchers, including those using qualitative content analysis, take an approach that is more interpretative. Many researchers adopt a qualitative approach as part of the process of choosing a CAQDAS (Computer-Aided Qualitative Data Anal- ysis Software) tool such as Nvivo or Atlas.ti. Most though not all qualitative approaches to coding take a code as you go approach, and some, but not all, eschew any kind of quantification. In *Coding Streams of Language*, we take an interpretive approach to coding; that said, our commitment to being system- atic and exploring patterns through numbers places us among the growing number of researchers taking a mixed-methods approach, which we discuss more fully in a later section.

Other methods for verbal data analysis exist that do not use coding. Approaches taken by corpus linguists, for example, focus on analyzing large sets of texts, often using some variety of grammatical or semantic tagging. In Chapter 2 on Designing the Analysis and in Chapter 4 on Coding Data, we suggest ways that one kind of corpus tool, AntConc, can be used to explore and automatically code data.

Finally, emerging methods for data mining have been introduced to deal with large sets of verbal data. Using algorithmic rather than interpretive ap- proaches, many big data approaches have little use for interpretation. But those who use machine learning methods to duplicate human judgment will often begin their work with the kind of coding we pursue.

The Important Role Coding Plays in Many Fields

We come to the coding of verbal data from the allied fields of writing studies and technical communication. No one should be surprised to find these language-intensive fields relying on a method that deals with verbal data. As we noted elsewhere (Geisler, 2018), coding is a key analytic method in writing studies and technical communication, being used in 44% of the re- search

reports published in 2015 and 2016. These reports used a wide range of data. For example, Breuch et al. (2016) coded interview data from hos- pital patients and their families for recurring themes. Martinez et al. (2015) coded video data for the cognitive activities students used while writing syntheses.

Coding plays an important role in a far wider range of fields than this brief sample of studies might suggest. Any field that deals with humans as social beings, that collects naturally occurring language data or elicits such data from participants, will find a use for coding:

- In applied linguistics, Wyrley (2010) used coding to study communication practices in radiotherapy.
- In education, Stevenson (2013) used coding to study the linguistic strategies used by fifth grade bilingual students in science.
- In engineering education, Richter and Paretti (2009) used coding to analyze how engineering students reacted to multidisciplinary design.
- In information science, Nobarany and Booth (2014) used coding to examine the use of politeness strategies in open peer review.

- In human-computer interaction, Friess (2012), used coding to study the use of personas in software design.
- In legal studies, Jameson, Sohan, and Hodge (2014) used coding to better understand turning points in mediation.
- In environmental studies,Thompson (2005) used coding to examine the kinds of issues that were discussed in newspaper articles about a proposed off-shore wind power project.
- In public health, Banna et al. (2016) used coding to make a cross-culture comparison of ideas about healthy eating among Chinese and American undergraduate students.
- In operations management, Mugurusi and Bals (2016) use coding to study the stages of an offshoring strategy adopted by a purchasing and supply organization.

When to Code Verbal Data—Or Not

The coding we introduce in *Coding Streams of Language* is best used when three conditions hold:

1. You are looking for recurrent phenomena within and across streams of language,.
2. You are interested in understanding underlying patterns of doing and meaning in these streams.
3. You and your co-researchers have sufficient intuitions about these streams to place them into appropriate coding categories.

Let's take a look at these conditions one at a time.

First, coding is a procedure designed to detect recurrent patterns in a stream of language. If you are looking for phenomena that occurs rarely, the procedural coding we recommend in *Coding Streams of Language* would be more complex than the rewards would justify. For example, if you are looking for the turning point in a conversation, and you expect there to be, at most, one turning point or perhaps none at all in a given stream, you may be better off using a careful close reading to find it. You might still find useful some of the techniques we describe in Chapter 4 for creating an explicit definition for yourself and your readers, but the other procedures described in this book would be more than you need.

Second, the analytic work we recommend in *Coding Streams of Language* is designed to examine the underlying patterns of meaning and doing, the ways with words of which participants may be largely be unaware. If, however, you are not concerned with the ways specific words and phrases are deployed and responded to, if you only want to identify the places in which certain topics are discussed, then you may only need to use a more simple topical coding (Geisler, 2018; Saldaña, 2016).

Finally, procedural coding, the primary method described in *Coding Streams of Language*, is designed to guide coders intuitions

toward appropriate coding decisions. As we describe more full in Chapter 4, in some situations, no one outside of the context in which a stream was originally produced may have good intuitions about what the language means or how it works. The level of jargon and specialized knowledge may simply prevent outsiders from understanding what is going on from what is being said. If, for example, your verbal stream is in a language you do not understand, you obviously won't have the intuitions to code it.

But even if you fully understand the language of a verbal stream, you may not have the intuitions to code it appropriately. In this situation, you have two options. One option is to invite an informant, someone who is familiar with the context of production, to work with you as a coder. Another option is to use the enumerative coding, as described in Chapter 4, in which you list all of the possible words or phrases that you include within a coding catego- ry. An enumerative coding scheme has the benefit both of being transparent to your readers and of helping them to better understand intuitively what you intend.

To summarize, we invite you to use the procedures in *Coding Streams of Language* to code verbal data when you are looking for recurrent and underly- ing patterns in streams of language and about which you or your co-research- ers have adequate intuitions.

The Patterns Revealed by Coding

As we discuss in this book, coding can be used to examine three basic kinds of patterns. The simplest pattern is the one-dimensional analysis we describe in Chapter 6, which asks how verbal data is distributed across a set of coding categories, often across a built-in contrast. Banna et al. (2016), for example, used a built-in contrast across Chinese and American undergraduates to notice differences in the ways they thought about healthy eating. Based on these distributional differences, Banna and colleagues recommended different pub- lic health strategies be used in these two communities.

Verbal data that have been coded with more than one coding scheme can be looked at multidimensionally, as we introduce in Chapter 7. Jameson et al. (2014), for example, analyzed conversational interactions that occurred during mediation along two distinct dimensions. First, they coded the precipitants leading to turning points in negotiations, points in which the relationship be- tween the disputants seem to change. Second, they coded for negotiation out- come. This allowed Jameson and colleagues to look for relationships between the two dimensions, the kind of precipitants used, and the outcomes of the mediation. Based on the relationships they saw, they suggested ways that me- diators could be more helpful.

The third pattern that can be revealed by coding is temporal. As we ac- knowledge in Chapter 8, temporal analysis deserves to be used more often for what it shows us about streams of language. Mugurusi and Bals (2016) use a kind of temporal analysis to show how the dimensions of Centralization, Par- ticipation, Formalization, Standardization, and Specialization changed over four phases in the offshoring process. The authors concluded that the offshor- ing process may be more disjointed and non-linear than current models in operations management would suggest.

Our Core Commitments

We bring to the task of coding streams of language a set of commitments that we'd like to put on the table from the start. They have served as our points of departure for the process and procedures that you will find in the rest of the book. In this section, we make these commitments explicit not so much to argue for them but so that you can judge for yourself.

Commitment to Being Procedural

Coding Streams of Language is fundamentally a procedural guide. That is, it provides you with a set of step-by-step procedures for coding and then analyz- ing verbal data. We anticipate that, as you grow in experience, you will modify, extend, and even discard these

procedures. But our intention is to provide you a very clear basis with which to begin.

You will find that most of this procedural knowledge has not been documented elsewhere. Instead, it most often handed down mentor to student during office hours or shared peer to peer in late night sessions. The trouble with these practices is that they tend to keep cultural knowledge about analysis within a closed inner circle. Not only does this seem unfair to us, but it also keeps these procedures out of the light of day. So we put our procedures out there for you to see, use, question, and refine.

Commitment to the Systematicity of Coding

Coding Streams of Language aims to help you produce a systematic analysis. To be systematic means to follow some articulate orderly procedure. It does not mean you have abandoned intuition—more about this later—but it does mean that you have tried as far as possible to create an analysis that can be replicated: that the coding decisions you make today will be the ones that you agree with tomorrow; that the coding decisions your co-researchers make will be more or less the ones that you would make.

The commitment to systematicity lies behind the importance we give to segmenting verbal data in advance of coding it. And, as we introduce in Chap- ter 3, choosing the right unit for segmentation is key to developing a coding scheme that works. The commitment to systematicity also lies behind our emphasis on reliability. In Chapter 5 we describe how having someone else try to code your data and then comparing it to your own coding is the eye-opening key to developing a good coding scheme.

Commitment to the Design of Analysis

Coding Streams of Language urges you to design your analysis. Verbal data tends to pile up and overwhelm the best of us. Stepping back to consider how you will design your analysis can help you get a handle on what can otherwise be an enormous task.

In Chapter 2, we suggest that you begin with some initial

explorations, sharpening your intuitions about what looks interesting. Then we give you some options on sampling your data, using your research questions to pick out a man- ageable subset of your data for further in-depth analysis. And finally, we recom- mend that you build your analysis around a built-in contrast, looking not only at data that you think should reveal the phenomenon in which you are interested, but also at data in which you expect the phenomenon to be absent. Sometimes the best way to know what you're looking for it to see its absence.

Commitment to the Complexity of Language

Coding Streams of Language takes a rhetorical approach to coding. That is, it acknowledges the complexity of language use. It considers not just what lan- guage says—that is, its topics—but also what language does. It assumes that language is more than just a vessel for content, more than a series of topics; that it *does* as well as *means*.

Acknowledging the complexity of language also requires us to forgo the ex- pectation that any coding scheme can be absolutely unambiguous. Language will always require the interpretive powers of a language user. Coding does not replace the human coder but provides a guide to our intuitions. The role that context plays in developing these intuitions is inescapable. What words and phrases mean in one context might be quite different in another context. Coding depends, however, on the idea that these intuitions can be developed using a full coding scheme as we discuss in Chapter 4.

A Commitment to Mixed Methods

In *Coding Streams of Language*, we take a mixed-methods approach to the analysis of verbal data. Adapting the terminology introduced by Vogt et al. (2014), the workflow we advocate moves from coding in words to an anal- ysis that combines qualitative (words), quantitative (numbers), and graphic (charts) representations. Like many mixed-methods researchers, we no longer find it useful to see qualitative and quantitative approaches

as opposing meth- odologies, but rather prefer to see them as constituting a useful set of tools (Sandelowski et al., 2009).

Nevertheless, our commitment to mixed methods has lead us to adopt the standard of mutual exclusivity for coding. Mutual exclusivity refers to the re- quirement that each segment of data should be assigned to one and only one code. Mutual exclusivity is often seen as one of the major dividing practices between qualitative and quantitative approaches to coding. Examined more closely, however, we have found that these two analytic traditions are often closer than we might expect because language is inherently multidimensional.

In practical terms, multidimensionality often means that an analyst con- sidering how to code a piece of language often sees multiple ways to code it. This will be true whether one is approaching coding from the perspective of content analysis, in which the goal is to create mutually exclusive categories, or from the perspective of qualitative analysis, in which double coding is not uncommon. Our method for dealing with the tendency to double code is to dimensionalize the data. As we describe in Chapter 4, rather than seeing the inclination to double code as arising from irreconcilable options, we can turn it into an invitation to develop mutually exclusive codes in different dimensions.

Our commitment to mixed methods also keeps us open with respect to research designs. We agree with Vogt et al. (2014), that the choice of analytic methods is not predetermined by the design of your study. Whether you have collected data in the context of a tightly-controlled experimental investigation or as a result of an extended stay in the field, as long as you have verbal data, you can code it and analyze it following the procedures we lay out in this book.

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Author Bios

Cheryl Geisler is Professor of Interactive Arts and Technology at Simon Fraser University, where she served as the inaugural Dean of the Faculty of Communication, Art and Technology. She has written extensively on the nature of texts, especially those mediated by new technologies. A recognized expert on verbal data coding, she organized a special section of the *Journal of Writing Research* (Vol 7, No 3) on current and emerging methods in the rhetorical analysis of texts and wrote an article on coding in the April, 2018 issue of *Written Communication*. She has published more than fifty articles, book chapters, and conference proceedings, as well as five books including *Analyzing Steams of Language* (2004). She has received awards for her work from *Computers and Composition*, the Rhetoric Society of America, and the National Communication Association. She is a Fellow of the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing.

Jason Swarts is Professor of English, specializing in technical communication, at North Carolina State University. His research focuses on practices of social cognition that are supported by texts and influenced by mobile networking technologies. He has written more than twenty articles as well as two books that both rely on techniques of verbal data analysis outlined in this book: *Together with Technology* (2007) and *Wicked, Incomplete, and Uncertain* (2018). His research has been recognized with awards from the National Council of Teachers of English, the Society for Technical Communication, and the Association for Teachers of Technical Writing.

APPENDIX C: BUILDING YOUR WRITING CONFIDENCE

44. Writing With Your Peers

RAQUEL CORONA; KAMI DAY; AND MICHELE EODICE

Abstract

In this chapter from *Writing Spaces: Readings About Writing, Volume* 4, Raquel Corona, Kami Day, and Michele Eodice advocate for student writers to collaborate and coauthor. When opportunities to write together are offered—as part of in-class or outside-class writing assignments—students can benefit in a number of ways, including learning how audiences are addressed and how immediate feedback can become a dynamic element of writing together. In terms of the value of the experience, collaborative writing and coauthoring are technologically supported and often expected in many professional workplaces.

This article is available below and as a PDF. The PDF edition includes instructor resources.

> *It was a good learning experience for me when my*

> *group members took their turns writing and ended up contributing things that I never would have thought of to the paper. All in all, I'd say that it was a positive experience, and a good assignment. Because writing in a group forces everyone to grow in some area that they are not good at. It's a different area for different people but everyone grows somehow.*
>
> —*First-Year Composition Student*

Perhaps you would describe your experiences with collaborative work differently than Noah does. When we ask college students about their encounters with teamwork, group work, collaboration, cooperative learning, coauthoring, or cowriting, many students tell us those experiences were not very positive, especially in high school. They complain that, for example, the bulk of the work usually fell on one person, that slackers got credit for work they didn't do, that one person dominated the group, that some group members did not communicate well with the rest of the group, that some members did not contribute much or did not contribute at all, that the finished product did not meet their standards. They may have felt their own grade was adversely affected by the grade their group's work received. Some of you are probably nodding your heads as you read this list, but we can say with confidence that most of the students in our classes report positive experiences with collaborative work, including writing together. We are three experienced writing teachers who believe collaboration sometimes goes sour because students are asked to work together without first understanding the value of such work, or because they have not yet learned how to work together productively. Some have collaborated successfully in a group yet have never actually written with another

person. But we have seen that when students understand writing together can deepen their learning and help them become better writers, and when they are shown how coauthoring works, they are more willing to set aside their skepticism and engage with their peers. Our goal is to get you thinking about the benefits of collaborating, and, more specifically, the benefits of writing with your peers.

It might surprise you to know that even though you feel you write better in solitude, you seldom actually write alone; writers, students, and professionals rarely do. Even the student in the dorm room in the middle of the night has access to the knowledge and experience of other writers through Internet searches, library databases, writing center tutors, other students who are also up in the middle of the night trying to finish an essay, and their own experience of reading the work of many authors. Two graduate students acknowledged this when they wrote (together), "We find solace, support, and success when we look outside ourselves, borrow ideas, remix other texts, talk to others, and collaborate with their thoughts. The Lone Genius author doesn't exist. And it never did" (Edwards and Paz 66).

We three coauthors believe all writing is collaborative in some way. The difference in a classroom situation is that you have what two scholars and coauthors in the field of writing studies, Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford, call an "addressed audience," or an immediate, rather than imagined, audience. That means you instantly have other people to give you feedback along the way, to add information and perspectives, to correct your mistakes, to push you to think hard, and to remind you that someone other than you will need to understand what you write. Yes, writing with peers can be fun and you can make friends and enjoy the experience, but mainly, writing with your peers offers a whole new way to approach your assignments and allows your thinking to become shaped by additional voices.

Our Own Experiences Writing with Others and in Our Classrooms

We're not sure what comes to mind when you think of the term *cowriting* or *coauthoring.* You might think of it in a broad sense—writing together or writing collaboratively. Of course, that kind of collaboration might take any number of forms, but the form we're talking about here is in-person, in close proximity or online, real-time writing together—in other words, a scenario in which writers sit down together and create text together. We three are writing teachers who ask our students to do this kind of coauthoring every semester, but before they dive into that first coauthoring task, or perhaps test the waters tentatively, we spend some time sharing what we know about the value of coauthoring, including some stories about our own experience.

Neither Kami or Michele remembers coauthoring in high school or even as undergraduates, so their first coauthoring endeavors came in graduate school. The workload was heavy and the subject matter challenging, but the professors encouraged collaborative work, so they wrote with each other and with other graduate students. Working this way allowed them to divide up some of the research tasks; but while working side by side, they also found they could tackle complicated concepts and generate even more ideas than they would have writing alone. Because of all the talking they did while writing, they were constantly testing their understanding with another person, and that helped them learn better and faster. They quickly discovered that what they produce together is always better than what they can produce individually because they were able to combine knowledge, life experiences, writing styles, and vocabularies. One of them is skilled at creating vivid metaphors, one is adept at organization and transitions, one is spontaneous, one is a taskmaster, and for editing, they have double the assets to make sure grammar and usage is appropriate for their audience and for the task at hand.

Kami, an introvert, had always preferred to work alone, so she

understands the misgivings some students might have about writing collaboratively. But because of her graduate school experience, she learned how her own work could be enriched by the ideas and perspectives of others, and she encourages any reluctant students to be open to the possible rewards of writing with their peers. Most of her students are willing to try, and most, like Noah, have a positive experience with coauthoring during the semester. They find themselves in what Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky calls the "zone of proximal development." In that zone, peers learn from each other, bringing together their individual knowledges and experiences to create a deep pool of ideas, expertise, and possibilities.

Raquel did write with others in her undergraduate years, but this writing was often outside the classroom with her sorority sisters. Some of it was personal, but often it was for sorority and organizational business purposes. During that time, it became natural for Raquel to cowrite with others. However, even in this context, she often took the lead or was particular about how the writing came to be. It wasn't until she went to graduate school and cowrote with others that it felt truly like a collaborative endeavor.

Now that she is a composition instructor, one of Raquel's goals in asking her students to coauthor is that her students learn to write as members of an ability-diverse team to experience community problem solving. She acknowledges that group writing tasks do not always turn out "successfully" if "successful writing" is defined as it has been traditionally. Her students' collaborative writing is often all over the place; sometimes one person takes over the writing while others contribute, or they really struggle with coming up with a cohesive written response. However, she keeps asking students to write together because she thinks the students' discussions as they share their different views are so important, and such discussion really helps build community. Students are also able to find others in the course they can be supported by or people they will choose to work with when they have to self-select for other group activities.

Students Writing Together

Here, we offer a snapshot of what a face-to-face, in-person coauthoring interaction might look like and sound like. Imagine a scenario at a midwestern community college in which students are coauthoring. One group of four has chosen to write about a proposed change in the school's nondiscrimination policy, a revision that would add sexual orientation and gender identity to the policy. The group is diverse: one member is a straight, nontraditional student (a student who has come back to school at an age that is not typical for new students) whose age and experience have exposed her to many different views; one identifies as queer and has experienced harassment and discrimination on campus; one straight male identifies as a Christian with rather conservative views; one male identifies as straight and liberal. Their majors range from elementary education to business to English to chemistry, their writing abilities from fluent and confident to tentative and inexperienced, their ages from eighteen to thirty-five. Two students identify as Black, one as white, and one as mixed race. It would be possible to fill several pages with all their differences. You can probably imagine the challenges this project would present, and because their views and perspectives differ, the group, after a great deal of discussion (coauthoring involves a lot of talk), decides to write an essay that explores these different views rather than takes one specific position. In this way, everyone's perspective is voiced but also challenged.

The following exchange captures part of the group's process; a few minutes of a final editing session might go like this:

Student 1: Okay, so the next section starts with "This change in the policy may cause trouble. There might be heated debates, demonstrations, and even violence."

Student 2: That doesn't sound right . . . kind of choppy. How about a colon after "trouble"?

Student 3: What's a colon supposed to do? I've never really understood that.

Student 2: Well . . . it usually comes before a list, but it can add more about the first part of the sentence too.

Student 4: What about one of those lines . . . a dash . . . after "trouble."

Student 2: Why?

Student 4: Well, a dash can be used like a colon but it sort of sets off . . . emphasizes something more than a colon does.

Student 1: Okay, so if we put in a dash it looks like this (typing) . . . "This change in the policy may cause trouble—there might be heated debates, demonstrations, and even violence."

Student 3: Yeah, I like that better, but what if we take out "there might be"?

Student 1: Okay, if we do that it looks like this (deleting) . . . "This change in the policy may cause trouble—heated debates, demonstrations, and even violence."

All four students: Yeah—that sounds good! (high fives all around)

You might be thinking "Oh, that wouldn't happen—too corny." But we have seen and heard many such exchanges, including in-person and virtual high fives.

These students are not working in an ideal coauthoring situation— no classroom ever is. Ideally, students who already know each other well would choose to write together, but in a classroom, even if you have gotten to know a few students, you usually do not know anyone very well and you are often assigned to groups. So, how do you participate in a group to help everyone work successfully together? You might find yourself in a class where groups are assigned, or you might be told to put yourselves into groups with little preliminary preparation. We encourage you to take some time to get to know each other. Of course, you can introduce yourselves, but we also ask students in a new group to come up with a list of things they have in common beyond the obvious (we are all mammals, enrolled in the same class, etc.). What usually ensues is a lively conversation, a relaxing of tensions, and the beginnings of a productive group. Even if your instructor did not ask you to participate in such an exercise, you could do it on your

own. Sometimes we make random pairs and have students interview each other with questions that get beyond where they are from. One question that works to move the conversation toward writing is: How would you describe your relationship to writing? The answers here are often metaphorical and revealing, such as: My relationship with writing is long distance!

Group writing can also help you gain experience as a facilitator and as someone who can take on different roles and responsibilities. Some groups assign roles like scribe (takes notes or types), sheepherder (keeps the group on track), whiner (to get problems out in the open so the group can move on, or to take questions to the teacher), the spokesperson (if the group is asked to report), and so forth. The members of some groups just naturally fall into taking on roles as they need to (actually, this happens most of the time in our classes). Sometimes one voice is heard more than the others, but we have experienced very few problems with domineering students or students who say nothing. In many cases, highly verbal extroverted students seem to understand they are instrumental in drawing quieter or less confident students out, and students who would never say a word in a large class discussion are more willing to participate in a less threatening small group whose members they trust and feel somewhat comfortable with. Students have told us they learn more about themselves through the coauthoring experience; they realize their strengths and gain self-awareness of the ways they can contribute to collaborative work, sometimes as idea generators, sometimes as editors, sometimes as taskmasters, and sometimes as the person who keeps the group laughing.

Ideally, you will be given time in class to coauthor. But you might be required to do your coauthoring outside class. In either case, we recommend the role of scribe is rotated with each session—it can be a powerful position to hold the pen or control the keyboard. When we first had computers in our classrooms (1990s!), groups gathered around one monitor and the scribe was on the keyboard. In current classrooms, it is more likely you will have your own device, laptop, or tablet, or there is a projection screen for the computer. The kinds

of tools now available to share screens and documents (like Google Docs), whether students are in a classroom together or meeting virtually, allow the process of writing together to be more visible and accessible for all writers to participate (Hewett and Robidoux).

The questions below can be used in the group as icebreakers but we place them here to give you a chance to reflect on your thinking about co-authoring so far.

1. Would your friends characterize you as someone who works and plays well with others? Why or why not?

2. Write the recipe for your successful individual composing process. For example, does it include six cups of time and a teaspoon of inspiration? Then develop a recipe for a successful coauthoring process for a four-person group.

3. Describe how a piece of writing might be enriched by having more readers and writers involved. It might help your thinking process to imagine you are starting to write a research essay. What is the question you want to ask?

Final Thoughts: Beyond Classroom Writing

Our purpose in writing this chapter was to help you feel more open and comfortable with the possibilities of writing with your peers. Writing together can impact your learning and engagement in a class but also prepare you for future opportunities, beyond your undergraduate experience, to write with others.

From the students in our classes over the years, we have heard just how much writing and coauthoring takes place outside of class, especially within clubs and organizations, student government, activist groups, and athletic events. All of our interactions with people, whether close friends or strangers in public life, require the ability to negotiate and compromise and writing with others can help you develop and practice ways of listening and learning with others. In some workplaces, team writing is the way all the work is done and there are many guides to doing team writing (an example

is Team Writing: A Guide to Working in Groups by Joanna Wolfe, who researches collaborative writing in technical communication). Pattie Wojahn, Kristin Blicharz, and Stephanie Taylor, who write about virtual collaboration, point out that because workplaces expect and support virtual collaborative writing, an understanding of the "care, coordination, and cooperation" that must go into coauthoring will be an asset (66). In addition, engaging with writers through writing projects has the potential to make the work more meaningful (Bleakney 2020).

To gain more experience, it might even be possible for you and a group of your peers to propose a coauthored project for this or another class, or to establish "interest groups" of students who are working on similar projects so you can share research, insights, and even do some blog writing or Wikipedia editing together (Lockett). We hope that by the time you enter the workplace, you will have had experiences working well and writing authentically with other people. Twenty-first century learners like you have access to amazing technologies, access to other writers around the world, and access to multiple literacies and modes of communication. All of these support collaboration and coauthoring—in school and beyond.

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45. Bad Idea About Writing: "You Need My Credentials to Be a Writer"

RONALD CLARK BROOKS

Abstract

It is important to note that this chapter comes from the book *Bad Ideas About Writing*, which includes titles that can be misleading if you do not read the text itself. Please note that the titles for all of the *Bad Ideas About Writing* essays are actually misleading myths about writing that circulate. It may be confusing, at first, to see these titles. And it is important to keep in mind the content of each essay dispels these popular beliefs about writing that can be found in the titles, by using research from the field.

This reading is available below, as a PDF, and as a podcast.

Recently, I launched a public writing project to help people free themselves from writer's block, or to at least free themselves from writer's block for long enough that they could get some part of their own life stories written down. I particularly wanted to reach out to people who normally would not think of themselves as writers.

Having considered most of the lessons of the process movement to be commonplace, I didn't anticipate resistance to this project from the people I would meet, but on our first trip out I encountered a young man who very much considered himself a writer, and he told me outright that he found the project offensive. "Not everyone can write," he said, and as he did so, the small group of people who had gathered around my booth started to disperse.

What is it about writing that generates this attitude, often held passionately, that some people are writers and others are not? Is it the romantic ideal of innate genius? The belief that one has to be initiated in a given way to join a special club called writers? Is it something unique to the craft of writing and the anxieties it provokes? I have never heard of a professional baseball player, for example, telling a community baseball league that they should get off the field or that they're a menace to the sport, but I have heard professional writers complain about there being too many people claiming to be writers. Is this an anxiety one sees from the practitioners of all underappreciated arts? Regardless of the answer to these questions, the idea that one has to be a credentialed writer in order to write is definitely a bad idea about writing, one that is pervasive in the general public and oftentimes fostered by writing teachers themselves.

When talking to the young man at my booth, I realized that as a composition teacher, and especially as a trainer of teachers, I have encountered some version of the belief that one has to be credentialed in order to call oneself a writer for most of my professional life. Writing teachers should be credentialed (see Seth Kahn's chapter), and in no way am I suggesting that these credentials are not important, but the kind of credentials that one gets in order to speak authoritatively about a field—whether that field is literature, film, cultural studies, creative writing, linguistics, or even the often now widely divergent fields of composition, rhetoric, and literacy studies—those need to be set apart from the beliefs that one must have in order to teach writing well.

The most important belief that a writing teacher can have about writing is, as Peter Elbow (a well-known teacher of writing) put it, that everyone can write. And at the heart of that belief is the assumption that everyone's experience and perspective is already worth writing about as soon they arrive in the classroom. To expand that belief beyond the classroom, we should generally believe that everyone's experience and perspective is already worth writing about as soon as they arrive at the page or screen. If this belief is essential for teachers of writing, it is even more so for the writers themselves. At some level, when we sit down to write we must believe it can be done, regardless of our previous experiences, or nothing gets written. This is true for beginners, but it is equally true for experienced writers because every new writing situation brings on new challenges and, as many of us have discovered, one often has to learn to write all over again with each new project.

At the same time, believing that one already knows how to write can be as much of a barrier to writing as believing that one can't. Believing that everyone already knows how to write, however, is very different than believing everyone *can* write. Believing that everyone already knows how or should know how to write is a different bad idea (see Elizabeth Wardle's chapter), and it is one that often leads to the production of five paragraph themes and disembodied, formulaic, general writing. Believing that everyone can write is simply starting with the idea that even though writing is complex, sometimes difficult, infinitely varied and variable, and dependent on rhetorical context, everyone is able to start somewhere in the process, and only from that ground can one unlock the potential to do it well.

What is key, then, is to create a space where a writer can develop a more positive, empowered approach to the actual complexity that is writing. Peter Elbow began his career with the book *Writing Without Teachers*, and it might be that this more optimistic ground is more easily fostered outside the classroom, as the culture of assessment that schooling creates constantly wants to reintroduce the bad idea that you need credentials to be a writer. This is not

to say that classes can't hold on to the belief that everyone can write, but these kinds of classrooms require vigilance in order to reinforce optimistic attitudes about writing. Despite how difficult it is to do so, maintaining this vigilance has proven to be effective. In *Ways of Thinking, Ways of Teaching*, George Hillocks has shown us that optimism is the one factor that continually makes a positive difference in the outcomes of writing classes.

If you find yourself in a writing course (or still remember a writing course) that has not fostered a positive outlook toward writing, it is entirely possible to create this environment yourself by surrounding yourself with supportive writers. Supportive does not mean they will tell you everything you write is great (that's not what everyone can write means). Supportive means that they will hold you accountable to getting writing done and to help you continually improve your writing. That's the beauty of it being a bad idea that you need credentials to be a writer. There is absolutely nothing stopping you from getting started right now.

Further Reading

For a longer exploration of the idea that *Everyone Can Write* and for ways of thinking about assessment based on this philosophy, see Peter Elbow's book of the same title. For qualitative proof of the effectiveness of optimism and the writing process, see George Hillocks's *Ways of Thinking, Ways of Teaching.* Because most process theorists share Elbow's optimism about everyone's potential to perform, it is worth studying the works of Ken Macrorie, Sondra Perl, Donald Murray, Wendy Bishop, and many others in order to know the best ways to foster your own supportive writing community. For even more specific information about how to create workshops beyond the confines of writing classrooms, see Pat Belanoff and Elbow's *Being a Writer: A Community of Writers Revisited.* More importantly, look for local writers' clubs and readings and community groups in your area. One possible way to

find these is to sign up for and take part in National Novel Writing Month, Academic Writing Month, and Digital Writing Month. Many have found success by letting their writing communities develop from there.

Author Bio

Ronald Clark Brooks is an associate professor and chair of the writing studies department at Montclair State University in Montclair, NJ. One of his primary interests is helping students learn to think of themselves as writers.

46. Bad Idea About Writing: "Only Geniuses Can Be Writers"

DUSTIN EDWARDS AND ENRIQUE PAZ

Abstract

It is important to note that this chapter comes from the book *Bad Ideas About Writing*, which includes titles that can be misleading if you do not read the text itself. Please note that the titles for all of the *Bad Ideas About Writing* essays are actually misleading myths about writing that circulate. It may be confusing, at first, to see these titles. And it is important to keep in mind the content of each essay dispels these popular beliefs about writing that can be found in the titles, by using research from the field.

This reading is available below, as a PDF, and as a podcast.

Our American culture and education has cultivated quite the romantic idea of authorship. Instruction in language arts and literature consistently and often forcefully exposes students to writers who have been canonized as The Greats: geniuses of

thought, master wordsmiths, and inspired creators—in a word, authors— who transcended humanity and mortality. Shakespeare, Emerson, Orwell, and so on—these were truly writers!—they say. These writers sat at grand mahogany desks in remote cabins ensconced in the most still and people-less of lakes and forests. These writers sequestered themselves from all influence and feverishly scribed brilliant works only their peerless minds could produce. But these writers, great as they may be, have been the most damaging to our current perceptions about writing.

The image of this autonomous, genius, and origin-ary author bears great consequences; it designates a coveted status against which many, if not all, writers are compared. It is etched into intellectual property debates, woven into anxieties and uncertainties over plagiarism, and intricately bound to the economics of writing. Worst of all, it stubbornly refuses to die, despite persistent attempts to overthrow its reign on literacy instruction and cultural production.

The Weight of Genius

As graduates of U.S. education, we've personally experienced (and continue to experience) the damage this myth has wrought on those who write. The genius writers were enlightened, wise, and shrewd observers of the world and humanity. They wrote the truth as only they could, and that fount flowed freely and easily. But that's not how writing works for us. Writing is *hard*. So many writing tasks we meet are impenetrable, fortified on every side with bulwarks tall and steel. We pound and press against those walls— but nothing. Our work often stalls out, halted in place. We obviously cannot be true authors, right? This should be that easy. Why doesn't it just come out? These unrealistic expectations cannot be the only way to be an author.

These genius authors misguide many writers. Their most damaging

effects are the unrealistic expectations they pose for everyday writers. Writing scholar and plagiarism expert Rebecca Moore Howard believes the notion of the solitary, genius author has perpetuated a climate where novice writers fear being unoriginal and must strive to prove their own creativity and genius. You need only glance at the branding language of the plagiarism detection service Turnitin, a self-proclaimed "originality-checker," to see how this manifests in real-life scenarios. The demand for originality frustrates many writers, who do not see how they could ever have the genius to discover an original thought.

Other writers, both within and outside of academic settings, similarly struggle when they feel their writing process doesn't live up to the lauded image of The Greats. In a short essay in *The Irish Times*, author and musician Josh Ritter writes about how he wrestled with the image of genius authors. He never felt his songwriting counted as real writing, which can only happen upon grand escritoires, penned with quill and ink and set in parchment. He writes, "Never mind that for my entire writing life I'd been writing at my kitchen table, with my guitar on my knee and a pen and notebook handy, if I wanted to be a real writer, I would need a desk. [...] And without the desk, how could I write my novel?" Ritter finds himself limited by the image of writing and writers that a desk represents. Without a desk, Ritter can't imagine he has the ability to produce a worthy piece of writing, just as many don't feel like true writers if they struggle and strive when they write. But Ritter comes to a conclusion we also share: remote cabins along isolated lakes, grand writing tables carved from cedars, brilliant manuscripts born in one candlelit sitting—these don't accurately represent what writing looks like for anyone.

Well-hidden between pristine white pages and well-crafted words lies the same trying process many endure each time they open a document or hold a pen as well as the same unyielding barricades that keep them out, which often only give way when they are influenced and inspired by others. Tales of genius writers who pour out perfectly structured prose all on their own recount

fables rather than reality. (See Teri Holbrook and Melanie Hundley's chapter elsewhere in this book for more on bad myths about writers.) Instead, these writers were certainly very much like ourselves—nervous, frustrated, harried, and tired, looking for help at 1:38 a.m. while trying to meet a deadline. What help we do find rarely comes from genius, self-willed epiphanies. Instead, we find solace, support, and success when we look outside ourselves, borrow ideas, remix other texts, talk to others, and collaborate with their thoughts. The Lone Genius author doesn't exist. And it never did.

Yet, such an understanding of authorship has become so commonplace, so naturalized, that few ever interrogate its origins. A closer look at this myth reveals that the author was forged only recently in Western history. According to literary historian Martha Woodmansee, the invention of the author in its current configuration can be traced to 1st-century Europe. It was during this century, according to Woodmansee's analysis, when a larger cultural shift began to take place, and out of a swirl of change—technological, legal, economic, and cultural—a new definition of the contemporary author began to emerge. This is the author that largely sticks today: the creator, owner, and proprietor of unique, original works such as essays, books, poems, and so on.

The Invention of Genius

Views of writing that lead to modern ideals about authors developed along with the circulation of popular treatises on originality. In 1759, for example, the influential writer and poet Edward Young's "Conjectures on Original Composition" began to draw deep divides between original and imitative authorship. Originality, Young claimed, sprung forth naturally from an inherent root of genius, like a plant bearing fruit. Imitations, on the other hand, were artificial inferiors built from the work of others. Young's essay, and many

others like it, began to forcefully redirect the locus of inspiration. They claimed that true authors are not inspired by the outside world; they are inspired by their unique selves. True authors are not imitators; they are originators. True authors are not made; they are born.

This redirection of inspiration also coincided with the birth of a new class of writers: professional authors. Now, essayists, poets, and other public intellectuals claimed an occupation where writing was their primary means for earning a living. Thanks in large part to the expansion of a larger reading public due to advances in printing technology, a need grew to find ways for professional writers (and the publishing industry) to earn money from their printed works. Enter copyright. Early copyright laws, according to historian Mark Rose's analysis of copyright, helped to form an under- standing of the author as an owner and proprietor of his or her individual ideas. In other words, copyright helped to define the author as author: an autonomous individual whose original ideas merit legal protection and deserve monetary rewards.

There are many reasons why this understanding of the author persists today. Tenets of originality, property, proprietorship, and genius have become etched into the fabric of Western authorship. Genius authorship is coded into our legal and economic systems and is further upheld through years of education. Our understandings of an author are also a product of the publishing industry itself. Publishers present a polished and finalized copy of writing and thereby dilute the messiness of the writing process. The idea that authors derive their writing abilities from their natural intellect is difficult to shake because it is inscribed in the very word *author* itself.

But such was not always the case. A deeper look at history, together with today's digital writing practices, reveals how the myth of the lone, original genius can be challenged. Specifically, alternatives to genius see value in imitation, collaboration, and

remix. Authors don't act in isolation but rather find themselves surrounded by other ideas, people, and writing.

The Alternative to Genius

Before the idea of genius authorship took hold, Woodmansee notes that authors were commonly depicted either as vehicles (receiving ideas from some outside source) or craftsmen (forging new materials out many disparate sources). An even deeper history reveals a more esteemed regard for imitation. Practices of imitation—drawing inspiration from outside sources by borrowing, adapting, and altering models from a rich stockpile of sources—were largely valued in ancient cultures. Imitation was how students learned their craft, and it was viewed as a way to invent new meanings out of existing materials. In fact, ancient philosophers and poets often used the metaphor of a transformative bee to describe the work of imitation. As Seneca described in the 4th century BCE, "We should follow, men say, the example of the bees, who flit about and cull the flowers that are suitable for producing honey, and then arrange and assort in their cells all that they have brought in." This metaphor suggests the act of producing a new work involves gathering bits and pieces from many different external sources.

These historical practices and ideas about authorship demonstrate what writing once was and what we believe it still should be: a collaborative endeavor in constant and deep conversation with the works and ideas of others. In other words, instead of the reclusive genius, we aim to be social writers. Instead of inspiration from within, we seek influence from without. Writing requires talking to friends, asking help from colleagues, finding answers and ideas in others' writings, and indulging in those practices. We embrace collaboration over isolation, and it is precisely this model of writing that we argue education should promote to writers and students everywhere.

In a way, it's odd to call for more collaborative writing or writing influenced by others, because it's already happening everywhere. Many scholars attest that collaboration, rather than isolation, is the dominant approach to everyday composing. Writing scholars Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford, for example, have studied the work of writers in diverse fields, including engineering, psychology, chemistry, and even sanitation. They find that the professionals in these fields rely heavily on collaboration to succeed in their writing tasks. Likewise, writing researcher Joan Mullin confirms that many artists—painters, architects, fashion designers, graphic artists and more—always feel their work is collaborative and often learn by mimicking, imitating, and even copying the work of others. These writers and artists rely heavily on others' thoughts and ideas to help them learn and succeed, and their success exemplifies why this should be the default approach to all writing.

What's more, collaboration involves more than the act of writing with other warm bodies in the room. It also involves a different kind of collaboration: reusing, recycling, and repurposing existing materials for new uses. In our digital age, everyday people increasingly have access to vast reservoirs of archived materials. Significantly, these materials can be put to use for new purposes. Rhetoric scholars Jim Ridolfo and Dànielle Nicole DeVoss refer to this remix process as "taking old pieces of text, images, sounds, and video and stitching them together to form a new product." Writing, if viewed this way, isn't predicated on values of isolation, inward inspiration, or originality; rather, it sees values in sharing, explicit influence, and renewal. Perhaps surprisingly, as media researcher Henry Jenkins notes, the language of remix resuscitates older, pre-Romantic ideals of authorship. A turn toward remix and borrowing, for Jenkins, "is not that radical when read against a larger backdrop of human history," despite the deeply entrenched ideal of creative genius propagated in recent history.

As both history and contemporary practice demonstrate, writing has always required deep social engagement and influence, and no

writer has succeeded solely due to preternatural intellect or talent. The pervasive idea of the reclusive author and genius birthing prose free from influence must die—and in its wake, a renewed idea of productive and meaningful collaboration (with other writers and their texts) will thrive.

Further Reading

To learn more about how today's writers actually compose, consider Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford's *Singular Texts/Plural Authors*: *Perspectives in Collaborative Writing* (Southern Illinois University Press), Carol Petersen Haviland and Joan A. Mullin's *Who Owns This Text?*: *Plagiarism, Authorship, and Disciplinary Cultures* (Utah State University Press), Majorie Perloff's *Unoriginal Genius: Poetry by Other Means in the New Century* (University of Chicago Press), and Kevin Goldsmith's *Uncreative Writing: Managing Language in the Digital Age* (Columbia University Press). Additionally, Josh Ritter's article "Paperback Ritter" is his story about how he personally was affected by myths of authorship while writing his book.

For more on remix, look into Lawrence Lessig's *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy* (Penguin Press), Jim Ridolfo and Dànielle Nicole DeVoss's "Composing for Recomposition: Rhetorical Velocity and Delivery," Kirby Ferguson's web series *Everything is a Remix*, and Jonathan Lethem's article "The Ecstasy of Influence: A Plagiarism" in *Harper's Magazine*.

Conversations about originality often intersect with questions about plagiarism. To explore this connection more, see Rebecca Moore Howard's *Standing in the Shadows of Giants: Plagiarists, Authors, and Collaboration* (Ablex), Susan Blum's *My Word! Plagiarism and College Culture* (Cornell University Press), and Nicolous Kulish's *New York Times* article about author Helene Hegemann's best-selling book, controversial for its plagiarized passages.

To read more on the history and theory of authorship, look to

Andrew Gallax's "In Theory: The Death of the Author," Mark Rose's *Authors and Owners: The Invention of Copyright* (Harvard University Press), and Martha Woodmansee's article "The Genius and the Copyright: Economic and Legal Conditions of the Emergence of the 'Author'" (*Eighteenth Century Studies*).

Author Bios

Dustin Edwards's research focuses on writing in digital environments, intellectual property, and authorship studies. He has writ- ten about how writing for extracurricular, professional, and civic purposes can—and should—influence the teaching of writing in university settings. He can be reached on Twitter @edwardsdusty.

Enrique Paz studies authorship and plagiarism and teaches writing. He's interested in how people come to see themselves as writers or authors. Working with many other writers, he's published essays on how writers can collaborate effectively and specifically how educators and students can and should collaborate to promote learning and success. You can find him on Twitter @eepaziii.

47. Bad Idea About Writing: "Some People Are Just Born Good Writers"

JILL PARROTT

Abstract

It is important to note that this chapter comes from the book *Bad Ideas About Writing*, which includes titles that can be misleading if you do not read the text itself. Please note that the titles for all of the *Bad Ideas About Writing* essays are actually misleading myths about writing that circulate. It may be confusing, at first, to see these titles. And it is important to keep in mind the content of each essay dispels these popular beliefs about writing that can be found in the titles, by using research from the field.

This reading is available below, as a PDF, and as a podcast.

The author-god, according to mid-20th-century language theorist Roland Barthes, embodies the Romantic notion of the artist to whom brilliant epiphanies come to be written down. In fact, at times throughout history, the best authors were believed to have been chosen and directly inspired by God Himself. Because of this cultural paradigm, many of us are deeply and psychologically

invested in the idea of individual genius authorship, as discussed in Dustin Edwards and Enrique Paz's chapter elsewhere in this collection. But, Bruce Horner writes in *Students, Authorship, and the Work of Composition* that the genius idea separates us from the real world. By seeing authors as genius artists only, we remove ourselves from the activity of writing, which is social and contextual, and are distracted by the product itself. When struggling writers consider writing a piece of art, they become frustrated because they cannot force their writing to look like what they expect art to be, and they have no clue where to begin to make themselves the genius writer they believe teachers, bosses, and readers expect.

Some of this idea—that writing is a talent set in stone—can be directly correlated to the history of writing instruction itself. At the end of the 19th century, proponents of a so-called literacy crisis claimed that students entering American universities needed to become more familiar with their own language and coincided with a push to use our education system to build a uniquely American intellectual identity, which ended up relegating writing instruction to first-year courses. Many critics have attached this literacy crisis to cultural anxiety over the growing pluralism of American society as immigration increased with the Industrial Revolution. This anxiety could also be seen in the approaches taken in these new writing-focused classes. In a narrative all writing studies scholars are familiar with, much of the teaching of writing in late 19th- and early- to mid-20th-century America focused on the *object* produced by writing, not the process of writing a text. This focus on the product of writing reinforced the idea of writing as a skill some people just had. Essays were usually written once and were done, for good or ill. Students who were privileged to be of the right socioeconomic, national, or ethnic background already wrote to the university's standards because they were part of the group in power who set the standards. Therefore, their perceived talent perpetuated the author genius idea because these desirable students were already seen as good writers while the less desirable students were not.

Now, however, our cultural situation is quite different. Because computer-based composition is quicker than pen to paper and because the Internet allows us to share what we have written so quickly, our composition happens quickly, often as a reaction to what someone else has written or posted. One of the effects of word processing and subsequently web publishing is that authors are not just authors; they are also editors and publishers, broadening the individual's daily interaction with language. In other words, while the idea of the individual author genius is theoretically problematic, it is also practically problematic because our everyday authorship practices are socially situated, collaborative, and interactive. People *can* and *do* read and write (and read and write again) all the time. Social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and others offer daily opportunities for reading, creating, and responding to texts. Many people are experts at those activities but then lack the experience and facility to recognize the rhetorical requirements of other contexts or genres.

Unfortunately, many discussions of authorship tend to ignore these interesting aspects of language and focus on what writers should not do: don't plagiarize, don't use "I," don't use Wikipedia. The practices needed to become adept at writing are criminalized, and inexperienced authors are often punished *for being inexperienced.* Sometimes when I hear colleagues complain about student writing, my response is "But isn't that why we're here? Is it not our job to teach them?" But a power differential between inexperienced writers and professional authors perpetuates the idea of learners as helpless children. We paint narratives of new writers negatively, researchers refer to them by first name only in publications rather than last names as we would real authors (in other words, "Julie writes" as compared to "Faulkner writes"), we construct writers as passive rather than active, and we negatively compare them to professional writers. In doing this, as Amy Robillard asks, "How can students *not* come up lacking?" particularly in their own minds. As a reaction to these cultural forces at play, process-focused teaching uses the steps taken as the writer creates the text—more clearly

connecting the *act* of writing with the product in the minds of those participating. Since that shift in the 1960s, writing theorists have been truly frightened to refer to our teaching as skills- based for fear that it might undercut all the work done to challenge those previously held assumptions of product-focused writing. But skill is not a word we should fear if we define skill not as natural talent but as a set of habits of mind and practices that can be taught and learned.

Indeed, the key to improving novice writers' experiences is improving how they think about their work, a process called metacognition. Opening up cognitive space that allows for meta-cognition and reflection is essential to experiential and practical improvement. One particularly powerful concept in the current metacognitive conversation is persistence: Persistence emphasizes that experience is more powerful than unchangeable ability, and challenges help move writers forward rather than delaying their progress. Good writers build these habits of mind. A successful writer—whether someone working alone or with a community group, or as a university student, professional writer, or any other way—is not one who necessarily writes more but one who persists and reflects on the work done as a means of improvement. Instructors work not to reward the talented genius and punish the unlucky, but to provide opportunities for writing, feedback, reflection, remixing, and revision of that work as socially located activities with rhetorical awareness. When a previously bad writer sees improvement, sees the value of persistence, and feels the satisfaction of the metacognitive recognition that they have gotten better, they will know that good writers are not born but come to fruition in the social act of writing itself.

To alleviate this disconnect between what culture believes writing is and what the activity of writing involves, many writing studies professionals agree that we should emphasize the contextual aspects that shape writing. We should emphasize writing as a socially located activity and reject it as idealized art object. One

potential way to do this is to take writing out of the sole context of the classroom. Traditional essays that are only seen by a teacher (or perhaps a teacher and a peer reviewer) do not build writers' concepts of themselves as authors because they can see those assignments as acontextual hoops to jump through. Writing experiences that broaden the writer's audience or provide real contexts such as blogs or service learning placements in the community can help new writers' see themselves as real authors with real audiences and see the act of writing as a socially located activity.

I will not deny, however, that certainly some authors are naturally more comfortable, more experienced, or more confident than others or may have more practiced facility with certain writing situations. Natural talent exists. Sometimes I compare writing to sports: I am not a naturally talented athlete, but I have trained for and run in dozens of races, from 5Ks to half-marathons. I am a runner. A person may not be naturally strong, but how could they gain strength? Lift weights. Need more flexibility and balance? Practice yoga. Likewise, it is with writing. We are all authors, and all authors can become better authors.

Indeed, research in writing studies shows that improved writing *can* be taught to writers at all levels, but we must first debunk the deeply held idea in the collective psyche that only some lucky people are good writers. If a person thinks their writing ability is stuck in place, improvement is incredibly difficult, further solidifying as a self-fulfilling prophecy the belief that they are a hopeless cause. This idea that some people are good writers while others are not can be truly crippling to a writer. Good writing instruction—either in a classroom setting, a tutor session, or informally with oneself—can only occur if the person believes they can become a good writer with practice and focused feedback, which can only happen if they have debunked the myth of the genius author. All writers can improve their own writing by discovering which strategies work for them and where their strengths and

weaknesses lie. We are not bound by an inborn, set level of writing talent. Good writers are not born. They are learned.

Further Reading

For more about authorship theories, see Roland Barthes's famous essays "Authors and Writers" and "The Death of the Author" or Michel Foucault's "What is an Author?" Sean Burke's collection *Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern* is a great resource for historical perspectives of authorship, which have changed dramatically over time. For alternative views from the single genius author, see Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede's work *Singular Texts/ Plural Authors* or Amit Ray and Erhardt Graeff's "Reviewing the Author-Function in the Age of Wikipedia."

To better understand the struggles and anxieties of inexperienced writers, see "Inventing the University" by David Bartholomae, Peter Elbow's widely read *Writing Without Teachers*, or Rebecca Moore Howard's *Standing in the Shadows of Giants: Plagiarists, Authors, Collaborators*. Further, Jeff Goins's blog post, "The Difference between Good Writers and Bad Writers," aptly gets to the crux of my argument here for helping inexperienced or unconfident writers expand their experiences and confidence: It's mostly practice. Because much of the idea that a person is a bad writer comes from anxiety about being unable to produce that art-product text as some kind of genius, simple exercises such as those found in advice from The Writing Center at UNC–Chapel Hill, which advises new writers to think of themselves as apprentices, or a psychological approach to conquering fears and insecurities, such as that found in Katherine Brooks's "Writing Anxiety and the Job Search" from *Psychology Today*, can be helpful.

Author Bio

Jill Parrott (@DrParrottEKU) works in the Department of English and Theatre at Eastern Kentucky University, where she is also the coordinator of the first-year writing program and the Quality Enhancement Plan co-director. She teaches all kinds of writing classes, from first-year courses to advanced composition to grammar and modern composition and rhetorical theory. In the past, she has written about copyright law and how our understanding of what an author is affects and is affected by intellectual property laws. She is researching how collaboration between writing instructors, libraries, and writing centers can help improve the way students interact with their own research and transitions from undergraduate writing to writing in graduate school.

Glossary

audience

> a component of the rhetorical situation; any person or group who is the intended recipient of a message conveyed through text, speech, audio; the person/people the author is trying to influence

composition studies

> the professional field and academic discipline that revolves around writing, research into writing, and instruction of writing

conceptual metaphor

> a metaphor (or figurative comparison) in which one idea (or conceptual domain) is understood in terms of another

context

> (also known as rhetorical situation) the context or set of circumstances out of which a text arises (author/speaker, audience, purpose, setting, text/speech)

contextual

> depending on or relating to the circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea

contingent labor

> (also referred to as independent contractors) workers hired on a temporary or short-term basis

conventions

> the elements, themes, topics, tropes, characters, situations, and plot lines common in specific genres--types of writing

critical reading

> the close, careful reading/listening/viewing of a composition that is undertaken in order to understand it fully and assess its merits, while taking into account the composition's context or rhetorical situation

current traditionalism

> is a theory of writing instruction focused on grammatical correctness.

deliberative rhetoric

> speech or writing that attempts to persuade an audience to take—or not take—some action

deviations

> the action of departing from an established course or accepted standard

discourse community

> a community of people who share the same goals, methods of communicating, genres, and specialized language

disposition

> prevailing tendency, mood, or inclination; the tendency of something to act in a certain manner under given circumstances

dual enrollment

a system allowing students to be simultaneously enrolled at two different academic institutions; typically refers to high school students taking college-level courses to earn early credit

ethics

philosophical exploration of moral principles

evaluation

assessment of a subject according to a set of criteria

exigencies

the event or occurrence that prompts rhetorical discourse; the event begins the "cycle" of rhetorical discourse about a particular issue

first-year composition

college-level general education writing and communication courses

genre

often thought of as a type or category of writing, e.g. business memos, organization charts, menus, book reviews; a discursive response to a recurrent, social action; materials that mediate social interaction

genre analysis

an analysis of the conventions and deviations for a specific genre

genre convention

the norms and expectations (or similarities) of a genre

genre conventions

the norms and expectations (or similarities) of a genre

grammar

the formal features of language and language construction

invitational rhetoric

a theory of rhetoric developed by Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin in 1995; invitational rhetoric seeks to abolish the patriarchal tendencies that go hand-in-hand with traditional rhetoric, such as domination and intimidation; it is not about persuading the audience to adopt the beliefs of the rhetor

literacy

the quality, condition, or state of being literate; the ability to read, write, speak; the ability to 'read' a specified subject or medium; competence or knowledge in a particular area

literacy narrative

writing from a single individual's perspective on their own experiences with literacy development and growth, including learning to read and write, as well as experiences with other aspects of literacy

metacognition

awareness and understanding of one's own thought processes; thinking about how you think and learn

metacognitive

relating to metacognition, or "thinking about how you think"

new literacies

new forms of literacy made possible by digital technology developments: instant messaging, blogging, social networking, conducting online searches . . .

OER

An Open Education Resource (OER) is a free or low-cost text available digitally. Many OERS have copyright licenses that allow remix or revision. They are intended to offer high quality educational content and keep down costs for students.

process theory

is a set of ideas that communicates how something changes or develops through a sequence of events.

purpose

the author's motivations for creating the text

reading pedagogies

is the principle methods of instruction that teachers use with students when teaching the principles, practices, and profession of teaching reading

reflection

the action or process of thinking carefully or deeply about a particular subject, typically involving influence from one's past life and experiences; contemplation, deep or serious thought or consideration; the process or faculty by which the mind observes and examines its own experiences and emotions; intelligent self-awareness, introspection, metacognition

reflective writing

a genre of writing that captures the process of thinking carefully or deeply about a particular subject

revision

Is the thorough process of rethinking and re-seeing your work. Revision is distinct from editing and proofreading, which usually just address grammatical and syntactical changes. Revision instead may include reorganization, finding new evidence, or similar substantive changes to a composition

rhetor

a teacher or user of rhetoric

rhetoric

the study and use of strategic communication--or, talk and text in social interaction; the way that rhetors/authors/writers/ composers use language in order to communicate with an audience; the art of using language effectively so as to communicate with or influence others

rhetorical analysis

the careful study of a text/speech where the context, audience, and purpose for discourse are considered; the process that helps demonstrate the significance of a text by carefully considering the rhetorical situation in which it develops and the ways that it supports its purpose

rhetorical approach

an approach that examines texts primarily as acts of communication or as performances rather than as static objects; the study of both production and reception of discourse

rhetorical context

(also known as rhetorical situation) the set of circumstances out of which a text arises, which includes attention to author, audience, purpose, setting, text

rhetorical listening

Being open to explore, understand, and incorporate other's perspectives into our own rhetoric

rhetorical moves

the strategies and approaches used by a writer to communicate effectively with an audience

rhetorical situation

(also known as rhetorical context) the context or set of circumstances out of which a text arises (author, audience, purpose, setting, text)

rhetorical situations

the set of circumstances out of which a text arises, which includes attention to author, audience, purpose, setting, text

rhetorical topoi

in rhetoric, stock formulas such as puns, proverbs, cause and effect, and comparison, which rhetors use to produce arguments

rhetors

teachers of rhetoric

self-assessment

an evaluation of one's own work, process, or performance

style

the associated genre conventions with which an author chooses to compose; these conventions include tone, level of formality, choice of register, punctuation, and grammar and syntactical concerns

surveys

a series of carefully-designed questions put together to gather information to help answer a bigger research question; can help you determine countable, or quantitative, information about respondents

transfer

the act of bringing knowledge or skills from one context to another; the goal of a first-year writing course is to transfer the writing skills developed in the class to other writing situations

vertical curriculum

a learning plan through which what students learn in one lesson, course, or grade level prepares them for the next lesson, course, or grade level

writing pedagogy

underlying philosophy/approach to teaching composition

writing process

an iterative, recursive process in which authors develop compositions

writing studies

is an interdisciplinary academic discipline centered on the

study of composition, rhetoric, literacy, research, and instruction.