GRASSROOTS WRITING
RESEARCH JOURNAL

Contents

From the Editors

Janine Blue

Issue 14.1 marks the fourteenth year of publication for the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*, and we are excited to share this new issue with our readers. 14.1 includes a variety of articles by new and returning voices whose work provides an important and intriguing look into discourse communities, writing literacies, and more. In addition, with this new journal issue comes the return of three specialized genres: Picturing Literate Activity narratives, co-interviews, and a co-authored article focusing on the podcast, *A Conversation with a* Grassroots *Author*. With these different genres included in this issue, 14.1 continues to expand our collective understanding of the diverse nature of literacy and the work of writing and researching in the world.

The articles in this issue range in topic from activity systems and genre to how we engage with writing literacies based on our hobbies and popular culture interests. As we continue to expand the scope of the journal, these articles include nuanced conversations about the activity systems of hobbies and their accompanying genres, as well as the multimodal literacies we use with loved ones. They take a closer look at what literate activity means and the different ways it shows up and transforms our lives. What we continue to find so important about these articles is their continued focus on communities. As we slowly transfer into a new era of "post-pandemic," these articles remind us of our everyday genres, the multimodal ways we communicate with the people we care about, and the joy of reconnecting with our writing identities.

These articles also include discussions of a range of concepts related to the study of literate activity through topics as diverse as developing literacies for writing about football, investigating receipts as a genre, or considering the activity system involved in birdwatching. With this latest issue, we also had the opportunity to bring back former *Grassroots* author Edcel Javier Cintron-Gonzalez for *A Conversation with a* Grassroots *Author,* along with former *Grassroots* author Nichol Brown for her Picturing Literate Activity narrative, or PLA for short. Certainly, the contributors' work in this issue shows the multifaceted nature of genres and the work of writing and researching in the world. We hope you enjoy this new issue as much as we do.

Issue 14.1 begins with three articles centered on various activity systems. First up, **Izzy Foltz's** article discusses the activity system of their local library and the greater importance of supporting local libraries and understanding the literate activities involved in working in one. Our second article, written by **Cynthia Nwakudu**, describes the activity system of cultivating house plants. She documents her uptake of learning to care for various plants and how she has employed the antecedent knowledge she gained as a child when discussing her love for caring for plants. She also adopts P-CHAT, pedagogical cultural-historical activity theory, as a lens to explore her identity as a plant parent. The Writing Program at Illinois State University uses a version of CHAT specifically aimed toward pedagogy. Our pedagogical version of CHAT includes seven terms that provide a framework around which students interrogate texts and genres as they exist worldwide while accounting for such texts' nuanced and dynamic structures. Following, **Piper Coe** walks us through her passion for birding as an activity system and the multimodal literacies she learned as a child engaging with the passion and the new community tools she's utilized since becoming an adult and continuing to engage with her beloved hobby.

14.1 then shifts to the discussion of discourse communities. **Manuel Reza** leads us through his passion for Magic: The Gathering and the dedicated discourse community associated with the card game. Manuel showcases some of his favorite cards and the different literacies of learning the game and discusses why the genre is so beloved as a PhD student living away from his family and hometown. Our fifth article, written by **Isabel Crabtree**, uses P-CHAT to explore the advertisement genre and how it is helpful in business marketing, touching on the practices of the discourse community of marketing majors of which she is a part. The co-interview between former contributor **Darcy Allred** and **Natalie Jipson** also dives into discourse communities. This article is a collaboration into the discussion of Indigenous activism on ISU's campus (and beyond), the discourse community involved in such an undertaking, as well as how translingualism and antecedent knowledge impact our ability to learn and reclaim languages.

The next four articles focus on different ways of thinking about genre, including analysis, evolution, research, and conventions. **Elena Petrova's** article discusses living away from her home country of Russia and how keeping in touch with her best friend requires very specific multimodal genres of communication via various apps and the translingual writing that takes place when navigating between the Russian and English languages. Following, **Lily Linden** uses P-CHAT to discuss how evolving media coverage can influence public opinion in political matters, dictating how citizens view and

empathize with global conflicts. Her article also talks about the modality of media and how social media as a genre can both help and be a detriment to individual persuasion. **Kayleen Haile's** article also brings together genre and media as she explores the popular TikTok subgenre of BookTok and how it is a platform to reinvent how books are discussed, distributed, and turned into profit. Specifically, Kayleen explores how the Gen Z generation revitalized how authors talk about and sell their books. Afterward, **Ola Al-Refae** takes a deep dive into the genre of receipts and their conventions, paying close attention to how receipts are used and displayed culturally in both the US and her home country of Jordan. This article explains the difference in how cultures partake in a monetary transaction and how the restaurant and commercial industries in the two countries value commerce.

The remaining five articles offer unique perspectives when thinking about literate activity and identity. First, **Sam Kelly** details his passion for participating in band in high school and college, the intricacies of how he learned to play various percussion instruments, and the particular literate activity of performing in a concert. Next, **Jessica Kreul** invites us into her world of learning website coding. She discusses her initial fears with us due to her antecedent knowledge and how she combatted those doubts by learning new writing literacies and relying on her natural writing skills as an English major. Following, **Nichol Brown's** Picturing Literate Activity entry features her current workspace and nap haven, depending on the time of day. Nichol discusses the duality of being a night owl and an early bird and the affordances and complications of both identities regarding productivity as a graduate student. Afterward, **Evan Craig's** full-length article intimately and comedically walks us through his love of football and the long, challenging journey it took to become a sports media writer. Evan's article is distinctive in its writing style, but ultimately his account of the literate activities and antecedent hardships he experienced while working to blend his love of football and creative writing will resonate with readers who are interested in developing their own individual writing identities. Finally, we offer a transcript of an interview from our *Conversation with a Grassroots Author* podcast, in which **Edcel Javier Cintron-Gonzalez** and **Ellen Sundermeier** discuss Ellen's experience of researching and writing her *Grassroots* article "The Magic of Handwritten Letters: Socialization in J. R. R. Tolkien's *Letters from Father Christmas.*"

The 14.1 issue concludes with a reprinting of "Publishing with the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*," which seeks to encourage prospective writers to submit their rigorous investigations of how people, tools, and situations affect writing in complex ways. As we complete our thirteenth

year of publication, we continue to receive a wide range of articles from writing researchers interested in publishing their studies in the journal. In the coming year, we hope to continue to receive submissions that reflect diverse perspectives, explore various distinctive genres, and provide a richer understanding of the culturally and historically bound spaces in which those genres are embedded.

Book It to Your Local Library: Public Libraries as Activity Systems

Izzy Foltz

In this article, Izzy Foltz investigates the multimodality of public libraries and how the associated activity systems have changed over time.

When I was a kid, I spent a LOT of time at the library. Maybe it had something to do with the fact that the library was air-conditioned and my house wasn't, but I was more than happy to spend my summer days sitting on the floor next to the shelves on the second floor. I was ecstatic when I was old enough to walk to the library on my own because it meant my mom wasn't there to set a limit on how many books I was allowed to check out at a time. For a long time, that's all the library was for me: access to books (and air-conditioning!).

Last summer, I got a part-time job at that same local library (Figure 1), and it opened my eyes to how libraries are growing and changing beyond society's preconceived notions of them. I found that my local library is not just books, movies, and CDs, but also summer reading programs, after-school activities, book clubs, and board meetings; this is all for a library in a town of only 1,500 people. As our small-town library finally has the funds to expand, we will soon be able to offer even more than we could before, such as a dedicated children's section, more workspaces, and more natural

Figure 1: A picture of my childhood library, found on the library's
Facebook page.

lighting for our library. It was this plan for expanding my childhood public library that made me start thinking about libraries as activity systems and how those activity systems are changing over time.

Check It Out! Activity Systems and Public Libraries

The Illinois State University (ISU) Writing Program defines **activity systems** as "cooperative interactions aimed at achieving a goal." For a library, one goal is to serve as a community space and to make media, like books and movies, and library programs of all kinds accessible to the public. Although this is one goal that many libraries share, even the activity system focused on this goal is made up of smaller systems that are dependent on the individuals and communities that participate in them. To do this, the library has various tools and systems in place.

The first public lending library in the US was donated to a city in Massachusetts by Benjamin Franklin in 1790 ("First Public Libraries"). The city had asked him for a bell, but he thought they needed a library more ("First Public Libraries"). From the beginning, these kinds of libraries were open to the public, did not cost citizens additional money, and had a goal of serving the community ("First Public Libraries"). However, it is necessary to mention that while the introduction of libraries was a huge development in the US, they were primarily accessible to white, land-owning men. Since then, libraries have grown and changed to contain far more than just books and will continue to evolve as the world does, especially when it comes to inclusivity and accessibility.

Since the creation of the modern public library, libraries have continued to grow and change. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, public libraries

started to look like what many of us probably imagine when we think of libraries. Since then, libraries have continued to branch out in new and different ways to better serve their communities. This includes different types of resources, like DVDs, CDs, audiobooks, and sometimes even board/video games. Libraries also started working to provide Internet access for their communities and spaces for people to get together. Internet access in libraries has shown a huge increase since 1996, when only twenty-five percent of libraries provided Internet access (Bertot and Palmer).

Figure 2: Melvil Dewey created the Dewey Decimal System (a system used to categorize books in libraries) while working at the Amherst College library ("Dewey Decimal System Day"). This system has been in use since 1876 and is still the most commonly used system worldwide.

Before I discuss the different activities and activity systems that you can find in a modern-day library, I want to start with the most basic version of a library activity system: checking out a resource. For this system of activity, there are particular things that folks need to know and do in order to navigate the library and accomplish this goal. These are called **literacies**. These would include things like being able to find the book you want in the library, knowing how to check that book out, and finding out when to return it. For these processes, we may need some antecedent knowledge. **Antecedent knowledge** is prior knowledge that contributes to processes and texts (ISU Writing Program). In this process, this may be things like what kind of books we like, at least a loose grasp of the Dewey Decimal System (Figure 2), and possibly an understanding of the fines that may need to be paid if the book is turned in late. If we don't have this antecedent knowledge, there are also librarians who can help us to a certain extent. We can definitely help with the Dewey Decimal System. What books you would like? We'll give it our best shot! The literacies associated with libraries are what makes libraries accessible to community members.

Don't Judge a Book by Its Cover: It's Not Just Checking Out Books Anymore

What comes to mind when you think of a library? You might have this image of a big, quiet, dusty place with tons of books and an old lady whose whole job is to shush you if you breathe too loud. It seems boring, right? If you don't like to read (and in complete silence), why would you ever go there?

Well, I'm sitting in ISU's Milner Library as I write this. Although it is not a perfect example since it is not a public library, I can see people doing

Figure 3: A flyer made by Milner Library advertising some of their programming.

all kinds of different activities around here. When thinking of libraries, "multimodal" may not be the first word to come to mind. Many people tend to think that libraries are just for books, but step into Milner Library on nearly any day of the week, and you will see a testament to the multimodality of libraries today. Someone at a nearby table is eating lunch. There are lots of people typing on their computers. My friends are next to me playing a board game they brought, and another group across the room is playing hangman on one of the whiteboards. Loads of people are talking, but I genuinely don't see anyone reading. And this is just my line of sight on one floor out of six! I actually can't even see a bookshelf from where I'm sitting, although I know they're there. So, while the stereotype of librarians hovering over patrons saying, "Shush, read your book!" may have been the case at one point, it clearly isn't now. **Multimodality** makes use of all the different forms of communication that people are capable of (ISU Writing Program), and it is engrained in libraries today to the point that the idea of a library with *only* books seems extremely outdated. If we think back to the goals of the people who were instrumental in developing libraries to "promote the public good" ("Public Libraries in North America"), we can still fit these activities

and activity systems into that goal if we expand our definition of what kinds of activities help shape and create communities.

Working at my hometown library, I, of course, had patrons come in for books (there was one patron who would request upwards of six or seven books nearly every week!), but that wasn't all we did. At the library, we frequently help people with printing, copying, faxing, sending E-mails, and finding information online. Our library is also used as a space for book club meetings, and when I work at the front desk, I can hear them laughing from upstairs. In the summer, our children's librarian hosts weekly summer reading programs (Figure 4), in which she takes the children out to experience something in the community and then brings them back and they read together.

These are all reasons why the focus on libraries is shifting from what libraries *have* to what libraries *do* (Agosto). Your public library *has* books. It *has* movies. We know this. But, have you spent time looking into what your local library *does*? That's where we start to think about libraries as activity systems.

What Makes up a Library?

There are many moving parts in a library's various activity systems. Each part is incredibly important to keeping the library functioning and moving toward its goals. This includes the structure itself. Like my childhood library with its air-conditioning (seriously, my house gets *way* too hot in the summer), the building itself can be enough to draw patrons in and provide what they need. It may offer shelter from the heat, snow, and rain. It is also a safe space for those without safe homes or any home at all. The library is somewhere people can spend time without spending money, making it a perfect place for people without any other place to go to spend the day. This is how the physical building of the library helps to achieve the goal of the activity system, to provide space for community members who need it.

Figure 4: A text made by my hometown library to inform patrons about our summer reading program.

There are also library-specific tools that often connect them to other libraries and patrons potentially outside their own community. These are systems like the Internet, interlibrary loaning systems, and organizations like Libby and OverDrive that provide audiobooks and eBooks to patrons. In this way, libraries make their content accessible to patrons of all kinds. As my hometown library continues work on construction and expansion, we are growing to rely more and more on interlibrary loans. Having access to other libraries and texts makes a huge difference to the patrons of our rural community.

These resources don't even consider the many other resources that can be checked out of various libraries. There are books—we know this—but also movies, DVDs, CDs, and magazines. Some libraries loan out video games and consoles. My own library loaned out ukuleles for some time. If there is something you really want to check out, there is probably a library somewhere that has it. That's part of what makes libraries so powerful: they aim to get tools and knowledge into the patrons' hands.

However, the most important part of a library's activity system is the people. This includes the patrons, the community, the librarians, and anyone else who comes into the library. The librarians make sure that the library is functioning the way that it should be. They are often the ones producing the texts on behalf of the library and reaching out to the community. Ideally, the community will provide support to its library. The public library should be supported by and work with other institutions in the community to provide the best access and content to its patrons. The patrons are arguably the most important part of the activity system. They are the ones that we're doing this work for. We want people to come in. We want people to be comfortable and find what they need, and that's why they are so important. They represent the goals of a public library.

Circulation of Library Texts

As part of the goal to support patrons and provide a community space, there are many texts created within and on behalf of the library. Within the library, we leave each other notes, while we're on the phone or otherwise, to communicate. We create tally sheets to track the number of patrons and books checked out. We fill out order requests. And we have another incredibly important tool: what I call *The Binder of Everything*. All of these are important texts for the library, but *The Binder of Everything* has saved my life more times than I can count.

The Binder of Everything was created by the librarian who retired before I started working there. It lays out the steps for nearly every process that the librarians or desk clerks need to complete to run the library. Each process is carefully typed and labeled in a very detailed way. Each page is in a plastic protector. This text was made by a former librarian specifically for the benefit of future librarians at that library.

However, not all of a library's texts are made exclusively for workers within the library. The library also produces texts like flyers, social media posts, news articles, and itineraries for children's programming. None of the library's texts are technically "exclusive," but we do create them for specific members of the community. The texts can change based on whether they are intended for children, senior citizens, parents, teens, or any other subgroup of the community.

My hometown library uses Canva, a free, online visual design tool, to create flyers and social media posts. The librarians need to learn to use the program, create the texts on the computer, and then either print them out or upload them to the library's social media profiles. Our patrons can then take up these texts and hopefully come check out the events at the library!

Libraries as Community

What does a library mean to the community? I think a lot about the boy who came off the bus every day and went straight to the computer to play Roblox until his mom called the library to tell me to send him home. I think about the patron who asked me to teach him how to copy and paste something into an E-mail. I think about the people who ask me for book recommendations. I don't know how to tell them that my weird niche is fantasy books about queer pirates, so I don't know nearly enough about mainstream adult fiction to recommend them anything with authority. I do tell them which cover I think is the coolest because I do judge books by their covers. Ultimately, I think that a library is less about the books and more about the community.

What does the community mean to a library? My hometown library would be a great example of this. My community of 1,500 people in a rural Illinois town worked to raise over a million dollars in support of their library. They sent their dollars to us and reached out to neighboring communities so that we could create a community space for them, and we will.

The Future of Libraries

The activity systems of libraries have certainly changed over time. Over the course of my life, I have seen them change, and they will continue to adapt to our advancing world. The libraries of the current day will soon seem out-of-date as libraries continue to grow and expand, and not just when it comes to books. Not even just when it comes to checking out media. Libraries are morphing to become community spaces in their own right, where people can work, study, or just spend time. The next time you're at the library, pause, take a look around, and consider how far the activity system has come. Also, enjoy that sweet, cold air-conditioning on hot summer days!

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Izzy Foltz graduated from ISU with a bachelor's degree in English studies in May 2023. They worked at Milner Library and plan to complete a Master's degree in library sciences. Aside from their love of libraries, Izzy enjoys playing Dungeons and Dragons and crafting!

Plant Parenting as a Literate Activity

Cynthia Nwakudu

Cultivating houseplants requires skills, practice, and a set of interrelated, often overlapping, and evolving activity systems. In this article, Cynthia Nwakudu draws on her antecedent knowledge of houseplants and P-CHAT to investigate her literate activity as a plant parent.

Reconnect: Nature and Activity Systems

Houseplants exemplify the characteristics of living things like growth and development, response to stimuli, ability to reproduce, adaptability, cellular organization, and the use of resources for energy. To see these characteristics as they happen is such a fascinating experience that it inspired my desire to cultivate houseplants. These days, I can't help but see my interest in houseplants as a practice that involves understanding, using, and creating different kinds of texts. When I buy and grow the plants that form the decor and ambience of my home, it has something to do with my past relationship with plants, my interactions with people who are connected by their shared experiences, and a series of complementary actions, routines, or ways of being. Writing requires skills and practice to produce results the same way growing houseplants needs skills and practice to produce the desired outcomes. In this article, I look at who I am as a writer through the lens of the activity of plant parenting. Writing and the writing process itself are cultivated over time through a set of interrelated, often overlapping, and evolving activity systems—and the same goes for plants.

Who am I as a writer? What counts as writing? What kind of writing do I write? Where and when do I write? What tools do I use when writing? Why do I write, and who do I write for? How does past experience and culture influence my current writing activities and practice? These are questions I never analyzed in depth until I got into the ISU Writing Program, where I gained a new awareness of my writing researcher identity through the program's philosophy, concepts, and key terms. **Activity systems** describe actions and actors working together to achieve a purpose (ISU Writing Program). Writing and the writing process are part of complex interlocking activity systems which, by their very nature, can be difficult to untangle, making writing not only confusing but also difficult to see why it matters. Writing is more than the finished product but includes the range of activities that impact the writing situation (ISU Writing Program). The concepts of literate activity and pedagogical cultural-historical activity theory (P-CHAT) highlight ways to talk about all the factors that go into understanding who I am as a writer and make visible the everyday lived experiences; communities; rules; processes; practices; boundaries; constraints; and social, cultural, historical, and antecedent knowledges that surround and are wrapped up in the writing and activities I engage in. This construction of P-CHAT has seven components which—according to Joyce Walker, editor-in-chief of the *Grassroots* journal—"'track' the movement and evolution of people and texts through the world" ("The Adventures of CHATPERSON and THE ANT"). In this article, I rely on three of these components of P-CHAT to investigate plant parenting as a literate activity: socialization, activity, and production.

My Story: The Activity of Childhood

My antecedent knowledge of plants encompasses the network of activity systems, people, institutions, communities, human and nonhuman actors, and geographical and cultural factors working together to achieve my current goals as a plant parent. This is also where the P-CHAT concepts of socialization and activity can help me to think about cultivating houseplants as an activity and look closely at the network of my activities and social interactions in my experience growing up in Nigeria and my life now in the US. **Socialization** is a category of P-CHAT which refers to all the interactions that happen when a text is produced or used (ISU Writing Program).

> **Activity Systems**
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> Activity systems refer to "cooperative interactions aimed at achieving a goal" (ISU Writing Program). Furthermore, according to the ISU Writing Program, activity "encompasses the actual practices that people engage in as they create text (writing, drawing, walking across the hall to ask someone else what they think, getting peer review, etc.)."

Socialization asks the following questions ("Just CHATting" 76): How do people and institutions interact as they produce, distribute, and use texts? And how are these interactions related to the social and cultural norms of particular institutions? My interactions with family members, teachers, Girl Guides, friends, and horticulture experts point to socialization. The specific activities I performed cleaning artificial plants, planting different seeds, learning agricultural science as a subject in school, working on school farms, using farming tools, gathering manure, mulching, writing reports, and other activities apparent in my story represent activity systems. Let me tell you how it all began.

It started with my grandfather, Ojo, a farmer who owned large tracts of land where he grew cocoa trees. Cocoa farming was a family tradition that passed from father to son. Ojo inherited his farm from his father who had a flourishing business at the time, exporting cocoa to other countries where it was processed into chocolate (he never tasted the chocolate made from his beloved cocoa—a story for another day). Cocoa farming was arduous and my father, Gabe, was not interested in the farm. He became an attorney instead. In our home, plastic flowers decorated the coffee and dining tables, and that was it. The bouquets consisted of daisies in pastels of blue, pink, and peach. Back then, cleaning the living room and dining area was my daily chore, and by the end of the month, the petals would have gathered so much dust that they needed a good soak in warm soapy water. Artificial flowers are made from synthetic materials that become a magnet for particles, dirt, stains, and dust. Over time, these particles accumulate, settle on the flowers, and become grimy so that no amount of washing could get them clean. In the end, even though we avoided the headache of caring for natural plants, the dusty fakes became a health hazard and had to be thrown out.

It was a different story outdoors, though. It was a house in the middle of a garden. Over the fence in front of the house was a glorious blanket of green and yellow scrambling vine. They could have been Cat's Claw creeper (*Dolichandra unguis-cati*) or Black-eyed Susan vine (*Thunbergia alata*). On the fence around the house, the showy green and fuchsia of *Bougainvillea* grew in wild abundance. We spent many evenings playing within sight of this colorful backdrop. Behind the house, we had a mini orchard of fruit trees: mango, banana, plantains, pawpaw, and guava. We pretty much let the plants do their own thing. This "garden" was my father's only concession to the family tradition of farming.

My active involvement with gardening began in elementary school. My siblings and I had to study agricultural science as a subject that involved working on the school farm and demonstration plots. The practical aspect of

the subject also required understanding the soil, seeds, fertilizer, and farming implements; conducting experiments; and using records and reports. Overall, the subject promoted practical agricultural skills and marketed the products. It felt natural to transfer these skills to my home. The ISU Writing Program calls this **uptake**, or how I processed the information in school but also how I applied my knowledge to a different setting. The garden at home began by accident. My siblings and I became actors in this new activity system when we discovered that after washing vegetables (beans, corn, tomatoes, and peppers) and throwing the water away in the backyard, seeds sprouted. Fascinated, we became more intentional by allotting different parts of the backyard to ourselves and planting whatever we liked. In those days, gathering seeds was a delight and watching the garden grow was pure joy. Then we became competitive, planting sweet potatoes, carrots, onions, African spinach, and even yams! The skills we learned in agricultural science were useful in our gardens at home, and they worked. We plowed the soil, planted the seed, watered it, watched it break through the ground, cared for it, and saw it grow from a tender shoot to a fruit-bearing plant. No other food tastes as delicious as the food you grow yourself.

Unfortunately, I went away to college and later moved to my own home. I lost that connection to the soil, the joy of watching plants grow, the endorphins that relieved my stress and improved my mood. Then I joined the Girl Guides where I mentored a group of girls. One activity we did often was growing potted plants around the school. As I helped the girls work with the soil, learn how to grow something from scratch, and witness its transformation, I reconnected briefly with my childhood passion. However, moving to America and living in apartments made me go back to artificial plants.

Socialization

"Socialization describes the interactions of people and institutions as they produce, distribute and use texts. When people engage with texts, they are also (consciously and unconsciously) engaged in the practice of representing and transforming different kinds of social and cultural practices" ("Just CHATting" 76).

Before I became a plant parent, I looked for resources and people to recommend plants suitable for my space. The **P-CHAT** term socialization comes into play here. I thought of my friend, Flora, in Texas who started with a few potted plants, mostly vegetables, and later moved on to large-scale potted fruit trees. Flora was not the right person to interact with because her hobby had become a business. I wanted someone who would have the time for my simple concerns. For that, I reached out to my daughter, Amax, who became a plant parent when she adopted a dying *Monstera deliciosa* abandoned in the lobby of her apartment building. She has since added other indoor varieties, one of which was the *Dracaena trifasciata*, commonly

known as the snake plant. Amax recommended the snake plant because it required minimum care. The attendants at the retail stores were also helpful. While I understood that they were there to help me make a purchase, they also provided useful tips to help me raise plants.

> **Literate Activity**
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> "Developed by Paul Prior (1998, p 138), the term 'literate activity' is meant to address all of the many ways that texts are part of people's lived experiences in the world. It extends beyond our typical ideas about 'reading' and 'writing' to include the broad range of practices and processes we employ in the creation and use of a wide array of texts" (Roozen 96).

Tracing the history of my interaction with gardening and plants helps me see how I embodied and represented my literate activity as an aspect of my social identity. Kevin Roozen, in his *Grassroots* article, "Unraveling 'Writing,'" states that

> Paying attention to the histories of people's use of particular tools invites us to view the literate activity people are involved in at present as a part of lengthier historical pathways, and thus to consider how activity is being shaped by those histories. Attending to histories also pushes us to inquire about how people and their tools have developed, how they have come to be, and to be on the lookout for the historical pathways of their emergent becoming. (103)

My interest in nurturing indoor plants has an origin and will evolve into different trajectories. To illustrate a trajectory, I started to care more about my physical and mental well-being. It is rewarding to walk through the park before sunrise, listen to the birds call out to each other, watch the ducks sit on the pond or swim toward me for food, and enjoy the light show in the sky as the sun heralds a new day. I meditate, breathe, smell, taste, and set out into the day with a clear head only to repeat the process in the evening and the next day. The activity of walking feeds the desire to bring nature into my home—an indoor garden with potted plants—and my interest in parks, zoos, arboretums, and conservatories. These recreational activities are trajectories of my interest in nature and reflect my interaction with institutions and events related to those plant-parenting activity systems. To summarize my networked connections, I came up with the map in Figure 1. This map is messy and incomplete because I'm evolving as I follow new trajectories in this literate activity.

The Goals of the Activity Drive the Activity System

What are the benefits of cultivating houseplants and what are my goals? Drawing from the definitions of activity system and literate activity mentioned earlier, the objectives of the activity are important. Consequently,
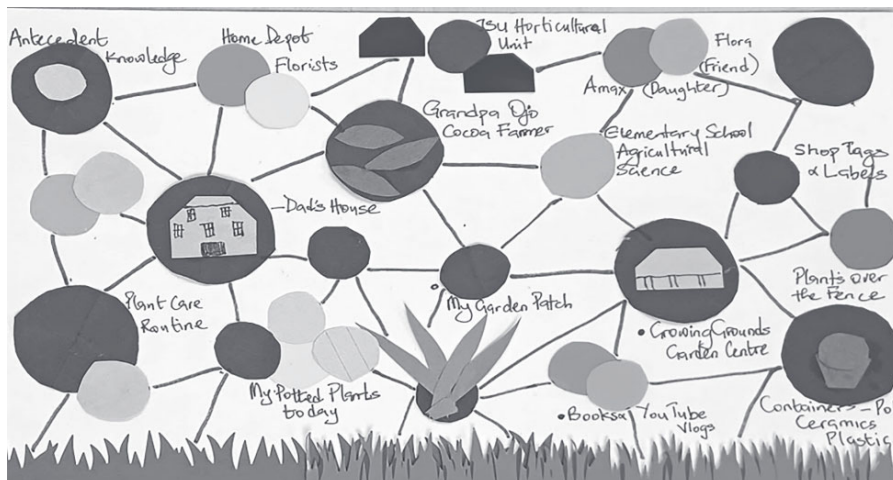
Figure 1: A map of my plant-parenting history, current activities, and networked connections.

I cultivate indoor plants to bring the wholesomeness of nature into my living space and add that aesthetic to my space. An indoor plant with fragrant blooms generates aroma, cleans the air, defines the space, strikes a mood, or sets the tone. Plants are also amazing because of the health benefits we derive from growing them, indoors or outdoors. In reading and thinking about the process of caring for houseplants, I came up with the list of benefits summarized in Table 1.

According to the list, the plant is an important actor in my activity system. The visible part is the plant's foliage, maybe the pot it sits in, and

Table 1: The six health benefits of indoor plants.

Indoor plants . . .

1. Purify the quality of the air by drawing out the carbon dioxide and diffusing oxygen;

2. Offer a unique symbiotic relationship to humans;

3. Reduce stress with gardening;

4. Improve the sense of well-being by decreasing depression and anxiety;

5. Support cognitive health by lowering mental fatigue; and

6. Improve environmental wellness.

where the plant functions as decor. The roots, soil health, nutrients, moisture level, and so on are hidden in the pot. However, the work going on in the pot is crucial to what appears above the pot. According to Angela Sheets' article "Angela Rides the Bus," **activity systems** are "the people, texts, tools, and rules that work together to achieve a particular objective" (134). Activity systems work in conjunction with genres (more details on genres in a later section). My plant-parenting activity systems are shown in Figure 2.

The qualities of literate activity become even more obvious when Kevin Roozen describes it as

> activity that involves people producing or using some type of text, broadly conceived. Their use of the term "literate" helps illuminate that human action involves not only words written on a screen or page, but also a wealth of other kinds of semiotic signs inscribed on a variety of other media and the processes and practices involved in making and using those signs. The term "activity" helps to foreground that people make and use texts to act in the world, not merely for the sake of creating the texts themselves. (96)

New Learning and Adaptation: As a plant parent and their plants learn and grow, there is constant new learning and adaptation. The activity system evolves as time passes, seasons (and light) change, and new plants are added to the environment.

Growth: Growth occurs as a plant parent collects more plants, learns about how to grow them, and uses them. Plants grow as well!

Interactions: These include those between plants and humans; between plant parents and different experts; between the plants and the environment; between different plants growing in the same space; and between humans who share an interest in parenting plants.

Activity Systems of Plant Parenting

Cumulative and Collective: The process of plants and plant parents working together forms patterns of knowledge, behavior, and reciprocal actions. Being a "plant parent" is the accumulation of all of these interactions over time.

Genres and Tools: Genres used to learn about plant parenting include conversations, books, videos, images, etc. Different types of plants could also be considered different genres. Tools include all kinds of things used to grow plants, including pots, fertilizer, water, light, tags, etc.

Figure 2: The activity systems of plant parenting.

Texts and genres commonly associated with growing and maintaining indoor plants function as actors within a network of activity systems. In the video "Activity Theory: Because Things Are Actors Too," The Word Bird explains, "Actors are the people, ideas, social concepts, rules, and tools that make the activity possible." Several human and nonhuman factors influence cultivating indoor plants by working through a network of cultural tools to participate in the activity, ideas, texts, and genres of a system. As an aspect of P-CHAT, **activity** "is concerned with the actual activities that people engage in when they are creating the text" (Kostecki 84). In other words, what do I do daily, weekly, or monthly in relation to my snake plants, and what tools do I use? Some of the things I do around my home with my plants begin on the day I bring the plant home from the retail store where I chose and purchased the plant. I need the right spot in my home for my small plants. To determine the design that goes with my plant, I look at my containers, the furniture around it, and the rest of the room. The initial place of choice is my kitchen countertop, far away from the stove but close enough to be seen in the living room of my small apartment. In the future, I might want bigger varieties to complement the decor of different spaces like the bedroom, bathroom, and living room depending on my budget.

Next, I consider the container. My plant came in its black plastic grow pot, so I bought white decorative containers or planters into which I placed the original grow pot to stage my plant. The decorative vessel has a natural drain for excess water built into its design to protect the surface where I stage the plant. The container of the plant, this physical object, is an integral part of the activity system of raising houseplants. The pot makes the activity of growing plants indoors or outdoors possible. There are different kinds of pots for different purposes and aesthetics. The most common kind of pot would be the plastic planter and the bags growers use in nurseries. These cannot work indoors. As a result, there are whole activity systems of pots, designs, and manufacturers who use a range of materials like ceramic, clay, plastic, and a host of others for plant parents to choose from.

The regular care of my plants is also part of my activity system. Plants thrive in an environment that has the right temperature and amount of light, which could range from direct to low. Light for plants could come from both natural and artificial sources. Snake plants typically survive in any kind of light. However, the care information tag recommends bright light for snake plants to flourish, so I move the plants around when they need bright light or other display options. Watering my plants is routine every two weeks or more because snake plants need the soil to dry completely before watering. When I do water, I use a spouted can and room temperature water on the soil, not the leaves. The biggest culprits of an unhealthy snake plant are overwatering

and bugs. I almost lost one of my plants to overwatering. After this incident, I made a habit of carefully watching the plants for signs of bugs, wilting, or rot. I cut off the dead leaves and keep them away from excessive heat during the winter months.

The custom of gifting flowers and plants found in many cultures across the world today is a huge industry. I give and receive flowers on Mother's Day, Valentine's Day, and other major holidays. Giving away my plants as gifts is always a satisfying activity. It is an easy and affordable way to share friendship, trust, and community. Whenever I give one plant away, I find another to take its place.

From Houseplant to Home Plant

The first snake plants I bought were from Growing Grounds and Home Depot in Bloomington, Illinois (see Figures 3 and 4). I noticed the plants right away in their various stages of growth. The green leaves, shaped like vertical swords, grow in a dense clump. This variation, almost a succulent like the aloe vera, was grayish green with the distinct darker green horizontal stripes often seen on snakes. The second variety had the same green horizontal pattern but with a striking golden-yellow edge. Of course, the bigger the plant the more expensive they are. Since I was not ready to invest more money on something that was still in its experimental stage, I chose two smaller snake plants with different cultivars. The cashier told me to water them once every two weeks and they'd be fine. I drove home with my plants, feeling like the clueless parent of two newly adopted children.

I learn about my "babies" through their labels and tags and approached this information-gathering process as genre research. If the definition of genre, according to Angela Sheets' article, includes a "typified response to a recurring situation," texts that make a "particular action possible (or impossible)," and a "'stable-for-now' category" (135), then plant tags is a genre, a type of text that makes the activity of plant care possible. For example, the tags showed
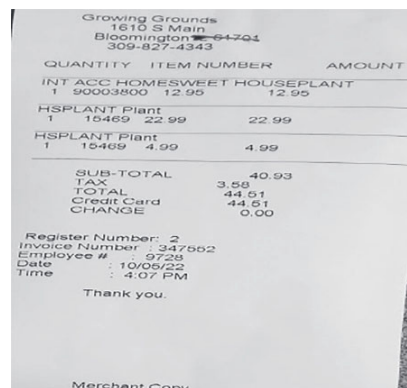
Figures 3 & 4: A price tag from Home Depot and a receipt from Growing Grounds.

Production

"Production deals with the means through which a text is produced. This includes both tools (say, using a computer to produce a text vs. using a cell phone to produce a text) and practices (for example, the physical practices for using a computer vs. using a cell phone have some similarities, but also many differences)" (ISU Writing Program).

that the plants I purchased have both botanical and common names: *Sansevieria trifasciata* "Futura Robusta" and *Sansevieria trifasciata* "Black Gold." (Before 2017, snake plants used to be *Sansevieria trifasciata*, but they are now scientifically classified as *Dracaena trifasciata*; I will use both names in this article.) The first word in the botanical name represents the genus, the second represents the species. Production (another important component of P-CHAT) provides a framework with which to analyze the text on tags. **Production** looks at the work that goes into creating a text including tools, materials, and format (Kostecki 80). Plant tags are printed on acrylic, plastic, or laminated cards designed to stick out of the pot. They are also waterproof. These labels include photographs of the cultivar or variety of the plant. I purchased two types of snake plants: Laurentii with yellow lines that form margins on the leaves and the Silver Queen with pale green and silver swordlike leaves. Snake plants have over seventy other varieties.

An effective plant tag displays information about what the plant looks like when it blooms or whether it is annual, perennial, or biennial (Figures 5, 6, and 7). Knowing the plant's sun requirement is key to its survival. My snake plants don't require too much sun to do well. This also applies to the type of soil the plant needs. If the soil is too rich, the plant might not do well. The tags also inform the buyer of the temperature that works best for the plant, how to care for the plant, and how often it should be watered. Nursery growers, retailers, and plant parents know that durable, extra high
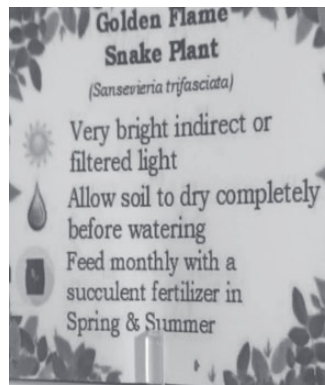
Figures 5, 6, & 7: Each waterproof tag displays information about how to care for the plant.

resolution, and color contrast plant labels are essential tools. Other tags include grower's details, the price, and the barcode of the product. Tag production for growers and retail stores is a niche horticulture industry that recognizes that a well-designed label sells the plant. The tags in the images here give the customer the information necessary to identify and care for the plant. I never throw my plant tags away.

Tags and labels are not the only texts related to houseplants. I created an infographic to help me understand how to care for my snake plants with information I gathered from various sources online (Figure 8). It was necessary to do this because most tags are mass-produced and contain general information. I wanted a text that would also provide a record of the growth of the plants over time and how often I watered my plants with dates. This text is solely for my use. This infographic is attached to a table to record the plants' growth rates and when the plants are watered.

How to Care for Your Snake Plant

Common Name	Snake plant, viper's bowstring hemp
Botanical Name	Dracaena trifasciata (formerly *Sansevieria trifasciata*)
Family	Asparagaceae
Plant Type	Evergreen, perennial
Sun Exposure	Shade to partial sun
Soil Type	Sandy, well-drained
Native Area	West Africa (tropical)
Toxicity	Toxic to cats and dogs

Image: "sansevieria" by marissa is licensed under CC BY 2.0. "Sansevieria trifasciata Prain cv Hahnii" by Ahmad Fuad Morad is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

Figure 8: An infographic I created to care for my plant.

Figure 9: Scan this QR code for the website created by Growing Grounds Garden Center.

Other texts relevant to houseplants are books, websites, and *YouTube* videos. When I visited Growing Grounds to pick up my first plants, the attendant recommended a book by Baylor Chapman, *Home Sweet Houseplant: A Room-by-Room Guide to Plant Decor.* Her book provided the information I needed about watering, lighting, and placement. The book influences the activity system of nurturing my houseplants and helps me achieve my objectives. Websites about houseplants abound on the Internet. I explored Growing Grounds' website (Figure 9) and their gallery of plants, which also functions as a catalog of the plants they sell. They also have pages for the services they provide, accessories, garden tools, and events. As someone who is into this literate activity and intends to be there for a while, it is reassuring to know I have access to this information.

YouTube features a large community of vloggers (video bloggers) with many subscribers who use the information shared there to learn how to do many things with plants. These vloggers are successful landscape artists, top gardeners, florists, conservationists, and horticulture professionals connected to established organizations. I follow Amanda Switzer of Planterina and the Swedish Plantguys. Their content is highly visual, conversational, and practical. Not only do they provide useful information to the community they cater to, but they also advertise and sell their merchandise. Through these resources, I can follow the trajectories of my literate activity to wherever I want to go.

Action not Words

Writing is more than words, texts, or stories. Writing is the actions, the actors, the things embodied and represented (or not). Investigating the activity systems related to cultivating my snake plants created a new way for me to see the specific actions and decisions related to the psychological and social practices I engage with in collaboration with other people and tools to achieve my goals of reconnecting with nature and attaining mental wellness, physical health, and ambience at home. The activities we participate in, the things we make, the people we meet, the places we go, and the tools we use are all part of who we are becoming and what writing looks like in the world. The world is framed by action, not just words.

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Birding as an Activity System

Piper Coe

In this article, Piper Coe compares two activity systems she was and is a part of as a child and an adult. Both systems are birding and have similar and different tools, members, and goals. She compares the complex literacies of each system, how both systems are still valuable despite looking different, and how our understanding of activity can change over time.

Introduction

Once, my mom let me pick out a "toy" at Target on a shopping trip, and of course, my ADHD brain picked out a ceramic blue bird figure from the home decor section. It might not make sense for a child to play with a ceramic bird over something like a stuffed toy, but because my mom already owned a ceramic duck that I loved, this seemed like something to add to the collection (because, of course, everything has to be a collection). Thus began my obsession with birds, which cultivated a lifelong hobby and fascination. Birding has always been a part of my life, and will continue to be. Whether it is spending six hours in the freezing cold looking for eagles nesting at Lake Bloomington or watching roadrunners, well, run in the streets of Arizona, there is nothing more enjoyable to me than birding. Birding, more commonly known as birdwatching, is the act of observing and enjoying birds (McGregor). It can be either a recreational activity or for scientific purposes. I've been birdwatching for most of my life, and in this article,

> **Activity Systems**
>
> Activity systems refer to "cooperative interactions aimed at achieving a goal" (ISU Writing Program).

I will be looking at the activity system of birding through two lenses—what birding looked like when I was younger and what it looks like now—and the complex literacies of each.
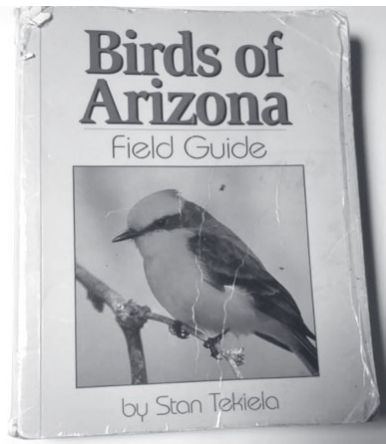
Figure 1: A picture of Piper's copy of Stan Tekiela's field guide.

Birding as a Fledgling

Besides the *Sesame Street* series and the book *Giraffes Can't Dance*, Stan Tekiela's *Birds of Arizona Field Guide* (Figure 1) sticks out in my mind as something I was obsessed with as a kid. My brother, Brighton, bought this pocket-sized yellow book from Barnes & Noble one day, and we proceeded to spend hours poring over it; I loved the colorful birds, especially the blue ones. Brighton explained to me what a field guide was used for, and I was amazed that these bright birds resided somewhere in the barren desert of Arizona. I knew then that I wanted to go out and find these birds—a seemingly simple task in the mind of five-year-old Piper.

As a young kid, however, I was unable to read. I relied on my dad to read me books at bedtime, and the field guide (unfortunately) was not one in the rotation of nighttime stories. Rather than reading the field guide in a traditional way, I had to learn new literacies to engage in this literate activity. **Literate activity** and literacies don't just mean being able to read and write—it's about learning new skills, abilities, and knowledge while also knowing who to ask for help when you want to accomplish a goal.

> **Literate Activity**
>
> Literate activity refers to the activities of humans in the world that involve different kinds of reading, writing, languaging, and communicating using all kinds of different tools and resources. When we're learning new skills and abilities, we're also engaged in a range of literate activities as we learn.

As I was developing my birding literacies, I relied on the people in my activity system when I had questions or needed support to reach my simple birdwatching goal: looking at birds. Brighton, my mom, my dad, and my sister, Kennedy, were a part of my system as a kid. Brighton knew how to read, so he read the pages to me, and I asked him questions about what he had read. I wondered if the birds we looked at in the field guide were ones we saw in the front or backyard, playground, or road. My mom was born in Arizona and knew facts about cacti, so I assumed she had other nature-related knowledge, and I relied on her to tell

me on the fly about different birds and calls I heard in our backyard. When my dad and I went on hikes in the mountains, he would tell me about wildlife and nature, which fostered my natural literacies (i.e., my understanding of the natural world and how to "read" nature). And finally, Kennedy was there to support me. She also loved reading the book with Brighton and me, so she and I would spend time flipping through the pages, marking off in the back of the book birds we thought we identified, and looking at the pictures when no one was available to read it to us. This act is a common means of identification while birding and is generally called a nonalphabetic literate system. Although not a traditional understanding of literacy—but still a very valuable one—"reading" pictures was a new skill we learned to look for birds outside of our windows. I learned rather quickly that the colorful birds that Kennedy and I admired, like the Western Scrub-Jay (Figure 2), Lazuli Bunting (Figure 3), and American Goldfinch (Figure 4), were harder to find outside than we thought. Just because the bird was in the book didn't mean it would be outside our window.

Figure 2: A Western Scrub-Jay (Burton).

Figure 3: A Lazuli Bunting (Bonello).

Figure 4: An American Goldfinch (Kramer).

Because of our geographic location, we were limited in what birds we could see. My family and I only took part in this activity in our house and surrounding areas. Since we were kids who could not drive or get very far on foot or by scooter, we participated in the activity of backyard birding. Another thing that was not outside our window was a bird feeder. Although we were learning how to identify birds by watching, birds did not sit in one place long enough to give us time to determine what they might be, unlike if they were feeding at a feeder, which would have given us more time to watch.

As we were limited in various ways, we were required to learn new skills and adapt to this system in a way that would work for us. I developed new birding literacies, like learning to ask questions about the activity I was participating in. I engaged in a nonalphabetic literate system, which goes hand in hand with learning how to identify birds by watching them. I also interacted with the members of my activity system in a way that would help me achieve my goals.

All of this knowledge of birding and the new literacies that I gained as a kid transferred over to my experiences birding as an adult. In the next section, I will describe how this knowledge was transferred, what new skills and literacies I have developed, and how the system looks different.
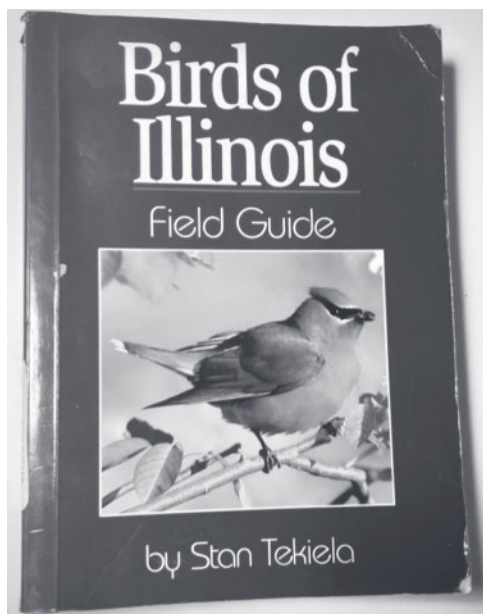
Figure 5: Piper's current copy of Stan Tekiela's Illinois field guide.

Birding as an Adult

Now that I live in Illinois, I have a copy of Stan Tekiela's *Birds of Illinois Field Guide* (Figure 5). Rather than being a pocket-sized yellow book, my Illinois copy is a mud-smeared pocket-sized purple book. People like my dad and Kennedy are still a part of my system, but the way we interact in the system is a bit different. I do not have to rely on them to read the field guide to me, and Kennedy and I do not spend hours poring over the pictures. However, we communicate and interact in the system in a way that is still collaborative. For example, we help each other with identification when it is challenging. We do this in person when we are birding together, or sometimes we do it over the

phone when someone takes a picture of a bird they don't recognize. We are all equally excited about birds; we all have the same tools, such as binoculars and birding apps; and we all have the same goal—to see birds!

Now that I can read the field guide independently, I use this tool in a few ways that reflect my growth as a reader. I utilize the descriptions listed in the book next to the images (which I still use to help me identify) of the bird. I also bookmark pages in the guide to revisit if I am uncertain of an identification I have made so that I can verify it with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Audubon Society websites (Figures 6 and 7) when I get back to my apartment. I am an adult who can drive long distances to look for birds that I am interested in locating based on what is shown in the field guide. The John Wesley Powell Audubon Society is the Normal, IL, chapter of the Audubon Society, and I am a part of their Facebook group. Birders in the community and Illinois in general post their sightings, questions, and group activities that members and the public can attend. When I visit their Facebook page and see birds being posted that were sighted close to me, I go out and look for them—this is how I have previously ended up spending hours with my dad looking for Bald Eagles (Figure 8) and the Eastern Screech Owl (Figure 9). Social media

Figure 6: The Cornell Lab of Ornithology website.

Figure 7: The Audubon Society website.

Figure 8: A Bald Eagle (Hillebrand).

Figure 9: An Eastern Screech Owl (Brigida).

is a digital tool I use while birding, allowing me to expand the reach of my passion. My activity system is embedded in this more extensive community comprising all types of birders, ranging from amateurs to professionals.

I also have a pair of binoculars to locate birds from afar. Having them shows an embodied understanding of birding that differs from before because when I was a kid, I merely used my eyes. Now that I have binoculars, I take field sketches and notes and go hiking or walking to locate birds. Although birding is traditionally understood as a physical activity, I did not engage in the physical aspect as a kid the way I do now. It is one thing to look at pictures or out the window, but it's another to get out and hike for hours to find a specific bird species. Of course, even though I no longer rely on backyard birding, I still participate in this when I am at school, looking out the car window, or staying at my parents' house (they have a neat stone birdbath with a feeder that I like to watch).

I use new (and old) tools when I go birding. When I go birding with my dad and sister, we use a green laser to point at trees if the others struggle to locate the bird. I still use the physical field guides, but I now have access to online guides with more capabilities. Digital field guides have a catalog system allowing you to mark off what birds you think you saw, where, and at what time. This tool is a more precise way of tracking sightings that is different from what I did as a kid. Before, we would merely mark off the checklist in the back of the book. The online field guides also have recordings of birdcalls that are easy to reference. I spend time listening to birdcalls that I am likely to encounter in my day-to-day life so that I don't have to wonder what I am listening to. Speaking of birdcalls, this is another nonalphabetic

literate system that I can now engage in. I am able to "read" calls that I hear and use those to identify what bird might be singing. For example, I can identify a band of Blue Jays (Figure 10) based on their holler.

I use both of these transferred and developed literacies to achieve the goal of my system: looking at birds. This activity is a passion that has stayed with me since childhood. As I continue to grow, both as a person and a bird enthusiast, I know I will keep developing my birding literacies. I have more tools at my disposal and a community that is helping me achieve my goal.

Figure 10: A Blue Jay (Miles).

I'll Always Keep Binoculars in My Bag

The activities I have described have specific patterns that have stayed the same from childhood to adulthood. For example, I still rely on my family, who are a part of my activity system and community, to help and support me in birding. I use Stan Tekiela's field guide in a similar way, like engaging in nonalphabetic literacies when I "read" the pictures. I also still ask other birders questions about what birds I see, though my questions are more specific. Despite my growth, in age and as a reader, some of the literacies I engage in have stayed the same. There are some differences, however, like introducing technology into my birding practices. Now that I have access to the Audubon and Cornell websites, my experiences with birding have been further complicated and greatly improved. These digital tools have made a huge impact on how I bird.

Although my birding literacies have changed as I have developed a more complex understanding of the world around me, this activity wasn't any less enjoyable as a child who couldn't read than it is now as an English major in college. There has been a transfer of knowledge from childhood to adulthood while also an acquisition of new knowledge that is helping me look at, understand, and appreciate birds, which is always an exciting and wonderful thing. So, the next time you see a bird outside your window, take a moment with it. You might just find yourself picking up a new hobby!

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Piper Coe is an undergraduate at Illinois State University studying English with an interest in women's, gender, and sexuality studies and queer studies. When she is not outside birding, she enjoys reading, crocheting, and playing *Stardew Valley*.

Notes
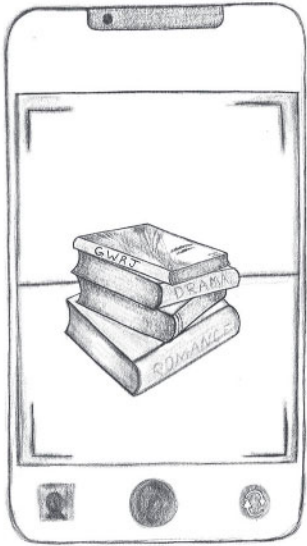
Understanding Magic: The Gathering Commander Through Genre and Community

Manuel Reza

In this article, Manuel Reza uses the concepts of genre and discourse communities to explore the card game Magic: The Gathering and to understand the game's Commander format.

Begin

Like many students, when I first moved to the BloNo area to attend Illinois State University (ISU), I was homesick because it was the first time I had really been away from my childhood home. I had been fortunate enough to attend a university fifteen minutes away from my house to attain my BA and MA. But for my PhD and teaching assignment, I had to move to BloNo a few weeks before my orientation to everything, and I felt alone the moment I stepped into my new apartment. In an attempt to keep my mind off missing home, I tried to keep myself occupied any way I could. *If you're thinking about something, you don't have time to miss home, right?* One of the things I used to keep my mind occupied during that time was playing MTG Arena. For the non-nerds who may not know what in the world that is, it stands for the Magic: The Gathering Arena app, which is the digital version of the popular trading card game (TCG) Magic: The Gathering. The game originated in 1993 and has been a mainstay of nerd culture since then. The app I was using to help cure my loneliness was released in 2021 and is meant to be a digital version of the game for seasoned and new players alike to enjoy for free. In the

Iterations of Magic: The Gathering (MTG) Cheat Sheet

Modalities of Playing:

MTG – The original physical card game. Players construct sixty-card decks based around certain card colors and battle with them. The goal is to reduce your opponent's life total to zero.

MTG Arena – The free-to-play app version of MTG that is meant to provide a streamlined version of MTG.

Versions of Games:

Commander – A format within the physical card game. Usually played with two or more players with 100-card decks.

Brawl – A game mode in the MTG Arena app that can be played online with others. It is meant to be similar to the Commander format in terms of rules and how it's played, but it's simplified.

original MTG card game, players construct decks featuring various creatures and spell cards to do battle against other players. I was drawn to this game because of my love for strategy and collecting cards (What can I say? I love a pretty piece of shiny cardboard).

In the time between arriving in BloNo and when I started school, I played the game religiously. In particular, I enjoyed a specific mode of MTG that the app offered: Brawl (in the nearby box is a little cheat sheet I created for those overwhelmed by the MTG terminology). This is a simplified version of MTG's popular Commander format. In Brawl, a player has a commander—a sort of boss creature—which you build your sixty-card deck around. Your deck can only have one copy of a single card, which adds to the enjoyment of the game—you have to think about what cards can come together in the best possible way to win you the game. By the time school started, I had amassed a sizable collection of digital cards, knew all the major MTG terminology, and had a Brawl deck that I enjoyed using. Eventually, my interest—well, more like obsession—with the game made me feel like it was not enough to simply interact with the cards on the screen. I loved the online Brawl deck, and it made me want to venture more into the world of tabletop MTG and build my own physical deck. There is only one problem: remember, the Brawl format does not exist in the physical card game. Brawl's equivalent in physical MTG is the Commander format. While there are similarities between the two formats, there are differences I needed to account for while adapting my online deck to the context of the physical card game. Table 1 breaks down the major differences in the two modes of gameplay that I had to account for when building my deck. It was not a simple point-A-to-point-B transfer. I found the entire process of creating my physical deck to be an **activity system** (or a series of different interactions which are done to achieve a particular goal, as explained by the ISU Writing Program) where I had to draw upon, alter, and transform my knowledge of MTG (plus, it was a wonderful excuse for buying shiny cardboard!).

First Main Phase (Or, My Starting Point)

To begin the process of building a commander deck with actual physical cards, I drew upon my antecedent knowledge of the game I gained by playing MTG Arena. **Antecedent knowledge** refers to all of the knowledge one possesses and takes with them when undertaking a new task (ISU Writing Program). When we apply antecedent knowledge to a situation, we are not directly transferring all of our prior knowledge to a new situation. Instead, we may only apply a few key pieces of knowledge which may help us accomplish this new task.

In my case, I knew the process of transferring my knowledge would involve a combination of my knowledge of each modality of MTG (the online game and the physical card game). I had to adapt my knowledge in order to do something new—to move my digital deck into the context of the physical card game. For instance, MTG Arena has a layer of automation because of its online modality. The app keeps track of variables such as the phases of the turns, life totals, creature stats, the way cards interact with each other, and it does it for the player. In the real-life card game, there is no such automation, and it is up to the player to keep track of these variables. As I took up the physical card game, I could not completely rely on my antecedent knowledge of the game I developed from the app and had to actively memorize the rules and structure of the game.

While my knowledge of the MTG Arena rules did not completely transfer to the real-life game, because of my time playing the app, I had a basic understanding of the cards and how they operate in the game. In MTG, cards could be one or a combination of five colors (red, blue, green, white, black). Cards have different styles of gameplay depending on what color they are. For instance, red cards tend to have an aggressive style of gameplay, being able to deal direct damage to players. During my time playing MTG Arena, I also familiarized myself with cards I enjoyed playing with. I enjoyed using a red, white, and green deck centered around the commander card Jetmir the Nexus of Revels (Figure 1). Through my ample playtesting, I understood that the idea behind this deck is to fill your side of

Figure 1: The Jetmir card (digital version).

Figure 2: MTG Arena Gameplay—filling up my field with creatures before playing Jetmir.

the board (or playing field) with creatures. Once you have enough creatures on the board, you place the Jetmir card into play, and its effects will add power to these creatures and give them additional abilities which allow for an aggressive barrage of attacks on your opponent (see Figure 2 for a screenshot of what this looks like in an online game). I loved this deck because when you have set up your board just right, you end up with a bunch of strong creatures that could easily win you the game. After playing with the Jetmir deck for some time, I had a sense of comfort with it and wanted to build it in real life.

Though I was not aware of it, I was actively using my antecedent knowledge to understand the general approach I wanted to take with my new deck. In my case, I was simply recalling experiences and understanding of colors and cards and whether or not I favored them—using it as a starting point for my deckbuilding. This exemplifies how our use of antecedent knowledge is not always immediately apparent. By revisiting my past experience with the game, I had a loose understanding of the game's components and what commander I want to build my deck around.

Combat (Well, More Like Research)

To start adapting my MTG Arena deck into the physical card game, I needed to understand the difference between Brawl and Commander. To do

this, I think it would be appropriate to view Commander and Brawl decks as genres. When we think about genres, the knee-jerk reaction is to think about categories to sort things (like, how with music, we have rap, pop, rock). However, we can also understand genres as social productions. **Genres** are not limited to just printed texts but can be anything which responds to a reoccurring situation and has characteristics that make it recognizable. For instance, we know a recipe is a recipe because it is responding to a situation (cooking/baking) and has characteristics which make it identifiable (measurements, list of ingredients, cooking times, instructions). It is the combination of these characteristics, or conventions, which signal to someone that they are working with a recipe.

Both Brawl and Commander format deck lists could be thought of as genres. They both respond to a situation, which is the respective game format that these decks would be used in. The deck rules for each format could be thought of as the conventions of the deck genres. Again, **genre conventions** make a thing recognizable as part of a distinct genre. I found it easiest to break down the conventions of the Brawl and commander deck lists. I then compared the conventions of each type of deck in a table (Table 1) to see their similarities and differences.

While both genres respond to similar reoccurring situations and have overlap in conventions, there are distinctions between them which make each recognizable from the other. Commander decks are certainly similar to Brawl decks in terms of the number of card copies one can use and the multiplayer nature of the format. However, that does not mean the two genres are the

Table 1: The differences in decks.

Brawl Format Deck	Similarities	Commander Format Deck
Sixty cards total (fifty-nine cards + one commander)	Only a single copy of a card is allowed in a deck	100 cards total (ninety-nine cards + one commander)
Standard and Historic variations of format affect what cards can be included in a deck	Built for a two- to four-player format	You can include any printed card from MTG's history you want in a deck (except for ones which are explicitly banned by tournament or play group)
Planeswalkers or Legendary Creatures can be commanders	Players can attack any opponent they want	Legendary Creatures and Planeswalkers with special text can be used as commanders

same because certain conventions, namely the larger size of the commander deck and the freedom/negotiation involved in the Commander format, distinguish it from Brawl deck lists. This shows how genres often rely on a specific situation and particular conventions to be considered that particular genre. These differences, though small, can cause a particular deck to be more successful in one version of the game over the other. That is, a deck may be more successful in Brawl as opposed to Commander, or vice versa.

Because of the similarities between the Brawl and commander deck lists, I found that I could actually use my Brawl deck as a base for my commander deck. I could include some of my favorite cards that I love using in MTG Arena, such as my Gala Greeters, Luxurious Libation, and Citizen's Crowbar (Figure 3). From playing MTG Arena, I know these cards have great synergy with my commander Jetmir, as they produce additional creature tokens which can be strengthened by Jetmir or create resources I could use to cast even more spells.

Though I could transfer most of my Brawl deck to its Commander counterpart, the deck size differences posed a problem for me. Since a commander deck contains more cards, I would need to add more to my Brawl deck. *But what other cards do I include?* To get an idea of how to further build my deck, I found it helpful to explore the MTG Commander Community and do some content research about it online.

Commander players could be thought of as a discourse community. A **discourse community** is a group of people who have the same goal or interest. As they interact (to achieve this goal, create things, share activities) a discourse community often develops communal practices or beliefs to

Figure 3: Some of my favorite cards.

aid their efforts. These means can be both apparent (specialized genres) or invisible (language practices). Keeping this definition in mind, MTG players could be considered discourse communities in and of themselves. For instance, they have a shared interest, playing the TCG, and have shared channels of communication (tournaments, discussion forums, etc.) that help them achieve their goal.

Interestingly enough, discourse communities are not mutually exclusive, and a discourse community can exist within an existing discourse community (I know, weird, right?). The MTG Commander playerbase can be thought of as a discourse community within the larger discourse community of MTG players. The Commander playerbase started off within a group of tournament judges who wanted to disrupt the standard way of playing MTG. They adopted a set of unique rules to add flavor to their games. Their goal was simple: use a unique play format to enjoy MTG that goes beyond the standard format of gameplay. For the most part, this goal has remained the same since the format's inception. The way you construct your commander deck may vary depending on why you want to play commander (are you a casual player or competitive player?). Since I want to play the game for fun with friends, I decided to align my deckbuilding practices with those of more casual players. To understand the casual player approach to deckbuilding, I decided to do some casual research on YouTube. I viewed some videos by well-known figures within the MTG and Commander communities.

One of these figures is the Professor, real name Brian Lewis, an English professor who runs a YouTube Channel called Tolarian Community College (TCC). He does a lot of general and specialized MTG content. A considerable amount of his content covers the Commander format. His work ranges from deckbuilding guides to Commander product reviews. One of his videos was particularly helpful in understanding the commander deckbuilding practices, entitled "The Commander Social Contract." In this video, Lewis discusses the social nature of the Commander format and the best practices for making the most out of the Commander game experience with your deck. He posits that the "fun that we have as Commander players is something that we are all responsible for helping support" through our behaviors and card choices ("The Commander Social Contract"). This assertion seems to be at the heart of the Commander community's ethics. **Ethics** can be understood as shared beliefs held by a certain group which often dictates what is considered right or wrong conduct in that group (ISU Writing Program). In the case of Commander, it is ethical to make choices which foster a fun and competitive environment. Therefore, it would be unethical to intentionally create a tedious and unengaging gameplay environment. What card factors can influence the game environment? In my

research, I found that some card choices for a commander may inhibit the interactive nature of the game.

To learn more about these controversial card choices, I turned to The Commander's Quarters YouTube Channel, an online show based around making Commander content. Specifically, I reference their video "Commander Taboos," which delves into card/deck types which are generally frowned upon in Commander. These taboos that they reference throughout the video are indicative of the unethical side of Commander gameplay. What particularly stood out to me was the general dislike of mass land destruction cards (MLD). MLD cards (such as the Armageddon card in Figure 4) destroy all players' land cards that they have accrued throughout the game. This is significant because lands are the main resources a player uses to play cards and advance the state of their board. By using MLD, that particular player is slowing the game down immensely and reducing the types of interactions that players could have with each other. Another type of deck which is not generally liked by the community are decks whose sole purpose is to give yourself additional turns. There are certain strategies in MTG which allow a player to take additional turns and limit their interaction with their opponents. While these cards and deck types can certainly be included in a commander deck, they do go against the ethics of the Community. Rather than fostering a sense of community interaction with gameplay, these cards and strategies slow down and limit the interactions between players. From my research, I learned how I did not want to build my deck.

Figure 4: Armageddon is one of the more notorious MLD cards in the MTG.

After doing my research into the Commander community, I understood that I wanted to make a deck that would not slow down the game state and instead focus on building up my own field and the creatures on it. Since I got a sense of how I did not want to build the deck from my research of the community, I decided to reference EDHREC (a website dedicated to producing Commander content, see Figure 5) to learn more about cards that I could incorporate in my own deck. Specifically, I referenced the sample deck list that the site provided for my commander. A sample deck list is a basic list of cards that players can use for a certain commander. These deck lists are meant to be a sort of starting point for players to get an idea of what cards work well with each other. The sample commander deck list lends itself to being remediated, or changed to fit a new context, by members of the Commander community. Players can take the basic list (a genre) and

remediate it to fit their needs. When we remediate a genre, we change a genre to address a new situation than its original one. As a result of these changes, the genre is able to achieve different things than it did previously. Continuing with the example of the sample deck list, it was originally meant to give players an introduction to how they are meant to play the deck. When one takes the list and adds or removes cards and makes the deck their own, they are remediating it. The remediated deck list is no longer meant to give players a sense of how it works, rather it is changed to better interact with other decks and fit players' playstyles.

Figure 5: Scan this QR code to view EDHREC and learn more about this resource.

Through this remediation, the player is allowing the deck to have new interactions with itself and other players' decks.

In my own deckbuilding journey, I used the sample deck list as a jumping off point for my own deck. I wanted to incorporate the cards I am familiar with in addition to ones which would synergize with my commander (I was partial to cards that were budget friendly). In my exploration of EDHREC, I found several cards that would add consistency to my deck or support its overall playstyle—some of which are pictured below. These cards would either provide more land cards for me to use later in the game to cast spells (like Cultivate in Figure 6) or spawn creature tokens with special abilities (like Jinnie Fay, Jetmir's Second shown in Figure 7).

Figure 6: Using EDHREC was a great way to do content research about different types of cards, such as Cultivate, that work in commander decks.

Figure 7: Jinnie Fay is another card I decided to add to my deck based off my research.

Eventually, by doing enough content research about different cards, I was able to fill in the additional forty empty card slots I originally had. Then, I went to an online card vendor to purchase the single cards I needed (I totally did not spend an outrageous amount of money on cards *sweats profusely*). In the meantime, I also purchased a few booster packs to satiate my desire for physical MTG cards, which effectively started my physical collection and gave me a larger pool of cards to possibly add to the deck.

End (Or Is It?)

Once I received all of my orders, I eagerly opened the envelopes which contained the cards. I then began to construct the first iteration of my commander deck.

As you can see from Figure 8, deckbuilding can be a rather messy process—especially if you have a limited antecedent knowledge of the game like I did. You have to consider how every card supports the overall goal of your deck and do a lot of experimenting. This involves frequently swapping cards in and out, as well as doing test hands to see how your card draws might look during a game. To further see how I could improve my deck, I found that I could playtest my deck against other players to see how I can better improve the deck. In attempting to continuously fine-tune my deck, I engaged in a system of different activities. Figure 9 shows a breakdown of my deck-editing process.

Figure 8: Starting to sort and arrange the cards in my deck.

Figure 9: My deck-editing process.

Deckbuilding is a process which involves a lot of trial and error. It consists of me coming up with an idea, incorporating the idea into my deck and trying it out. While I cannot say that I have built the perfect deck that I will never change, I can say that I have built a deck that is functional. It does what I want it to do, which is create lots of strong creatures to overwhelm my opponent. Because the game is constantly changing and being updated with new card sets, I will likely make changes to the deck as time passes. However, I can lean on my genre and community knowledge about Commander to make improvements and navigate the fun yet chaotic world of deckbuilding.

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"Am I Ever Gonna Use This?": How P-CHAT Can Be a Useful Tool in Advertising

Isabel Crabtree

In this article, Isabel Crabtree will explore the genre of advertising, specifically social media advertising and the conventions that make them perform successfully. Through pedagogical cultural-historical activity theory (P-CHAT), you will gain a better understanding of how advertising functions. Crabtree believes that using P-CHAT as a tool for creating advertisements will ensure effective results that leave a lasting, positive image for a business.

Advertising is just one part of business marketing, and thanks to new and improved technology, popular forms of advertising are evolving at a fast rate. While newspaper advertisements had an influence in the 1960s, most people don't even get a copy of the printed paper anymore. It's important for people working in marketing to understand current trends to stay on top of them. After all, there is plenty of market competition, so the goal is to create effective advertisements that draw in more attention, and as a result, more buyers. Every type of business looks for ways to stay relevant through its marketing and advertising strategies. But I must ask, *how do you make a successful advertisement?* Well, you can start by understanding the genre conventions of effective advertisements and the different **P-CHAT** terms that go into the creation of advertisements to be more familiarized with the genre as a whole.

Before we get into the bulk of **P-CHAT**, let's examine some other helpful terms to improve our understanding of advertising as a genre and to get some definitions clarified.
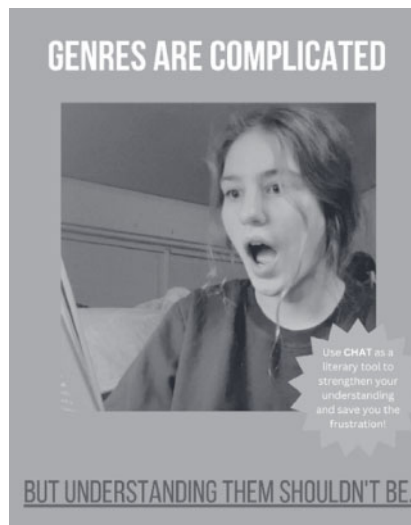
Figure 1: My own advertisement for P-CHAT.

OMG Genre and Genre Conventions?

I'm sure you have a general understanding of advertising. Whether it's a Taco Bell commercial during your Super Bowl watch party, a sponsored Instagram post promoting supplements, or an ad breaking up the jams on your wicked Spotify playlist, you can't avoid advertisements in America. But you *can* use your antecedent knowledge of advertisements to help you with your understanding of advertising. The Illinois State University (ISU) Writing Program defines **antecedent knowledge** as "all the things a writer already knows that can come into play when a writer takes up any kind of writing." Think about what has influenced you to buy something. Was it a Jeffree Star makeup tutorial or a TikTok "get ready with me" posted by your favorite influencer? Based on your extensive experience with different kinds of advertisements, you probably have a basic idea of the genre and its conventions.

Understanding genre is the first step to being able to master a particular genre. You can't create a successful advertisement without knowing what makes up a successful advertisement first. So, let's define what genre is. Referring back to the ISU Writing Program, **genre** means "a kind of production that it is possible to identify by understanding the conventions or features that make that production recognizable." Think less of broad music and movie "genres" and more of specific characteristics that make a literary work distinguishable. Protest signs, school posters, and Connect Transit maps are some examples of genres because they have their own genre conventions. The ISU Writing Program says we use **genre conventions** "to describe all the things a writer could discover (and discuss) about a particular genre that makes us recognize it as, well, what it is."

Earlier, I gave some examples of different advertisements (social media posts and TV ads). All advertisements have one thing in common: they are trying to influence and bring awareness to a business's goods, services, or ideas. There are different subgenres under the advertisement umbrella. *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* defines a **subgenre** as "a genre that is part of a larger genre." Some subgenres of advertising include television, radio, direct mail, Internet, and newspaper advertising. Figure 2 highlights the different categories these subgenres could fall into. Although these types of advertising are different, they are all marketing a product, brand, or image
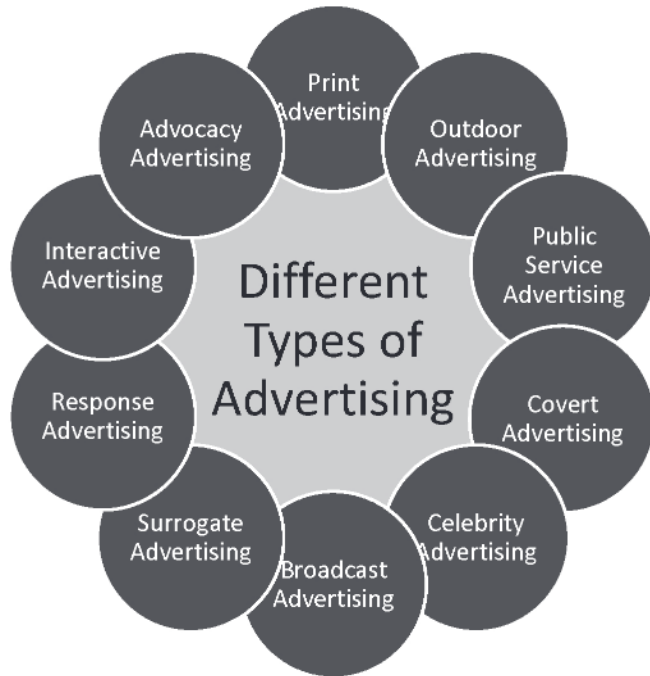
Figure 2: The different subgenres of advertising.

to gain sales and make connections with the people interacting with them. Each type of advertising has its own benefits, and it's up to the business—and its objectives, budget, corporate identity, and numerous other factors—to decide which advertising route to take. In Figure 2, these different types of advertising include a combination of written, oral (spoken), aural (sound), and visual (pictures) elements. By the ISU Writing Program's definition, this would make them **multimodal**. When shopping for a new concealer, are you convinced to buy it based on an essay you read about it, or rather, the combination of written reviews, videos about its longevity throughout the day, and pictures of the bottle and the applicator? Now, I understand not everyone here is into makeup, but I do know we are all into buying our best available option due to our lack of infinite money. Usually, it takes several different modes to convince us that we're making the right choice in our purchase, hence why it's important to understand and use more than one mode when creating an advertisement.

Figure 3 is a thumbnail for a video from Tati Westbrook, a makeup influencer on YouTube. Her video uses different modalities. She has subtitles and a description box (written), she speaks about the details of the product (oral), and she includes images of the product on the screen (visual). She's

Figure 3: Thumbnail for Tati Westbrook's YouTube video "BEST &
WORST DRUGSTORE CONCEALERS . . . (Up Close)."

been successful in raising makeup sales through the effective use of these
different modes. Businesses have also discovered the importance of social
media and social media influencers for the promotion of their products.

What Makes an Advertisement Successful?

An advertisement is successful if it captures customers' attention and entices
them to purchase products. A business's advertising should be congruent with
its overall image to maintain a positive reputation for its brand. Dany Ortiz's
article for *Cyberclick* mentions ten characteristics that make an advertisement
successful:

- It's promotional.
- It's persuasive.
- It's part of an overall marketing strategy.
- It's targeted.
- It's an investment.
- It's original.
- It's creative.
- It's consistent.
- It's personalized.
- It's ethical.

Figure 4: One of Panera Bread's successful online advertisements (Zosimo).

Of course, not *all* these characteristics have to be used at once, but a mix of them is the recipe for an effective advertisement. We can break each of them down into easy-to-understand examples to strengthen our understanding of these important characteristics (Figure 4). A business can also use metrics to measure the effectiveness of its advertising campaigns by observing things like how many clicks its website gets and if the number of sales increases.

Could This Idea Get Me Canceled?

More than ever, people value a business that creates and sells its products in an ethical manner. Examples could be paying their workers fair wages, using vegan ingredients, or pledging donations to charity organizations. In short, we are becoming more aware of whom we are choosing to buy from and the impact our purchases have on the world—whether that means not supporting a company that tests on animals or not supporting one that relies on fossil fuels. A business is going to want to use ethical communication practices in its advertisements to appeal to the morals of its potential consumers. Ethicality is one of the components of successful advertising as mentioned in the previous section. **Ethical communication** can be defined as "honesty, clarity, accuracy, open-mindedness and a willingness to listen to others" (ISU Writing Program). If you value a business's ethics, you would probably be

persuaded to buy from an ethically sound business instead of a notoriously unethical one because people will buy from a business whose morals align with theirs. For example, a local thrift store could lean into the fact that thrifting is better for the environment and that it's better than buying from cheap brands that rely on child labor.

A business also should consider the trajectory of its advertisements. In the context of what we'll be observing, **trajectory** is "the shifts and changes that occur in a genre as it gets used over time" (ISU Writing Program). An advertisement could become controversial as the years pass, haunting and tarnishing the image of a brand or business for years to come, especially if the conventions of the advertisement don't fit into the current standards of the genre. I'm sure you've seen a few examples of sexist American advertisements from the 1950s and 1960s (Figures 5 and 6).

I probably don't need to explain why these advertisements didn't age well. But that does pose a question: How do you predict if an advertisement will age badly? The truth is you really can't. However, a good place to start is

Figure 5: This advertisement from 1955 is from the company Lux (Jacobs and Edwards). Looks like they think it's a woman's job to do the dishes. This certainly doesn't resonate with many women today.

Figure 6: This is a 1961 advertisement made by the electronic company Kenwood (Jacobs and Edwards). This sends the message that wives are the designated cooks in a relationship . . . yikes. An advertisement like this would be the center of controversy if published in the twenty-first century.

by communicating ethically with your consumers. Ben & Jerry's provides an excellent (and delicious) example of acting ethically and communicating that back to the customers. Their official website has an "Activism" tab alongside "Ice Cream Flavors" and "Shops & Catering." Under the "Activism" tab, you'll find different information about the company including how they do business, issues they care about, the Ben & Jerry's Foundation, and their progressive values. They are committed to reducing racial inequality through awareness and activism efforts as well as reducing their carbon footprint (Figure 7). The company also supports and practices fair trade and agricultural preservation. Ben & Jerry's has made a conscious effort to do business ethically, and they are transparent about the improvements they still need to make.

Looking back at Figures 5 and 6, both businesses don't seem to take an open-minded or accurate approach in their depiction of women, and this type of narrative is harmful, even when it used to be socially acceptable to believe. Not only do these ads seem problematic to us now, but even at the time they were produced, they were created from the perspective of men rather than through a process of listening to or understanding women. Using these advertisements as a learning lesson and Ben & Jerry's as a positive example, we could propose that one rule of ethical communication would be, "don't use people (especially an underrepresented group of people) as the butt of your joke for the purpose of selling something." Not only does this kind of advertising spread harmful stereotypes, but it certainly increases the chance of your advertisement becoming outdated and inappropriate in the years to follow.
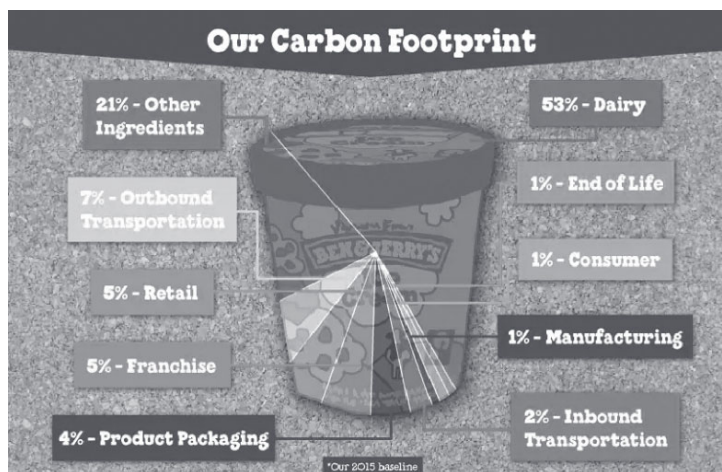
Figure 7: A breakdown of Ben & Jerry's carbon footprint, found on their website ("Our Carbon Footprint").

P-CHAT as an Advertising Tool

P-CHAT is a term you'll stumble across a lot if you're taking an English course at ISU. However, P-CHAT is useful beyond the activities that occur in your classroom. **P-CHAT** stands for pedagogical cultural-historical activity theory, and the ISU Writing Program's take on the term is as follows: "In our program, we use [P-]CHAT to help us think about and study the complex genres that we encounter in the world . . . [P-]CHAT allows us to focus on any aspect of the myriad elements of textual production." There are seven key P-CHAT terms including production, representation, distribution, reception, socialization, activity, and ecology (see Figure 8). In this article, we are only going to focus closely on production, distribution, and reception. As mentioned previously, there are many different types of advertisements, and they appear on many different types of platforms. Let's apply these three key terms to social media advertisements, more specifically the ones found on the video-sharing platform YouTube, to strengthen our understanding of P-CHAT and its usefulness in advertising.

Figure 8: Reference the definitions and examples of the P-CHAT terms (and other key Writing Program concepts) here on the ISU Writing Program website!

Why focus on YouTube? Well, people are watching more YouTube than cable TV. According to the article "YouTube Statistics 2022: How Many People Use YouTube?" on the site *Quantum Marketer*, YouTube has two billion active users, which is about twenty-five percent of the world's population (Fitzgerald). YouTube is free and easy to use, making it accessible to anyone with access to the Internet. And its vast and diverse content options generate different types of audiences, ensuring that a business's advertisement will find its main target. This also saves a business on advertising because YouTube keeps track of the type of videos you watch and engage with, making it easy for an advertisement to find you and convince you of a purchase. Advertising on YouTube has a pay-per-view count. The same *Quantum Marketer* article provided a lot of interesting statistics, one of them being that "70% of viewers bought a product from a brand after hearing about it through a video on YouTube according to YouTube statistics" (Fitzgerald). This is important information a business would want to consider.

There are different types of advertisements you'll interact with on YouTube. The *Influencer Marketing Hub* article "How Much do YouTube Ads Cost?" by Werner Geyser and the *YourStory* article "Importance of YouTube as an Advertising Platform and Different Ad Options Available" by Tushar Chopra dive into six main types of YouTube advertising formats, which include display ads, overlay ads, skippable video ads, long and non-skippable

videos ads, bumper ads, and sponsored cards (Figure 9). It depends largely on a business's budget. To summarize quickly, display ads and overlay ads are on the desktop platform only and are the cheaper option as far as YouTube ads go. Skippable ads are also a relatively cheap option because the cost to run the ad is cut down if the ad is skipped through by the viewer. However, this is the most common type of ad you'll interact with on the platform. Non-skippable ads are just that, non-skippable. They are the least popular among viewers, but it requires them to watch the whole advertisement (fifteen to twenty seconds), which gives a business more time to pitch. Bumper ads are "non-skippable videos up to six seconds which a viewer must watch before seeing the main video" (Geyser). This doesn't leave a business a lot of time to make a strong first impression. Finally, sponsored cards provide content relevant to the video, such as products featured in the main video (Chopra).
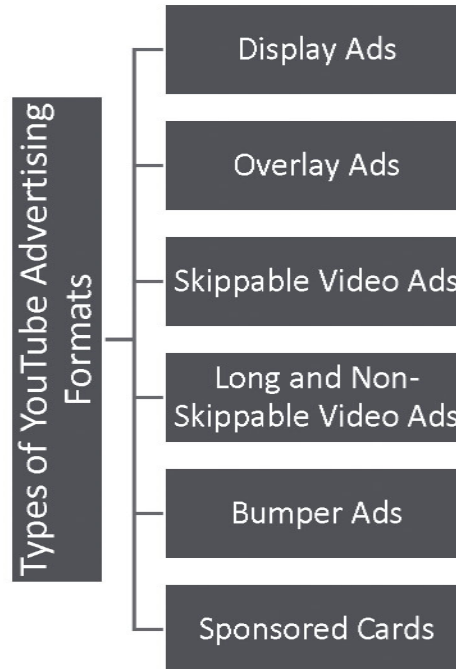
Figure 9: The six YouTube advertising formats.

All six ads have similarities, but let's narrow it down even further and focus only on skippable ads since they are the most common type and available on both mobile and desktop platforms. As a business, you often have to choose only one or two options, especially if your advertising budget is tight.

Production

According to the ISU Writing Program, "**Production** deals with the means through which a text is produced. This includes both tools . . . and practices." There is *a lot* that goes into the production of an advertisement, even one that's only fifteen seconds long. Let's break down some steps from the perspective of a business (at the most basic level) to make the production process a little less clustered.

1. Put together a marketing team or department by hiring qualified individuals with experience and education in the marketing field. (The business will need a budget for their advertising and the salaries they will pay their workers.)

2. Set up meetings to generate ideas and a plan for the advertisement that aligns with the marketing strategy set by the business—including the message they want to convey and how they want to convey it (hiring actors, artists, etc. to tell a story).

3. Cut down to the most important points the business wants to highlight due to the short run-time of skippable ads. (They want to grab the viewers' attention right away and get them invested in their message and product.)

4. The business might need to hire a videographer and editor to film and edit the ad, bringing the business's ideas to life—depending on the route the business takes, they may need to create a script as well.

5. Schedule a date and time for the actors and videographers to meet to film the ad—some items needed include a camera, a microphone, lights, a short script, and a location to film.

6. Edit the ad using a computer or laptop and editing software.

7. Have the ad reviewed by the business and possibly a sample of people, including potential customers.

8. Contact YouTube and choose the skippable ad option. (You'll need access to the Internet and a Gmail account or phone number to go on the YouTube Advertising website and request advertising.)

None of these steps are exact for *every* business. In fact, it's much more complicated. However, this gives us a rough idea of the many factors that go into the production of skippable YouTube video ads. Some key things that go into the production of YouTube ads include a Gmail account (YouTube is owned by Google), a budget for the advertisement, access to the Internet, and a team to put the advertisement together (actors, videographers, editors, marketers, etc.).

Distribution

As defined by the ISU Writing Program, "**Distribution** involves the consideration of where texts go and who might take them up." Skippable YouTube ads are created to be distributed on YouTube since there are time limits on skippable ads (the viewer has up to five seconds until they get to skip). In general, advertisements, especially in video format, have to be quick and to the point. Our hypothetical business might consider also putting its ad on its website or on another platform, but since skippable ads are restricted by time, the business should tailor to YouTube's formatting to get the most

out of the advertisement option it is paying for. Even though there is little time until the audience can skip, choosing to distribute on YouTube increases the chance that a business's advertisement is seen by its target audience. However, due to YouTube's large audience, there's no telling how people will respond to an advertisement. WatchMojo compiled a list of the "Top 10 Commercials That Became Memes." It wasn't each business's intention to become a meme from their advertising, but they must consider "how distribution can sometimes move beyond the original purposes intended by the author(s)" (ISU Writing Program). One example mentioned on the list was the Trivago Guy ("Top 10 Commercials That Became Memes"). Trivago allows you to compare hotel prices and pick the best option for you. They had a tagline that went like this: "Hotel? Trivago." Simple, right? It gets to the point and tells the audience that Trivago is where you go for your hotel needs. Well, the Internet turned this tagline into an unlikely explosion of memes (Figure 10).

Reception

The ISU Writing Program describes **reception** as dealing with "how a text is taken up and used by others." I believe that the successful completion of production and distribution leads to a positive reception. A business will consider the reception positive if its advertisement leads to a purchase and

Figure 10: A meme tying the Trivago tagline to Marvel superheroes ("What about Thor?").

even a friendly review of its product. Sometimes customers do the advertising *for* the business, whether it's telling their friends about a product they love, giving it five stars on Amazon or the company's website, or filming a TikTok video featuring the product. Often, if the reception is positive, customer engagement goes up, which leads to even more sales for the business. We can also use the metrics we talked about earlier to see how well our advertisement performed.

We created a plan for how to produce an advertisement, where we would distribute it (so it reaches as many people as possible in our target audience), and what tools we could use to see how the advertisement was received. These steps are the basic yet *crucial* parts of understanding and creating advertisements. After all, you can't create successful advertising without understanding its core first. This was done by using P-CHAT and some of its key terms: production, distribution, and reception (remember P-CHAT's other key terms will come in handy as well). If you're interested in marketing or creating advertisements for a business, P-CHAT is an excellent tool to add to your toolbox. Even if marketing isn't your thing, P-CHAT can be used for the creation of many different types of productions in *any* professional field.

Popping Off in My Concluding Thoughts

Marketing majors who study and create advertising are part of a discourse community, one that I belong to here at ISU. A **discourse community** is "a grouping of people who share certain language using norms and practices" (ISU Writing Program). By reading this article, you got an insight into our common practices, such as the type of research we conduct for the purpose of creating a product (aka an advertisement) that we're proud of. I'm mentioning my role in the community to let you know that I've used P-CHAT and genre analysis on projects outside of English 101. Even though its elements may seem intimidating at first, they become simple with practice. I invite you to create a P-CHAT analysis of your own for a genre within one of the discourse communities you are a part of.

Although you might be studying P-CHAT and/or reading this article for your English class assignments, P-CHAT's power goes beyond the four walls of your classroom. Hopefully, you've seen that P-CHAT is a resource you can call upon throughout your professional career. You can use P-CHAT to examine any genre that is relevant to your major or career choice. You can use P-CHAT to understand and write a medical report, a lesson plan, an infographic on an animal species, and so on. Whatever path you take,

P-CHAT can help you navigate the complex genres and creations you'll interact with along your journey.

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Indigenous Activism and Language Reclamation

Darcy Allred and Natalie Jipson

In this co-interview, Darcy Allred and Natalie Jipson investigate connections between Indigenous activism and languaging practices. They consider the ways that translingualism and antecedent knowledge impact our ability to learn and reclaim languages and discuss the vital work being done in Indigenous communities.

This Grassroots Co-interview was created from a conversation Darcy Allred and Natalie Jipson had about Indigenous activism and the language reclamation work that Darcy has been pursuing both with the Wyandot(te) community (as an enrolled citizen of the Wyandotte Nation in Oklahoma) and on ISU's campus. Grassroots Co-interviews are aimed at bringing two people together to discuss literate activities that they engage in. A "literate activity co-interview" is when two people with an interest in particular activities where literacies occur have a conversation, which is then turned into an article, using the dialogue to showcase the many ways that humans interact with literacies and language as they exist and move about the world. The goal of these co-interviews is to see how discussion about literate activity can extend to the everyday writing, reading, and communicating that people engage in. In this case, both Natalie and Darcy have an interest in activist work. In particular, Darcy is contracted by the Wyandotte Nation to help tribal community members reclaim their heritage language, Wa^{n}dat. Natalie is also interested in social justice activism and has been an active member of the newly formed ISU Graduate Workers Union. However, Natalie found Darcy's discussion of the need to understand and create opportunities for

Darcy's Note on the Spelling of "Wyandot(te)":

Today there are three Nations of the Wyandot(te): the Wyandot of Anderdon Nation, the Wyandot Nation of Kansas, and the Wyandotte Nation (of Oklahoma). Wyandot(te) citizens had previously shared the same spelling of their community's name as "Wyandot." The contemporary, "Wyandot(te)" is to both distinguish and include all descendants of the Wyandot people as recently adopted among many of their diaspora.

Social Identities

These are identity categories that align with specific communities including various racial or ethnic groups, genders, sexualities, religions, abilities or disabilities, classes, and so on.

language diversity so fascinating, that this co-interview focuses heavily on that topic. In this text you will see Darcy's portion of the interview and Natalie's portion, along with contextual information co-written by Natalie and Darcy.

Because US history has been whitewashed and recorded primarily with ideas rooted in settler colonization, it is important to address some key terms and concepts before we dive into the main event! The first thing we want to point out is that the term Indigenous Peoples encompasses a large group of separate nations and communities. Each of these has their own customs, cultures, and language practices. While much of our discussion will focus on the Wyandot(te) community and their sleeping Wa^{n}dat language, this is not the only Indigenous language that is being reclaimed or stabilized by Native communities. It is important to remember that just like other **social identities**, there is no monolithic experience that resonates with all community members. In other words, we all have unique and varied lived experiences, and they are all valuable in understanding how we see the world and live within it!

It is important to explain the next set of terms: colonization, anti-colonialism, and decolonization. *Facing History* explains that colonization is "the process of assuming control of someone else's territory and applying one's own systems of law, government, and religion" ("Colonization"). In the case of the US, this also included genocide of Indigenous Peoples and attempts to destroy Indigenous languages, traditions, and governing systems. Because the US is a country built upon settler colonization, there are deeply held anti-Indigenous beliefs embedded in US culture and institutional support for those views through laws and policies.

The process of challenging colonization is called anti-colonialism. Makes sense, right? Anti-colonialism is the process and work of challenging and removing colonial values, while advocating for Indigenous Peoples' rights. It stops short of decolonization, which is the process of actively returning (or "repatriating") to Indigenous Peoples their homelands

and other ancestral belongings housed in museums and other US cultural institutions. Decolonization also applies to the reclamation of cultural knowledge and language. Now that we've covered a few of the basics, let's jump into activism and language reclamation.

> **Translingualism**
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> According to ISU's Writing Program, translingual writing acknowledges that English is not the same in all English-speaking countries, that there are variances of English even within the US, and that it is valuable to hybridize or add multilingual content to writing and speaking.

Colleges and Standard American English Supremacy

During the interview, Natalie and Darcy spent time talking about English language supremacy, and specifically the lack of support and appreciation of multilingual folks and diverse ways of Englishing. Despite the fact that ISU's Writing Program emphasizes the value and importance of **translingualism**, there are still individuals, groups, and organizations within the university that harbor resistance to the idea that there is more than one way to speak and *write*. This is not just a problem on Illinois State University's campus, however. Even in K–12 schools, students have often been told that there is one way to English: Standard American English (SAE). The trouble is, "SAE is not truly 'American' in that it is not the language of all Americans and has often been used to normalize white, middle- and upper-class language systems and to denigrate language systems that differ from them" (Chun et al). Standard American English has been used by those in power to label their version of English, and a specific one at that, as the "proper" way to speak and write.

So, what sorts of challenges are there, on campuses and off, that attempt to limit people's ability to use multiple languages, dialects, and so on?

> **Darcy:** I guess my biggest issue right now, there's just not enough infrastructure at ISU for Indigenous students, especially when thinking about literacy and monolingual English-speaking universities, like ISU and the US in general. What can we do to have programs for students whose first language isn't English, or if they're like me and trying to reclaim their Indigenous language? There are examples of other schools that do that. Miami University in Ohio has a Myaamia language program, founded by Darryl Baldwin, where Myaamia college students can earn credit at Miami University for learning their language, and that's the dream. I feel like all the work I am doing here, the activist stuff, is important to help build that infrastructure for all Native students at ISU. But at the same time, it's taking away the time that I need to become literate in my own heritage language.

Natalie: Yeah, there is a lack of understanding and appreciation for multilingual students and experiences. Even though I've only been teaching here for a year and a half, I've had a bunch of students talking about how they've had instructors who are very rigid, who are unsupportive of the idea that there can be a blending of languages or some hybridity happening. It seems to be something that is just generally frowned upon. I have a group of students who are in Communication 110 right now who were talking about how they were explicitly prohibited from using any African American Vernacular English (AAVE) or Spanglish. It was outlined in the rubric saying that they can't utilize those language practices.

D: Yeah, and that's the legacy of homogenous white American eyes and policies, especially whenever we're thinking about immigration in the US at the turn of the twentieth century. International students have these discriminatory eligibility requirements that domestic students don't, like the TOEFL or IELTS language exams (Figure 1), even if they might know English a lot better or have a better handle of English grammar than a lot of US-American-born students. Yet, they have to prove English language proficiency and fluency by taking tests or enrolling in courses, all of which can be expensive. It's definitely another sort of predominantly white institution value system that results in discrimination against people with diverse, rich knowledge bases in their multilingualism.

Figure 1: For more details about common English language requirements for international students wanting to attend US universities, scan this QR code to see a US government website called *Study in the States*.

Valuing Antecedent Language Knowledge(s)

Between the limitations placed on students by instructors, as well as the arduous testing and education requirements placed on international students, it seems clear that the complexity of languaging is often ignored by institutions. Schools and government organizations alike have created processes for assessing and accessing language tools and resources that favor one very specific way of Englishing and stigmatize variation.

Let's all face the fact that language is messy!!! It isn't as simple as learning phrasing and grammar. We all write, speak, and read differently because of our **antecedent knowledge**. We need to embrace the beauty of language variation, folks!

Language reclamation, particularly in the case of sleeping languages (i.e., languages that no longer have any fluent speakers), can be tricky in

conjuring up antecedent knowledge. This is because a community has experienced a dramatic language shift where intergenerational transmission of a language (parents teaching children a language in the home) exchanges a heritage language for that of a more dominant language in society. This is what happened during the federal US Indian boarding school era, during which Native families and children were severely persecuted for speaking their languages. So in waking up a sleeping language (a language that was

> **Antecedent Knowledge**
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> This term refers to all the prior knowledge—everything you already know—that can come into play when you're encountering a new literate activity (ISU Writing Program).

stolen), communities are not only trying to learn a language, they're trying to reconstruct worldviews and different meanings in a language that does not easily—or at all—translate to English or any other commonly spoken global languages. Heritage language learners of sleeping languages must resist a lot of their antecedent knowledge about how meaning is constructed, especially if they're literate monolingual English speakers. In order to make more effective progress in learning the often-complex grammar and sound features of an Indigenous language, it's important to perhaps use antecedent knowledge of an experience or habit you developed to help change your way of thinking or behavior—like deciding to go on a jog every morning during the coldest part of winter, when you have no prior experience as a runner! Similarly, language reclamation requires lots and lots of discipline to build a better habit to practice and study a system of knowledge that you have no prior experience with.

Languaging on College Campuses

As graduate students in an area of study that has language requirements, Natalie and Darcy also discussed the way that both undergraduate and graduate programs view certain languages as meeting the criteria for general education and language requirements, while others are not considered acceptable for college credit.

For example, if the language you already speak isn't offered in classes by ISU, your only option is to complete a proficiency exam, but there are only certain languages that have an exam available at the university. At ISU those languages are French, German, Italian, Latin, Portuguese, Spanish, Chinese, or Japanese ("Language Requirement"). These tests cost ten dollars to take. If the language you speak isn't among ISU's offerings, you have to pay an additional 150 dollars to take a test with another agency, which creates inequality for students whose languaging abilities and language-learning

interests aren't prioritized by the university. For some languages and dialects there isn't even a testing option at all.

D: The other issue I have is what can count toward students' credits. Whatever minor or general education courses meet their foreign language or second language requirement, it often only includes four or five language options. Often these are French, Spanish, German, or Mandarin. These are usually languages that are pretty common on a global scale but rarely include marginalized languages such as Indigenous languages unless it's a tribal university. Maybe there are some universities that include more common North American Indigenous languages like Tsalagi Gawonihisdi (aka Cherokee), Diné (aka Navajo), and Anishinaabemowin (aka Ojibwe) who have relatively bigger heritage-language-speaking communities and often get more funding. But it sucks for the little guys who have dormant (sleeping) languages and are trying to do the work to bring them back out of sleep. It's just a huge long process, and if we had more help from universities to bridge the gap, that could be a great mutual sort of benefit in recruiting more Native students while helping them reconnect with or expand upon their ancestral ways of knowledge-making.

N: Yes, it seems like there is this possibility of a beautiful partnership, it's just that many universities aren't taking advantage of an opportunity to provide this support and research to marginalized communities. I mean, the English department is a great example because we have folks who specialize in linguistics who could partner with Indigenous communities that are doing this language reclamation work. There just seems to be a level of resistance at a lot of academic institutions to forming community partnerships.

Modalities

ISU's Writing Program describes modalities as the different modes used to communicate between humans, including "Alphabetic (stuff we write using the alphabet), Visual (pictures), Aural (sound), Oral (spoken), and Symbolic (using symbols that aren't alphabetic, like emoticons or emojis)."

Even when we are just talking about one language, there is a lot we can do to think about and include diverse languaging practices. For example, throughout the interview, Natalie and Darcy shared that through researching their own writing and speaking practices, as well as those of their students, there seems to be a huge difference between alphabetic Englishing and oral Englishing. These two **modalities** used for communicating do different work in the world and can open up pathways to investigating language practices that work against the monolithic idea of standard-English-only models.

D: The way people speak, it's still in their own languages or dialect of whatever. In writing, it's often completely the opposite, so yeah, it's a lot to sort of disrupt.

N: Yeah, I mean even in my own writing practices, and I'm a monolingual speaker, I still feel like there is a huge variance in what I feel comfortable with, including my own personal voice when writing. There does seem to be a separation there and that's with someone who doesn't have additional languages. There is that weird divide between what we feel like is comfortable putting on a written page versus what we feel comfortable saying out loud.

D: As a former ENG 101 instructor at ISU, I noticed that some students come into their first-year writing class with these really prescriptive ways of writing versus speaking in a class discussion. They'll say something that may sound kind of scripted because they're intimidated or are trying to sound smarter. I don't know if there's an educational sort of trauma with feeling like you have to talk a certain way or write a certain way, but writing is definitely stressful because of all of that—all of the different rules you feel like you have to follow instead of just diving into writing from your own perspective.

It seems that there are different comfort levels that folks have with either speaking or writing, but as Darcy pointed out, this also seems to change based on the environment they're in and who they are languaging with. In the case of college classes, there often is pressure to language in a way that mirrors or fits department, administrative, or community standards and often disregards the value of less jargony vocabulary. And let's face it, the academic space is an elitist space that has done very little to make variations of languaging acceptable. This pressure to conform to a certain communication style is felt by students and faculty alike.

Reclaiming and Relearning the Waⁿdat Language

After their deep dive into the problems of multilingual learning on college campuses, Darcy began to tell Natalie about the history of her heritage language (Waⁿdat) and the important research and reclamation work that she has been doing. Darcy has been engaging in a blend of writing, speaking, and research because of the way dormant languages are relearned. It isn't as simple as finding an introductory French textbook and turning to the first chapter. There isn't a study guide or even a dictionary with which to look up new words. There are many forms of research that have to take place

before any new vocabulary or sentence structures can be learned. This is the writing research work that Darcy has been engaging in to awaken the Waⁿdat language.

N: How are you working with your tribe to learn a language and how does that language reclamation work happen?

D: So, it [Waⁿdat] is a sleeping language, which means that our last fluent speakers died in the early 1970s. Our relatives were less likely to pass down our language because of the US Indian boarding schools and colonial legacies of assimilation, removal, and displacement of Native peoples that have led to cyclical poverty and disruption of generational transmission of our traditional ways of living and being. Throughout the twentieth century, Wyandot(te)s often had to choose political and economic survival over maintaining our culture and language, especially in a time where it wasn't "cool" to be Native. In the 1920s era, when my great-grandma had my grandmother (both Wyandotte), she didn't pass the language down to my grandmother because they were super poor in rural Oklahoma during the Great Depression. They just wanted to survive and fit in—you know, assimilate. All of those socioeconomic factors combined with historical traumas inside boarding schools that not only forced Natives to learn English but also punished them for speaking their Native languages. Over time we just kept teaching our kids English instead of Waⁿdat. And now we have issues with "anthropologists" or other academics and how they recorded some of our ancestors speaking because it's based on their asking them, "hey, how do you say x, y, z," etc. We do have a lot of archives, more than a lot of other dormant Indigenous languages do, but the problem is getting enough help and skills-training needed for language recovery. We have language classes, but we also need constant meetings to talk about certain words. Many Wyandot(te)s and our tribal linguist have been working for several years (some for decades!) to standardize our **orthography** and publish an updated English-to-Waⁿdat dictionary and grammar book for our community. We also need more language teachers, linguists, multigenerational participants willing to learn the language, and lots of renewable funding to sustain our efforts and keep the momentum going. Right now, there is so much piecemeal, overwhelming work to do. But it's important we don't give up.

Orthography

According to Wikipedia, an orthography is "a set of conventions for writing a language including norms of spelling, hyphenation, capitalization, word breaks, emphasis, and punctuation" ("Orthography").

There are a lot of non-Natives who have published books on our language and lumped it in with our cousin nation, the Nation Huronne-Wendat in Quebec, Canada, and think that Wa^{n}dat is merely a dialect of the Wendat language. But our languages and our peoples, while closely related, are not the same. So we've had a lot of scholars—deceased and living—who conflate us, and they're publishing these works that are completely inaccurate. I have to correct a lot of people, and it's not their fault because most mainstream sources about us are inaccurate. It's not even just about learning the language, it's about learning the unevenness of the whole historical, political, and geographical factors involved with how the Jesuits first started transcribing our languages too.

N: In most language learning scenarios you already have translations and dictionaries. For what you're doing, there's so much rigorous research involved because these records have such colonial history. Because of the history and the lack of ability to be immersed in fluent speakers, a team approach must be important to the reclamation effort. Who's been working with you on this project?

D: So it's a growing number of Wyandot(te)s and our tribal linguist (who's non-Wyandot) who participate in beginner language classes via Zoom and other cultural activities. I'm taking a class once a week and facilitate a class twice a week with Wyandot(te)s and invited guests. We have a Facebook page and calls for a digital class every so often. There's a momentum of interest right now, which is super exciting! However, it's still difficult for adult learners to join classes due to a lack of time and energy or availability due to busy work, school, and/or parenting schedules. Our people have overcome so much and are thriving more than ever since colonial contact. We are working to build more widespread interest in tribal citizens, as well as to instill a value that our heritage language is so crucial to who we are as a civilization of people, a nation. Language is an epistemology, a way of being in the world. It's also important to remember that English is actually a foreign language on this side of the continent.

Thinking of English as a foreign language challenges everything we have been taught about the US. There is so much time spent focused on the establishment of the nation that for the most part, English is considered naturalized in the US.

N: Part of breaking through the belief that English is the original language of the US is to challenge the antecedent knowledge that writing researchers come in with.

Challenges in Activist Communication and Bureaucratic Red Tape

After discussing so many important topics related to language and activism, Darcy and Natalie turned their conversation toward solutions and funding opportunities that could make campuses, specifically ISU's campus, more equitable.

> **D:** Another tricky thing is money. Investing substantial amounts of money—especially whenever it comes to federal or state dollars—sometimes can be an issue. While money is incredibly necessary to sustain renewable funding for different programs or projects, the university should be more intentional in how funding is allocated for a new committee or particular project related to diversity advocacy and extracurricular student engagement on campus. For example, if there was a resolution passed by the Board of Trustees that they could give us a million dollars, how do you have things in place to make sure that money is used sustainably and ethically? Are we hiring the right faculty and not just box-checking and meeting the diversity hire quota? I would love to see more Indigenous faculty, but I also have very specific Indigenous research interests and just hiring one or maybe even a cluster of Native faculty could be great, but how do you ensure they're meeting the needs of Indigenous students on campus? There needs to be an administrative deep dive into what can be done for marginalized students to ensure that ISU is making their education work for them. Stop using these assimilation methods like the box-checking sort of thing. I think we do have to build more intentional spaces for marginalized groups of people.
>
> The Board of Trustees makes so many decisions on behalf of us—multimillion dollar projects that lots of student voices are not consulted on. We don't get to vote and yet they directly impact us, so it's something that is very challenging. It can be difficult to navigate and advocate for the assistance needed to be successful.

> **Discourse Communities**
>
> This term refers to "a group of people who have some common publicly stated goals, mechanisms of participation, information exchange and feedback, community specific genres, a specialized terminology, and threshold level of members" (ISU Writing Program).

> **N:** Yeah, the funding thing is so confusing. Through some of my activism on campus, I really struggled with understanding the practices of these **discourse communities** because it seems to exist outside of student-led spaces, and often the rules and regulations are not accessible to people outside of that closed circle. On top of the practices and regulations being challenging to access, meetings of the ISU Board of Trustees and the Academic Senate are also very hierarchical spaces that can be intimidating for student activists to enter.

D: Going back to the language aspect, there is literacy involved in knowing how these bureaucratic systems work—systems that are historically designed to box out the people who have the least power. It makes it harder to go through the hoops and hurdles to be able to understand that languaging and get a seat at the table. For example, you get a certain amount of time to talk at these meetings, but depending on public comment interest, that time may shorten significantly. This can mean improvising on the spot, having multiple commenters join one statement, or speed-reading to try to be heard. Even if you know how to speak that language, the power dynamics are intense. For example, although I have made public comments, none of mine have received a response. It's in the Academic Senate and Board of Trustees' regulations that they must respond. Not all rules and regulations in these literate spaces are enforced equally, and for student activists, this presents a steep learning curve.

N: And even the labor involved for you to have to go search through their bylaws and find out what they're supposed to be doing is something that just adds to the taxing of energy to have to navigate all of these different communities and their sets of rules. Sometimes you can Google search these things, and sometimes you come up with out-of-date documents and have to dig further. All of this additional work has to be done by people to try to penetrate those systems which makes it even more inequitable.

D: And if you come off as too antagonistic, they're just going to start ignoring you, but sometimes you need a time and place to rally and protest. Sometimes you need agitating sorts of methods to get underrepresented people empowered and to get those in power to actually listen to the people who are the most vulnerable and affected by the decisions they're making. People who are dealing with inequalities have only so much time and resources to fight back because of those inequities. If you are a full-time working student, that time and those resources are in short supply. That's why it's so hard for us to all raise our voices and why solidarity and coalition-building really matter.

Clearly, the possible solutions to the problems of English language supremacy, unequal language requirements, lack of resources and funding, and discrimination on campus are not simple. They require significant institutional changes as well as grassroots activism to function in tandem if there are to be improvements in resources for marginalized communities.

As we have discussed in this interview, language is complicated, varied, and alive. It doesn't exist in a vacuum. Indigenous languages in particular

were persecuted and stolen by the US's mandated settler-colonial state violence. But they can be reclaimed when Native community members are able to join efforts in reawakening or stabilizing the abundant meanings and worldviews that an ancestral language holds. Thank you all for taking the time to read about Indigenous language activism and reclamation!

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Cyanocitta Cristata
Blue Jay Nestling

Cyanocitta Cristata
Blue Jay Fledgling

Cyanocitta Cristata
Blue Jay Adult

Miles Apart: How Moving to the US Transformed Communication with My Best Friend

Elena Petrova

In this article, Elena Petrova discusses how moving to the US affected communication with her best friend. She researches how her writing research identity was transformed by considering chatting in different mobile applications as literate activity. She gives examples of real chats with her friend and analyzes them focusing on different aspects of writing: multimodal representation and translingual writing.

Can you imagine how it feels when you leave someone you truly love because you have to move to another continent? That's exactly what happened to me recently. I have a best friend. Her name is Yuliana. She is my soulmate. We've known each other for seven years. But one day I got a long-awaited—and at the same time, a little scary—E-mail from Illinois State University (ISU). I was offered a place as a graduate student in the Department of English (good news) and had to leave Russia in three months (sad news, especially for my family and friends).

When my preparations for moving abroad began, Yuliana and I had to find a way to communicate regardless of the time difference and long distance between us. We chose several apps to keep in touch as much as possible (these apps included WhatsApp, FaceTime, Telegram, and Instagram).

When I entered the Writing Program at ISU, I realized that all of these communication plans and tools could be considered part of my (and Yuliana's) literate activity. Kevin Roozen, in his *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* (*GWRJ*) article, "Unraveling 'Writing': Interweaving Maverick Literacies Throughout a Literate Life," describes literate activity as "activity

that involves people producing or using some type of text, broadly conceived" (2021, p. 96). The use of the term "literate" helps illuminate that human action involves not only words written on a screen or page, but also a wealth of other kinds of multimedia along with the processes and practices involved in making texts. The term "activity" helps to foreground that people make and use texts to act in the world, not merely for the sake of creating the texts themselves. People usually perceive texting as something casual, something we do daily, but studying and teaching in the Writing Program has helped me reconsider my perception of texting, which is why I think it's worthwhile to offer this discussion of the texts Yuliana and I send each other every day.

I have to mention that Yuliana and I are both teachers of English as a foreign language. We met at the National Research University Higher School of Economics in Moscow because we studied in the same program, and we have the same backgrounds. We were both exposed to the same academic environment for four years as undergraduate students, and we both speak and teach English. What's more, we were born on the same day (yes, an unbelievable coincidence!) and were raised in very similar ways. We've watched many similar films and read many of the same books. All of these connections have definitely made us best friends and have shaped our **writing research identities**—or how our knowledge, experiences, and skills (and the knowledge and skills we don't yet have) impact what we as writers can (and can't) do (ISU Writing Program)—in similar ways. Writing research identity is something everyone has, but it's possible that some of us have never really thought about or analyzed it before. I was certainly one of those people until recently!

While writing this article, and with a better understanding of writing research identity, I asked myself some questions as I was thinking about how my identity and Yuliana's were similar and different:

- How do we write when we communicate with our friends, family, or teachers?

- What language do we use?

- If we speak more than one language, what language(s) do we choose when communicating with different people?

- Do we use any inside jokes or phrases?

- What genres do we use?

- What topics do we discuss?

- Do we use emojis or stickers, and if so, what kinds?

If someone were trying to be specific when answering these questions about a particular kind of communication they engage in, there probably wouldn't be two people in this world who would give identical answers. But as you read on, you'll see that Yuliana and I have similarities that make it easy for us to communicate using these texts, because we have a lot of shared knowledge and experience that connects us. My primary goal for this article is to illustrate how writing research identity is reflected in any literate activity we produce. *We are all writers and we are all unique because our writing is unique.* When people share significant aspects of their identities, it can impact their communications, making it easier to share meaning and understanding.

> **Definition of Genre**
>
> According to a video by The Word Bird, **genre** is defined as "a typified response to a recurring situation" (2014), which is based on a definition of genre provided by Carolyn Miller in 1984.

Communicating across Genres

When thinking about genre, many people will mention literature genres, like fiction, the novel, poetry, and so on, or maybe media genres like horror, romance, YA, and the like. Although this is correct, genre, as a concept, can be used for so much more than this kind of categorization. When my friend and I communicate, we employ different genres and tools such as texting on WhatsApp, sending voice messages on Telegram, talking via FaceTime, and sharing pictures on Instagram. These can be called apps or platforms, but they can also perform as genres.

Genre choice always depends on the *objectives* we have for producing a particular genre. When my friend and I use WhatsApp, our objective is to have some fun, tell each other about recent news, and just have a great time together. In contrast, if my objective in a classroom setting is to obtain important information about an assignment from my professor, I will probably use a more formal genre like an E-mail. Thus, choosing a genre depends on the context and the audience, as well as on the specific choices we're presented with (in some situations, like a particular class, someone in authority might decide what genres and tools we'll use, and we just have to make it work). With the permission of my friend Yuliana, I have done some research digging deeper into the ways we communicate. I added some screenshots of our chats to this article to illustrate my findings more explicitly.

> **More Definitions of Genre**
>
> There is another definition of genre: **Genre** is "the tool (or tools) that the participant(s) use to achieve the objective" (ISU Writing Program, n.d.).

Platforms and Genres of Communication

Here is the list of platforms (or genres) we use for different objectives:

- FaceTime (live video communication): We use this genre when we want to share news and don't want to text.

- WhatsApp: We use this genre to quickly check in with each other about the times we are available to talk on FaceTime. We also use WhatsApp to forward some messages our friends send us on this app. So, here we not only produce text, but we also share and interact with texts produced by other people.

- Telegram: We use this genre to communicate when we don't have time to talk but want to share news. We use text messages, voice messages, and video messages and share pictures and videos with each other.

- Instagram: We use this genre to share posts and memes we like as a way of creating shared memories and jokes.

Even More Genre Definitions

Genres are also defined as "kinds of texts that it is possible to identify by understanding the conventions or features that make that production recognizable" (ISU Writing Program, n.d.).

We can view these genres from different perspectives. Yes, these communication apps are ones that Yuliana and I *use* for different objectives. But at the same time, when communicating online, we also *create* genres on these platforms. And when we create or produce our own genres, we can focus on such an important concept by thinking about genre conventions.

Before writing anything new or using a new kind of writing tool or technology, it can be helpful to conduct **genre analysis**—which means thinking about the conventions of a genre as they shape the way we write, what language we use, what formatting we employ, and so on. When creating informal texts, we probably don't think much about all these things. However, they are always present. Let's make it more visible by looking at the genre conventions of the different apps Yuliana and I use to communicate online.

FaceTime genre conventions (see Figure 1):

- It was created for oral communication.

- It requires the phone number or E-mail of the person you're contacting.

- It has buttons showing sound and video settings.

- It also includes the "Take a screenshot" button and the "Finish call" button.

- Your picture is in the right-hand corner, and it can be zoomed in on if necessary.

- You have the opportunity to display your screen.

Every time we use FaceTime, we create a new genre by using FaceTime's conventions to form a new way to communicate. Though it is mainly a face-to-face video app, Yuliana and I use it to quickly share images with each other. We modify the features of Facetime to our advantage. For example, when my friend wants to show me pictures, she uses the "display screen" button, and I can see her photos immediately.

WhatsApp genre conventions (see Figure 2):

- It was created with multiple media and forms of communication in mind.
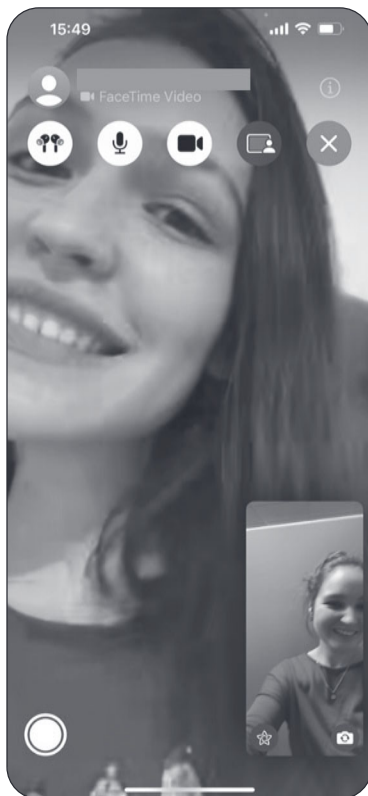
Figure 1: A screenshot of Yuliana and I using FaceTime.
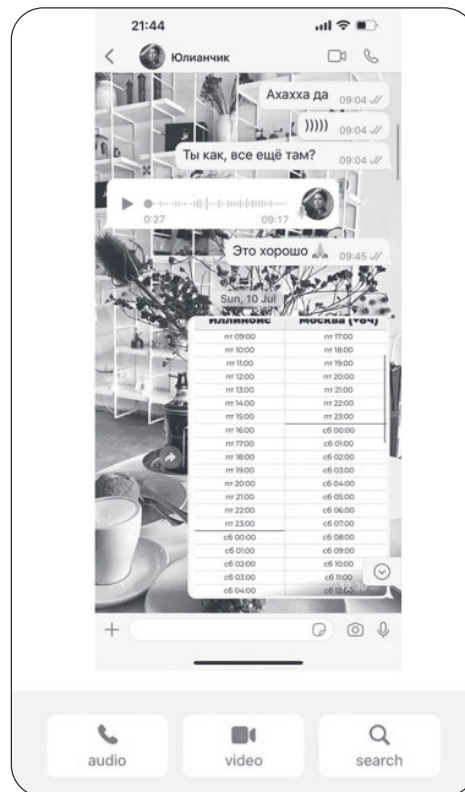
Figure 2: This screenshot depicts the different features of WhatsApp.

- Its features include:
  - ∗ The chat itself,
  - ∗ The "Attach file" button,
  - ∗ The "Attach photo" button,
  - ∗ The "Record audio" button,
  - ∗ The "Start audio call" button,
  - ∗ The "Start video call" button, and
  - ∗ The "Search" button.

All these genre conventions serve different purposes and help us choose how to interact with the app in the appropriate ways. Yuliana and I enjoy WhatsApp because it has features such as attaching files and video calls, but this communication platform does have limitations in its genre conventions. For example, while there is an option to record audio, there isn't one for recording a video. Not all communication apps have similar features, which is why genre research and analysis is important.

Telegram genre conventions (see Figure 3):

- It was created as an alternative way to communicate outside WhatsApp.

- It lets users send text messages, audio messages, and video messages; share media files; and make audio and video phone calls.

- It is also used by some bloggers to create informative and entertaining channels.

- Its features include:
  - ∗ The chat itself,
  - ∗ The "Attach file" button,
  - ∗ The "Attach photo" button,
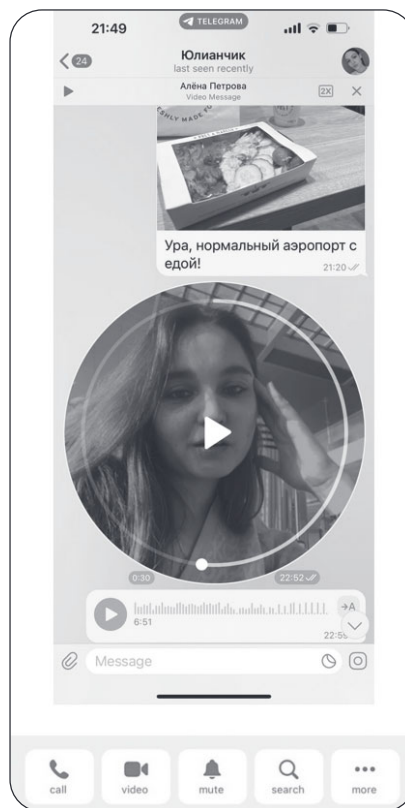
Figure 3: This screenshot depicts the different features of Telegram.

* The "Record video" button (located in the right-hand corner),

* The "Record audio" button (if we click on the icon in the right-hand corner, it will change to "Record audio"),

* The "Choose sticker" button (we love this function and use it a lot to express our emotions or attitudes),

* The "Start video call" button,

* The "Start audio call" button,

* The "Mute" button,

* The "Search" button, and

* The "More" button, which includes other functions.

• You can edit or delete texts you've sent. This is a very convenient function to correct typos in a matter of seconds or get rid of texts you've sent by mistake (this function is also not available on WhatsApp; there you can only delete a message, and it will be seen by a person).

For the conversations that Yuliana and I have, Telegram has more useful functions than other platforms we use, which is why Telegram is the genre we use most of all. For example, "Record video" is a button that is only available on Telegram, and we use it a lot to quickly tell each other recent news. This is another example of how important it is to consider a genre's different conventions before choosing an appropriate one for composing. For instance, if you want to film a tutorial on how to knit a dress, you are more likely to choose a video (to demonstrate it visually), not a podcast as your genre. Similarly, when you want to write an article for the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*, you might try to avoid some of the complex language used in scholarly articles because one of the genre conventions of a *Grassroots* article is an informal or neutral, friendly tone.

Instagram genre conventions (see Figures 4 and 5):

• It was created for sharing photos and videos online. People can use Instagram to follow each other; view, like, and comment on posts; and exchange direct messages.

• Its features include:

* The chat itself,

* The "Start video call" button,

  ∗ The "Record audio" button,

  ∗ The "Attach file" button,

  ∗ The "Attach photo" button,

  ∗ The "Flag this chat" button, and

  ∗ Some additional functions.

Although it looks similar to other platforms at first glance, Yuliana and I never use Instagram to verbally communicate and we rarely share personal photos on the platform because you can't "x2" voice messages and listen to them two times faster, and you can see the picture the person sent only once. Much like WhatsApp, there are inconveniences and limitations of this genre's conventions that prevent us from chatting a lot on Instagram. However, we do use Instagram for the purposes we don't use WhatsApp and Telegram for. For example, we use this platform for creating text-based posts, commenting on posts, sharing posts that already exist, sending reactions, and so on.
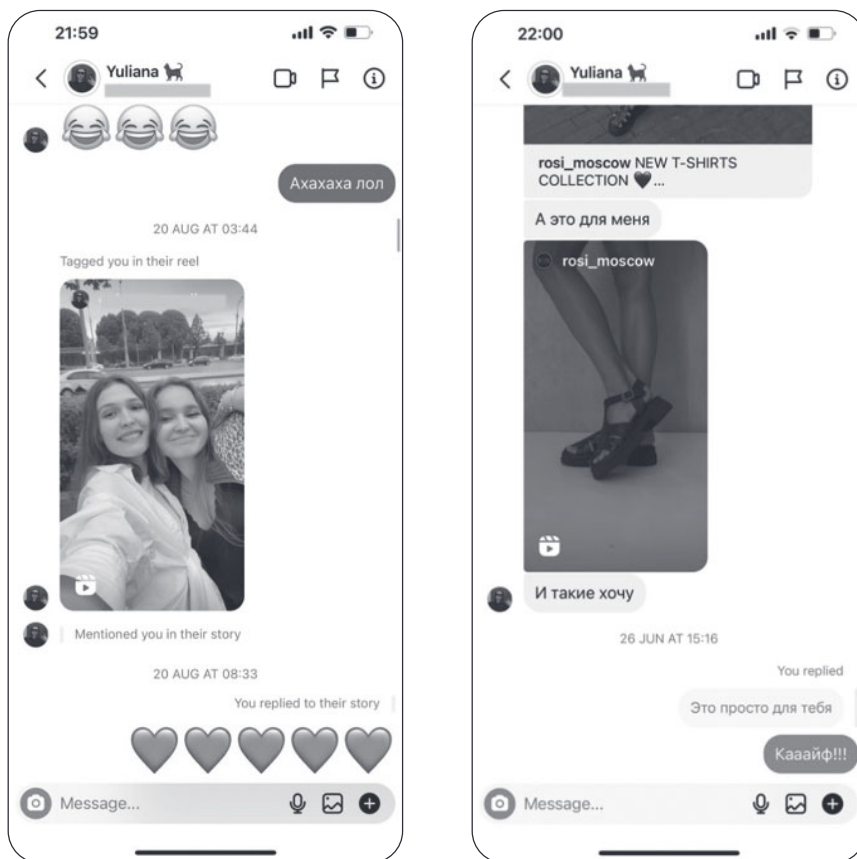
Figures 4 & 5: Together these two screenshots show the uses and features of Instagram.

CHATting with Yuliana

Let us explore the communication genres Yuliana and I use more specifically by "CHATting" about them. Exploring P-CHAT before writing can facilitate the writing process. According to Joyce Walker, P-CHAT can be helpful for "making a place for the individual writer within a *particular* framework at a *particular* time. *This* writer, at *this* particular time and place, trying to learn to write in *this* way, for *these* reasons and hoping for *these* effects" (Walker, 2017).

There are seven P-CHAT terms:

- Representation

- Socialization

- Distribution

- Ecology

- Activity

- Reception

- Production

When we plan our writing (even if it takes three seconds of thinking about how to answer a friend's text), we need to consider our audience (for whom we are writing) to then choose the appropriate genre, language, and mode(s) of writing. Sometimes (especially when texting friends) we do it unconsciously, without realizing it. However, writing is an activity system that involves more steps than you might think.

Let's look at representation consciously and think about all the processes that go on in our brains when we want to send a text. As an example, I will take a small message Yuliana sent me and analyze how I respond to it. All texts are in Russian because it is the language we use to communicate, but translations are always given under the texts.

Communication in Activity Systems

When we communicate through writing, we create **activity systems**, which are "cooperative interactions aimed at achieving a goal" (Russell, 1997). The way we perform the activity depends on the context we perform it in (Kain & Wardle, 2014). In the ISU Writing Program, we use a modified version of activity theory—**pedagogical cultural-historical activity theory** (**P-CHAT**), which helps us break down our writing processes into smaller steps and make them more visible and transparent.

Representation Is Key for Writing

Representation is a crucial P-CHAT concept you have to focus on before writing. The term **representation** "highlights issues related to the way that the people who produce a text conceptualize and plan it (how they think about it, how they talk about it), as well as all the activities and materials that help to shape how people do this" (ISU Writing Program, n.d.).

Here is the text (Figure 6):
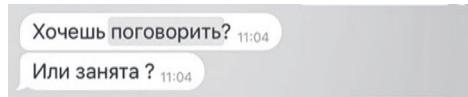
Figure 6: A screenshot of two text messages I received in Russian from Yuliana.

In English, this reads:

Do you want to talk?

Or are you busy?

Here is my thought process (which usually is unconscious with texting, but must be conscious when writing a composition for class or producing any other complex form of literate activity):

- Audience: friend

- Language: informal

- Modes I can use: alphanumeric (using letters and numbers) or visual (pictures, videos)

- Thinking about the content: "Well, I want to talk, but I have a lesson soon. After it, I have a meeting. The only time I'm available is after 4 p.m. (Illinois time). So, I have to tell her that I can talk after 4 p.m. Oh, wait! 4 p.m. in Illinois is 00:00 in Moscow. So, we won't be able to talk today. I'm so sad about that."

After considering all these things, I respond to her in the following way (Figure 7):
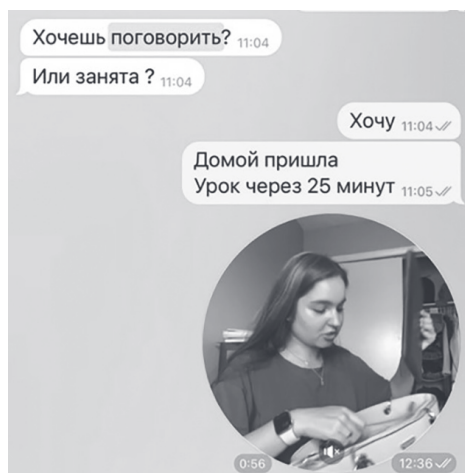
Figure 7: A screenshot of Yuliana's texts with my texts and video message in response.

In English, these texts read:

> [Yuliana:] *Do you want to talk?*
> *Or are you busy?*

> [Me:] *I want to*
> *Just came home. My lesson is in 25 minutes*

> (I then sent a video message in which I say I'm getting ready for the next meeting and will be available in the afternoon after 4:00, and she will already be asleep. I also apologize and say that I hope to talk tomorrow.)

So, while thinking about the representation of my response, I considered multiple things: what I will say, the language I will use, and the modes I will use. I then responded in a way appropriate for this particular situation and for this particular audience.

Multimodal Representation

Due to technological advances, there are more opportunities to write in the ways we prefer. There is also more room for experimentation with modes. We are not limited to just using letters and numbers. Instead, we can write Instagram posts with text, pictures, and emojis. We can create Telegram messages that incorporate short videos, text, emojis, and sometimes images added to the videos. From the example above, we can see that I chose to combine modes: alphanumeric, visual, and oral. This is called **multimodality**.

Let's look at how multimodal representation works in WhatsApp and Telegram chats that I've had with my friend.

Multimodality

Multimodality refers to "all of the modes that humans can use to communicate" (ISU Writing Program, n.d.). This includes the following modes:

• Alphanumeric (something we write using words and/or numbers),

• Visual (pictures),

• Aural (sound),

• Oral (speech), and

• Symbolic (symbols that aren't alphabetic, like emoticons or emojis).

Here I am combining the visual and alphanumeric modes (Figures 8 and 9):

Figures 8 & 9: Two screenshots of messages I've sent using both images and text.

Here I am combining the symbolic and alphanumeric modes (Figures 10 and 11):
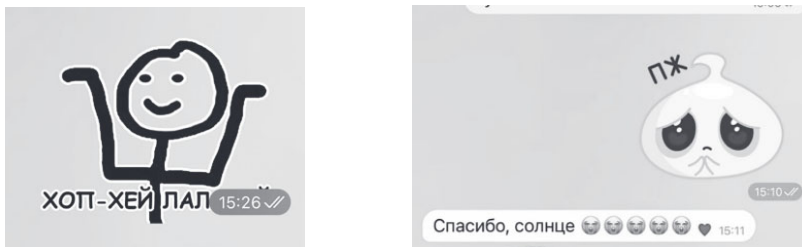
Figures 10 & 11: Two screenshots of messages I've sent using both symbols and text.

And here I am combining the oral, aural, and alphanumeric modes (Figure 12):
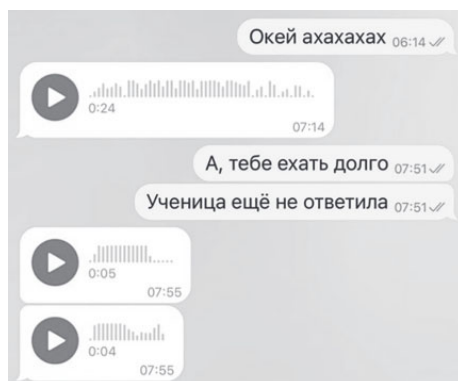
Figure 12: A screenshot of messages I sent using both audio recordings and text.

We can use the alphanumeric mode by simply texting, the visual mode by sharing pictures or videos, the aural and oral modes by sending voice messages and listening to them, and the symbolic mode by sending emojis. Using and combining different modes can be very helpful in different situations connected with producing literate activity. Sometimes simple text isn't enough to convey the ideas we have. If you look at Figures 8 and 9, you can agree that using only the alphanumeric mode wouldn't have helped us communicate the ideas we had. My purpose for creating a multimodal genre was to demonstrate visually how beautiful my breakfast was, and her main purpose was to show me a cute cat that was disturbing her while she was teaching.

Similarly, if there weren't stickers, we couldn't express our emotions in chat as sometimes it is hard to do with just words. There is also an option to add moving stickers. These are a great way to show how we are feeling at the moment. I would even say stickers help us reinforce our relationship and be more emotionally attached to each other. We even created our own sticker pack with our faces.

As for voice messages, they are an indispensable part of our conversations (Figures 13 and 14). Sometimes it is hard to type (when walking somewhere), and it is also inconvenient to record a video message. So, audio messaging is the perfect fit for sharing news immediately. Also, audio messages can help when we cannot call but have a lot of things to tell each other. Sometimes I wake up in the morning and see several five- to ten-minute audio messages
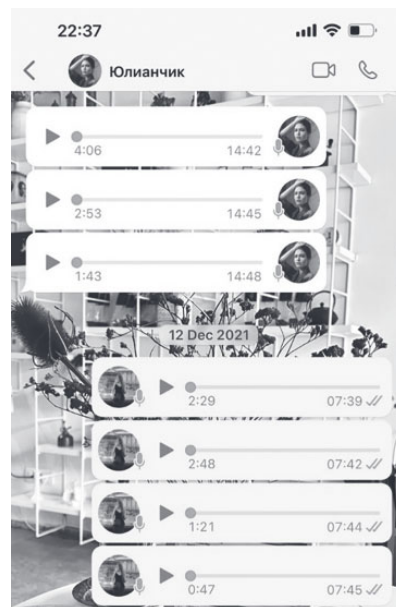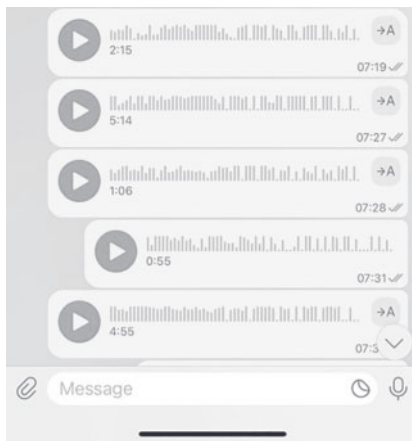
Figures 13 & 14: Two screenshots showing examples of Yuliana and I using the audio messaging feature on Telegram and WhatsApp.

from Yuliana who needs to share her news with me while I am sleeping (one more struggle in maintaining relationships when you are in different time zones).

Coming back to the concept of writing research identity, using a genre such as Instagram for our communication definitely transformed our writing research identities and our relationship because now we have some inside jokes and phrases from the posts we share and view together, and we use these phrases when we produce texts (communicating via WhatsApp or Telegram).

Translingual Writing

Translingual writing is the concept of bringing various languages into the same space and in communication with one another (ISU Writing Program, n.d.). It is based on our antecedent knowledge (things we already know) and reflects our writing research identities.

Figure 15: A screenshot of Yuliana telling me how she feels about seeing her favorite singer perform.

Translingualism in Our Communication

If you go back to Figures 8 and 9, you will see a lovely picture of pancakes and the text "Morning." This is one more feature that makes our chats unique and different from any other best friends' chats: we mix languages (Russian and English) and that's where translingualism comes into play.

Let's look at some examples of translingualism in our chats. In Figure 15, my friend tells me she is going to a live performance of her favorite singer. In English, the text reads:

I'm in this place. I'm very excited

In Russian, we don't have a word that carries the same meaning as "excited," so she decided to use "excited" in English to tell me exactly how she felt about the concert. Our shared antecedent knowledge (previous knowledge of the English language) lets us write this way while being sure that the other person will understand it. Knowing two languages allows us to communicate ideas more easily and gives us more room for expressing our thoughts and feelings in a more accurate and comprehensive way.

It is necessary to note that translingualism is *not* possible in all contexts and with all people. I will never send anything including English to my dad because he simply doesn't speak this language. I also can't use different languages when

composing some other types of literate activity, for example, writing an essay for class because I have to stick to one language. And this brings us back to representation (explained earlier in this article) and all the things we have to consider before we write.

Let's look at another example. Sometimes my friend and I use English on purpose: Yuliana jokingly says that I am forgetting Russian because of moving to the US, so we sometimes "have to" chat in English. Here is a small random part of our conversation in English (Figure 16):

Figure 16: A screenshot of a conversation in English.

And again, I wouldn't be able to do this with other people who don't speak English.

One more interesting example of translingualism is using English acronyms such as OMG and LOL but transliterating them into the Cyrillic alphabet ("ОМГ," and "ЛОЛ"; see Figure 17):
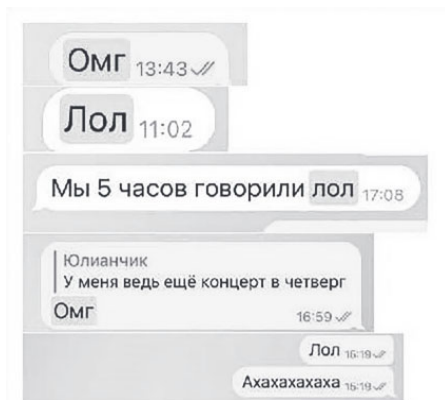
Figure 17: A screenshot of text messages showing Yuliana and I using the Cyrillic versions of OMG and LOL.

Sometimes we use English words but write them in the Cyrillic alphabet, such as writing sorry as "сори" and please as "плиз" (Figure 18). If we want to add emotions to our message, we usually multiply letters ("сориииии" is sorryyyy, while "плиииииззз" is pleeeeaseeee). We do the same when we
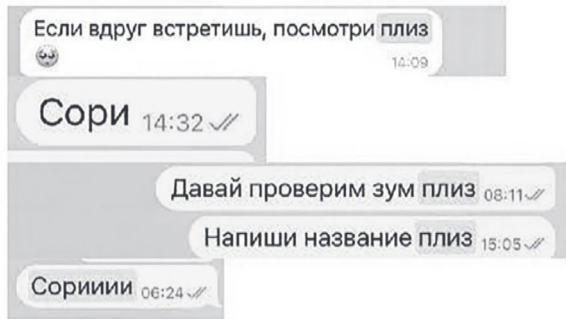
Figure 18: Two screenshots of text messages showing Yuliana and I using the Cyrillic versions of "sorry" and "please."

communicate in person by simply pronouncing these words with a strong Russian accent, so they don't sound English. That's how we transfer our oral communication patterns to our written communication. All these factors shape our unique writing research identities.

How Has Our Communication Changed?

Usually, moving to another country separates people. In this case, it brought us together even more:

- We have more topics to discuss because we are both obtaining new experiences apart from each other. I tell Yuliana about my life in the US, and she recently moved to Turkey, so she shares her stories about her new life, too.

- We started talking *more* than we used to because now we don't have to spend time commuting to meet in person.

- Our texting habits changed—we learned how to use different platforms to communicate and even created many inside jokes about our new lives with the help of these platforms. It definitely brought us closer.

- As we both now speak English more than we used to, our chats have become translingual, which also makes a difference in our communication.

- FaceTime helped us get acquainted with new people. I finally met her boyfriend, whom I had never met in person, and we sometimes chat together.

- I looked at texting from a different perspective and did a lot of research on it, which helped me analyze my writing research identity and the ways it is constantly changing.

- We realized that our friendship is unique, and we will always be together despite circumstances that separate us.

Thanks to digital technologies, chatting in the modern world is getting much easier. Distance and time differences are no longer factors that have to negatively affect relationships. Instead, if managed wisely, they can be an excellent bonding element for you and your loved ones. It can also help you learn more about yourself and your identity, including your writing research identity.

If you also use digital tools to communicate with your loved ones, consider how your personal writing research identity has been shaped by mobile apps, translingualism, and multimodality. You will probably discover a lot of new things about yourself, as I did.

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CHATting about Conflict Coverage

Lily Linden

Since the Vietnam War era, the media has influenced how information about conflicts and the truth is presented to citizens. Lily Linden's article deals with how media tools are used and how the reaction to them in relation to conflict influences both the American government and citizens' actions and opinions.

The Beginning of Media Coverage of Wars

Up until 1965 and the Vietnam War, most American citizens had never seen the reality of combat. Throughout World Wars I and II, newspapers, articles, and eventually newsreels—that came many days and weeks after the events they were covering—were the only way noncombatants received information about wars. With the invention and increase in availability of televisions to the average citizen around the time of the Vietnam War (Figure 1), however, this all changed, and Americans would never think of or respond to war in the same ways they had in the past.

Figure 1: This is a screenshot of a 1967 CBS Television News Report giving updates on the Vietnam War for the American public ("The Ordeal of Con Thien").

Vietnam as the "First Televised War"

There is still a lot of debate about the impact that American news coverage of the Vietnam War had on the way Americans perceived the war, and even on the way policies related to the war were decided. But one thing that we know is true is that television coverage of the war, which often included "live" broadcasts from combat zones and was less firmly controlled by the government than media coverage in World War II (such as newsreels), was an entirely different genre. The immediacy and the visceral quality of TV war coverage was certainly different, even if the impact of that difference is disputed (Huebner 150; Kratz).

Figure 2: For more information about the Tet Offensive, check out this resource from the Office of the Historian ("US Involvement in the Vietnam War").

Television coverage of the war allowed Americans to have a firsthand look into the harsh reality of wars. Although photography and film were certainly a big part of the US's news coverage of World War II and the Korean War, the prevalence of television by the time of the Vietnam War changed the way that Americans were able to visualize what was happening in a war taking place far from US territory. According to a page on the US Library of Congress website, from 1950 to 1960, the number of Americans who had a television in their homes went from five percent to ninety percent ("Television"). Having a visualization they knew was accurate and that they didn't have to imagine for themselves was impactful for Americans and changed how they responded to the news they received. As Ryan Singsank explains in his article for the *Armstrong Undergraduate Journal of History*, "As compared to words describing an event in a printed publication, an image, especially in the context of war, is much more powerful as one is able to shape their own opinions without having to create a visualization."

Having access to television coverage of key battles in the Vietnam War, such as the Tet Offensive (Figure 2), provided Americans with a different version of the events occurring across the sea than the one the government had been offering. The US government maintained that American soldiers were extremely successful in their battles and getting close to winning, but because reporters were recording the actual events, the US military had less control over what was recorded and reported. As a result of this coverage, Americans were able to see and hear about negative views of the American progress in the war. Seeing the reality of what was happening to soldiers in Vietnam impacted opposition to the war, and this impact would not have been possible in a pre-television America. Singsank again provides a summary of this when he states, "Never before had the American people seen coverage of the war to this level, indicating a change in the perception of news and combat footage to viewers in the years to come."

The Evolution of Media

Since the Vietnam War in the 1960s, the types of media outlets and different ways people can now access information has further expanded. Whereas in the past, newspapers, televisions, and radio broadcasts were the primary sources for news, the general population now also has access to social media apps and websites, blogs and reporters, and an increased amount of news channels and stations. This range of choice has had an impact of where people in the US get their news. For example, according to reports on the Pew Research Center website, the percentage of Americans who use TV as their primary source of news has been steadily declining since 2000 (Forman-Katz and Matsa). In September of 2022, the Pew Research Center published a study that indicated that only thirty-three percent of Americans now prefer TV as their primary source of news, while only seven percent say they prefer radio broadcasts, and fifty-three percent say they prefer a digital device (Forman-Katz and Matsa). This growth and change in mass media is also creating changes in the way we find, understand, and use information, and these changes can be understood using elements of the ISU Writing Program's model for understanding people's activities and literacies—the framework of P-CHAT. P-CHAT stands for pedagogical cultural-historical activity theory and, as the ISU Writing Program explains on their website, the seven concepts in P-CHAT can "help us think about and study the complex genres that we encounter in the world . . . CHAT allows us to focus on any aspect of the myriad elements of textual production, so it is more robust than these other methods for investigating texts." The P-CHAT terms production, reception, distribution, and socialization can all be used to highlight the changing ways information circulates within our culture.

One of the first P-CHAT terms we can use to analyze the spread of information through different media platforms and genres is **production**, which according to the ISU Writing Program is "the means through which text is produced . . . the genres and structures that can contribute to and even pre-shape our ability to produce text." Over time, the way media coverage is produced has drastically changed. During the years when most news was produced by mass media outlets, fewer people were able to produce information, and sources for news were fairly centralized. As Coopersmith, a history professor at Texas A&M University, stated in his interview with Luke Henkhaus, a communications professor at Texas A&M, "Before, if you wanted to send out a false video or misleading claim or even something accurate, you really had to have the resources of a state or at least a powerful actor . . . Now, I can make a TikTok and send it out across the world."

My Sense of Genre

When I refer to genre in this article, I'm not referring to literary genres like fiction or nonfiction, or styles of text like romance, horror, and so on. Instead, I use genre to describe all different kinds of formats, purposes, and modalities that can be produced. Genres are often identified by the purposes they are designed to serve and the characteristics they usually have (who uses them, how they are organized, etc.), but even examples of the same kinds of texts are unique in some ways, and categories of texts (like "news stories") aren't stable. They change a lot over time or when they move into different settings (e.g., print newspaper, television news story, blog post, tweet, etc.).

Making mass media is easier now than ever. Anyone who has access to the Internet or a technical device can write an article and post it, create a tweet or Facebook post, or post a video on YouTube for the whole world to see. Even those who aren't journalists, reporters, or who possibly don't even have any credible sources or knowledge can have their text go viral and have thousands of people see and react to it. This can be a very positive aspect of social media coverage of world news, but it can also be very dangerous and tricky when war is the topic of coverage.

The way the media has evolved in the last century can also be looked at using the term **genre trajectory**, which the ISU Writing Program explains as, "how a text moves through a process of production, but even more importantly how texts move through institutions and spaces in relationships among different people." Within the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*, the idea of genre trajectory is often used to focus on the ways that genres change—both over time, as the ways people use them change, and as they are remediated using different kinds of tools or systems of distribution. Years ago, reporters had to go to the location or have intelligence from that area, write or film their information, and distribute it to the public through a prominent media source or government institution. Although they still have to do this for television media coverage, other coverage options like social media do not always rely on traveling and working with credited sources to produce media coverage. Now, ordinary citizens can read an article or get information from almost anywhere on the Internet, and they also create and distribute content themselves, using tools as ubiquitous as a cell phone and access to a social media account. Unfortunately, this kind of access to information, both consuming and creating it, doesn't yet include many rules, and research and fact-checking aren't required to gain access to publication. So, while people have access to a large amount of content, produced by a wide range of people, it can be difficult to know whether information that is posted is credible, accurate, or adequately researched. This increased access to unreliable information sources is especially important when it comes to the dissemination of conflict information.

The Spread of Conflict Information

The ability to produce and consume information related to different conflicts across the world has also increased. As the number and usage of different media platforms has grown, the number of people who see information as it spreads through the media has drastically increased. Because most people in the US have access to the Internet and many devices that are used to spread information, such as televisions, computers, phones, and even smart watches, it is almost impossible to be oblivious or avoid seeing information about ongoing conflicts. Almost all mass media platforms, such as the radio, television channels, news sites, apps, and social media spread updates and constant information on world conflicts, especially those that affect the US in some way. If people are on any of these platforms or use any of these services, they are bound to stumble across conflict information because of its increased production.

The process through which this incredible volume of information makes its way onto the computers and cell phones of average Americans can be looked at through the P-CHAT lens by thinking about the term distribution. **Distribution**, as the ISU Writing Program explains, deals with "where texts go and who might take them up. It also considers the tools and methods that can be used to distribute text." In the case of conflict media coverage, the amount of places texts go and who sees them has grown due to the evolution of tools and avenues for production, and therefore distribution, to occur. Because the means of production and distribution are different, and they allow both access to a wider range of people and access to a wider range of information—but with less oversight and control—it might not be wise, or even possible, for people to continue to think about the news information they consume in the same way they did during earlier eras.

In an article for the Pew Research Center, Elisa Shearer states that "More than eight-in-ten US adults (86%) say they get news from a smartphone, computer or tablet . . . This is higher than the portion who get news from television." Shearer goes on to explain that "Among digital platforms, the most preferred one for news is news websites or apps" (Figure 3).

Based on this, we can see that the majority of Americans get their news from at least semiregulated sources. Unlike social media platforms, professional news outlets are governed by rules and regulations under the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Additionally, if they report incorrect information, they can be subject to legal penalties of various kinds. While information from professional news outlets can still be biased or misleading in a range of ways, in contrast to nonprofessionals on social

US Adults' Top News Platforms
2017 v. 2016 (% using source for news "sometimes" or "often")

marketing charts

Jan-Feb 2016   Aug 2017

73% 64% 56% 64% 59% 56% 58% 55% 57% 51% 44% 47% 48% 43%

Watch local TV news | Get news from a news website or app | Listen to news on the radio | Watch cable TV news | Watch national evening network TV news | Get news from a social media site | Read any newspapers in print

Published on MarketingCharts.com in September 2017 | Data Source: Pew Research Center

Based on a survey of 4,971 US adults (18+)

Figure 3: This graph of the change in Americans' top preferred news platforms shows a decline in traditional mass media and an increase in digital and social media sources ("Social Media Sees Some Gains").

media (who are not subject to regulation by the FCC), these sources have some incentive to report events with accuracy. In the reporting of conflict information, this has a particular importance, because political and diplomatic decision-making can be influenced by news reports and by citizens' opinions about news reporting. If citizens have few ways to determine whether the news they are consuming is accurate, then they may also have a difficult time understanding complex conflicts that take place around the world.

Does Media Coverage Influence Peoples' Opinions of Conflicts?

Arguably, media coverage does have an impact on world conflicts, because reports, whether from credible sources or not, can alter how people think of and respond to them. This P-CHAT concept is what the ISU Writing Program refers to as socialization. **Socialization** involves "the interactions of people and institutions as they produce, distribute and use texts . . . When people engage with texts, they are also engaged in the practice of representing and transforming different kinds of social and cultural practices" (ISU Writing Program). The ways people use conflict information they see varies greatly from person-to-person and can be heavily influenced by the information's source and bias as well as which parts of the conflict they highlight and ignore.

In general, most media outlets—even the most trustworthy and regulated ones—have a bias toward headlines that will draw peoples' attention. Media outlets, like all other businesses in competitive markets, must pay attention to

whether consumers choose them over other options, and this requires picking and choosing information that gets presented, which in turn, alters how people respond to conflicts. Topics such as violence and political scandals within conflicts are things that people are more likely to look at, in comparison to topics such as foreign aid (in most cases), so media outlets heavily favor showing that side of conflicts. In a summary of Christopher Young's work on media and international conflict, the Conflict Research Consortium stated "Visually dramatic, acute events (such as battles or bombings) receive more coverage, while longer-term, wide-spread situations (such as famine or poverty) get less." This focus on violence and acute events distorts how people think, and therefore act, in relation to conflicts. For example, during the Vietnam War, because media coverage was harder for the general public to produce, governments could prevent coverage of certain events, or at least diminish the perceived damage they caused. In current-day conflicts, almost every event that happens is filmed by someone and uploaded to the Internet for anyone to see, as with the war in Ukraine. Seeing every violent attack makes people realize how real the conflict is and the affect it is having on others, which usually makes them more empathetic and willing to push for change. Public response also alters government action, as the government tries to appeal to public opinion to stay in office and power. The Conflict Research Consortium goes on to explain that media sources can play a really important role in providing information:

> Finally, the traditional role of the media as reporters of the truth can play an important role in international conflicts. As noted above, a key function of the media is to give the public the information necessary to make good decisions. The media can seek to confirm official accounts, reveal official deceit, and correct errors of omission.

When the public receives problematically biased, or, worse yet, inaccurate information, people often don't understand the full truth and therefore aren't able to make informed decisions about how to try to influence their local, regional, or national governments.

Socialization can also be influenced by government and powerful institutions manipulating which media sources and information are allowed to be distributed to citizens, like we commonly see in less democratic countries such as Russia and North Korea. In cases like these, interactions between media outlets and the public are altered or not allowed to happen at all (Figure 4). Henkhaus explains how this is seen today in Russia: "Russian efforts to control and weaponize information about the conflict have been more centralized, as the Russian government seeks to limit the spread of information within its population and promote its official justifications for

	Trust in the President (4 pt)			Russia's influence on the world (6 pt)			
	Beta	Std. Beta	Sig	Beta	Std. Beta	Sig	
MEDIA SOURCES							
TV news	0.405	0.196	***	0.316	0.147	***	Main source of information: yes (1)/no (0)
Internet and social media	-0.334	-0.150	***	-0.383	-0.165	***	Main source of information: yes (1)/no (0)
Daily newspapers	0.327	0.064	**	-	-	-	Main source of information: yes (1)/no (0)
Radio	-	-	-	-0.256	-0.054	*	Main source of information: yes (1)/no (0)

Figure 4: Russians who consume more censored media, like TV news and newspapers, have higher trust in the president and his message than those who consume more free media sources, like those found on the Internet and social media (Kizlova and Norris).

the invasion." Governments such as Russia can also use control of the media to spread false information to influence peoples' perception of conflicts. Currently in Russia, "Russians who consume and trust state media may blame the US for the conflict" (Henkhaus). Scenarios like this disrupt how people use texts and often modify the message and reception in a way that the creator of the text didn't intend or predict.

Ukrainians are using the increased availability and socialization of media in their own way. In his article, Henkhaus explains how Ukrainian citizens are using and sharing media about the conflict they are currently dealing with. Since the conflict began, Ukrainian citizens all over the country have been, "posting pictures, videos and stories of Ukrainian soldiers and civilians standing up to the invading Russian forces" (Henkhaus). This type of media socialization is helping to mobilize Ukrainians and provide a sense of hope. Watching average citizens stand up to Russian forces affects most people in a much stronger way than reading a story, as they get to see those similar to them being heroic. This sort of media coverage has the potential to encourage Ukrainian citizens to work together and stand up to Russian forces.

The Future of Conflict Media

The way that P-CHAT can help us to understand conflict reports is to help us map how changes in genres, platforms, and access can impact both the kinds of news that get produced and the ways that people find and make decisions based on their news consumption. Considering that every day our society as a whole is becoming more reliant on technology and the media, it is likely that conflict coverage as we know it will evolve in the near future. It is important that we hold our media sources—especially the larger ones such as Fox News, CNN, and NPR—accountable for providing factual information.

This kind of accountability might help to alleviate some of the problems we see now, such as unreliable sources spreading false information and government distortion of information. In addition, we might be able to focus more on conflict resolution and how average people can get involved in these processes and increase the potential of news media to influence conflicts in positive ways. As Bajraktari and Parajon explain in their article for the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), with some research and effort, the media could be used as a method for conflict prevention in addition to providing information. Local and worldwide media can aid this effort in different ways. Global media outlets, such as BBC, have the potential to alter how an actor considers their next actions. For example, if a state feels that global news coverage of something they do will create a negative public opinion toward them, they may not follow through with this action. On the other hand, countries and citizens suffering during conflict may exaggerate and promote their struggle to global media outlets as a method of gaining support. Bajraktari and Parajon referred to this as the "agenda-setting effect" that global media sources have. Local media sources play a different but equally important role in conflict prevention and resolution. For example, local media sources tend to focus less on the political motives and actions behind conflict and instead focus more on smaller groups and the effects on local communities. Because local media sources are often talking to and working with average citizens and local organizations, they can help create a sense of trust in the media and help with community building during and after conflict. As things evolve, however, P-CHAT can still help us map out how tools and resources are being used to see who is producing news texts (and who is influencing these productions), how different methods of distribution and reception influence what people learn and what they do with that information, and how different patterns of socialization impact the way we participate in conflict or in conflict resolution.

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The Gen Z Book Review: BookTok and Its Evolution as a Genre

Kayleen Haile

In this article, Kayleen Haile uses her experiences as both a reader and a BookTok creator to explore the evolution of the genre of BookTok book reviews. Using research from rhetorical genre studies and activity theory scholars, Haile argues that BookTok itself is a complex and changing activity system, one impacted—for better or for worse—by consumers, producers, and commodification.

"And then I want to weep. To think I haven't dressed appropriately for alien abduction" (Dixon). That quote is from the BookTok famous book, *Ice Planet Barbarians* by Ruby Dixon (Figures 1 and 2). This series was first independently published in 2015, but since it went viral on TikTok, it was bought by Berkley, an imprint of Penguin Random House, and is now being republished with fancy new covers and the same ole tentacle extremities. Now you may be thinking, "What might possess one of the five major publishers in the US to republish alien-focused romance novels?" And let me tell you, my friend, it is BookTok.

Figures 1 and 2: Two covers of the book *Ice Planet Barbarians*, the left being the independently published version, and the right being the traditionally published cover.

Figure 3: This QR code leads to a TikTok by creator @caitsbooks.

What Is BookTok and Why Should You Care?

Maybe you've heard of BookTok from the tables they have at Barnes & Noble, or from one of those videos that show up on your "for you page" (FYP) and you think they are telling you this crazy story about their life, but it turns out to be the plot of a book. But in case you haven't heard of it, BookTok is the section of TikTok that posts—you guessed it—about books. BookTok was first started by the creator @caitsbooks at the start of the pandemic and quickly grew into a bookselling machine (Figure 3).

You may be thinking, "Why should I care about BookTok?" Or, "How is this even related to the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*?" Well, I'll tell you. BookTok is a textbook example of the complicated evolution of a literate activity.

What first started as

- "Here is this book I *loved*, you should read it."

Then evolved into

- "Here is this book I *wrote*, you should buy it and read it."

Which then evolved into

- "Here is this book we are *publishing*, you should buy it."

And I think that's a really interesting evolution. Over the two years during which BookTok has become a thing, the way that people are using the platform has drastically changed. These changes are a great example of what happens when people and genres and new technologies and spaces get mixed up together in new ways.

When it was first created, there was no desire to make money by posting silly little videos. But when authors and publishers joined the platform, we entered the era of the commodification of BookTok, which the original creators didn't want or expect. **Commodification** is the transformation of a "thing" into a commodity, which essentially means that people can now make a profit off of it ("Commodification"). Because the original BookTok creators didn't start posting with the intention of generating a profit, they obviously had a reaction to the commodification of the platform. Some have embraced it, and these folks have sponsorships with publishers and work alongside authors. Some actively work against commodification by never

promoting sponsored content and refusing to interact with authors on the platform. Some, like myself, land somewhere in the middle.

As BookTok evolves, we are also witnessing the evolution of a genre. The term genre, at least in rhetorical genre studies, doesn't refer to a particular category of text, such as romance, science fiction, or true crime. Instead, genre is used to define ways that texts work in the world. For rhetorical genre studies scholars Anis S. Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff, **genres** work to "normalize activities and practices, enabling community members to participate in these activities and practices in fairly predictable, familiar ways in order to get things done" (79). But they warn that genres also have to change when the communities using them or the technologies used to produce them change, or they "risk becoming obsolete" (Bawarshi and Reiff 79). BookTok demonstrates the fairly quick evolution of the genre of book reviews. I think people tend to think of the book review as a pretty stable genre, because they are easy to spot. It doesn't matter where they are published, whether that be in a print publication or online somewhere. A lot of times they are even specifically labelled "Book Review." They usually include a basic plot summary, describe the quality of the writing, and assess the general "value" of a book. These recognizable features are what one would call **genre conventions**. Part of the appeal of book reviews is that due to their easily spotted genre conventions, they are accessible to readers wanting to read a particular book and people trying to figure out what books they might like to read. In most cases, they aren't written by the actual author of the book that is being reviewed. In fact, often reviews published in newspapers or magazines (e.g., the reviews that have long been published in *The New York Times* or *Library Journal*) are written by someone who is a professional book reviewer. However, once book reviews moved into online spaces like Amazon, the book review genre changed, becoming more the territory of readers explaining what they like (or don't like) about a book, rather than being a more formal text written only by professionals. The spaces where book reviews by nonprofessionals appear have also evolved. For example, we've gone from book blogging, to BookTube (book-focused content on YouTube), to Bookstagram (book-focused content on Instagram), to where we are now, which is BookTok. These reviews all have their own alterations of the more "typical" form of the book review that one would see in *The New*

Activity System: Take 1

Activity systems are defined by Donna Kain and Elizabeth Wardle as being made up of "a group of people who share a common object and motive over time, as well as the wide range of tools they use together to act on that object and realize that motive."

In the early days of BookTok, the object(ive) and goals of the group were primarily just to share ideas about books they loved to read.

York Times or on Amazon, because a part of growing on these platforms is personality. People don't really care *who you are* on an Amazon book review, but on BookTube for example, half of the battle to get people to care and watch your review is the personality and the brand that you've created. Out of all of these video-review platforms, BookTok is the only one that has seen such a dramatic change in audience and creators since it's conception and contains content created by both the consumers and the producers—the producers in this scenario being both authors and publishers. The evolution of the genre of BookTok can be mostly blamed on the producers joining the platform, which changed how people consumed and created content on BookTok.

BookTok: The Activity System in the Early Days

When BookTok first started, it was made up almost exclusively of fans of reading, not so much any of the people that do the writing or work on the business side of publishing. According to Donna Kain and Elizabeth Wardle's definition of an **activity system**, this community could be understood as being focused on the "object" of sharing stories about books they had read. They did this through making short videos using the shared platform of TikTok. At first, BookTok was a platform that hadn't been polluted with paid promotions or authors trying to promote their own books in weirdly cringey ways. It was just people who love to read, posting about the books that they loved or making jokes about books. BookTok started off as a community of readers, for fellow readers. BookTokers, people who post on BookTok, didn't start posting in hopes of getting noticed by their favorite authors or getting deals with publishers. Instead, they saw a cool, short video medium where they could talk about the books they loved.

@BookaPlenty (Alias–Me): The Activity System (and Genre) Evolves

As you may have guessed or sussed out, I am a BookTok creator. I started on the platform pretty early into the pandemic and have been posting fairly consistently since then. Because I am on this platform and have been for years, that offers me a fairly unique perspective on this topic. And some of the information I can share involves specifically what I do with my videos to increase my viewers and followers. This is a fairly natural evolution of the genre of BookTok reviews and the activity system of making, sharing, and viewing reviews. That is, as users started posting more and more videos, a

new goal for creators evolved: to get more people to view and use the videos they made. And to do this, creators had to make choices in how they composed the videos that would, hopefully, lead to more viewing and more specific kinds of viewing.

In terms of my own content, my form of the BookTok review is a lot different from other creators. I find that the videos where I actually physically hold up a book and talk about it eloquently don't do as well as when I let my personality shine and just make a joke about a quote or an aspect of a book that I like. Due

Figure 4: This QR code leads to a TikTok post by @BookaPlenty.

to the nature of the platform and how the algorithm works (for me at least), the shorter the video and the more text I use, the better it does (Figure 4). This is because people often have to watch the video multiple times to read all the text, therefore making my post have a longer view time, which puts my video on more FYPs. Sometimes, a video does even better if I don't mention the specific book at all, just a quote. This is because people become interested and comment asking for the title, which increases engagement, and once again makes the algorithm push my content more. That is what a lot of creators do, especially if they promote mainly romance novels. A lot of their promotion is just posting a really good quote to get people interested, and then not mentioning the book, so they get more engagement. I feel like that is taking advantage of your audience a bit, so if I don't mention the title explicitly, I mention it in the caption, usually through the hashtags, so if people care that much, they can see it there. Due to the content I post, usually I just talk about something I liked in the book, not citing anything really of substance except for the tropes and a quote that I really like. That is enough to get people excited to read the book. So, as it evolved, BookTok not only became a place where people shared information about books; it also became a place where creators made changes to the genre, such as how we talk about books, what we quote, and how we try to get viewers and keep them engaged.

How Authors Change Reader Spaces

As BookTok grew in both size and popularity, it became more appealing to both authors and publishers. Here was a new social media platform to promote their books, and since it was still fairly new, there wasn't much competition. In the first few months of BookTok (March to May 2020), posts were made almost exclusively by readers, but then authors started to join the

platform. At this point in time, it was only a handful of authors, but it was enough to make a difference.

Now while this seems all good and dandy, it was not always fun and exciting for BookTok creators. In online book reviews, one rule of politeness that reviewers often follow is that they don't tag authors in negative reviews. But TikTok is an algorithm-based platform. If you are an author posting about your book, using the hashtag for your book, and tagging the tropes, your algorithm is going to show you content that is related to that. So now someone could post a negative video about your book, and even if they don't tag you, there is still a decent chance that you would see the video.

Coming from someone who has been on BookTok since the start and frequently posted videos calling out authors, this terrified me. I have a friend who posted a negative review for a book that they were provided with, and the author saw it and then made a whole post about it on Twitter and sent their fan base after my friend, so this fear wasn't unwarranted. At first, because BookTok was mainly made up of readers, it was a safe space to post your opinions and jokes about books without fear that the wrong people may see it. But when authors started joining, I began to censor what I posted based on whether that author had joined TikTok or not. This was one of the earliest examples of both commodification and the evolution of the genre. Authors obviously joined the platform to sell books. This wasn't the intention of the first creators on BookTok. Physical sales of books weren't necessarily a goal. But for whatever reason, and I am still not totally sure how it happened, BookTokers were affecting real, physical sales of books. Books that were published decades ago were climbing back onto *The New York Times* Best Sellers list. Books that had their hype back in 2012 got popular again and went into new printings. Even @caitsbooks, the original creator of BookTok, didn't know this was going to happen. It's clear to see why authors saw BookTok as a platform that they *had* to jump onto. Social media having this much power over book sales had never happened before, and the platform still didn't have many, if any, authors on it. It was the perfect time to join and take advantage of being one of the first authors on the platform to try to make your book go viral. Authors need to sell books to make money, and if their books go viral, this leads to a massive increase in book sales. They wanted to take advantage of that before the platform became overrun with authors, which is definitely something that has happened at this point. Before BookTok was a thing, an author would do a guest post on a blog or a collab for a YouTube video or Instagram post, but it never went as far as authors permanently joining the platform and making content that promoted their books.

Conflicts Emerge as the Activity System Expands

Having authors join the activity system of BookTok might not seem like it would make all that much difference. I mean, we're all still book lovers, right? Wrong. Authors being so intertwined with these review spaces turned out to be not so good for reviewers, or for the authors. When authors entered the space, possibly with the idea of promoting their books, they also encountered negative reviews, and some definitely didn't know how to handle that very well. Take Becky Albertalli, the author of Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda, which the movie Love, Simon (2018) is based on. Albertalli faced a lot of criticism for her writing about a gay male teen, when it was assumed she was a straight woman. Eventually the hate she received became too much and she posted a coming-out post where she announced that she is bisexual and was forced out of the closet. This situation is obviously terrible, but Albertalli really ran with it anytime she received any criticism. For example, there is a lesbophobic line in Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda, and when users simply stated that they didn't like the book because of that line, Albertalli responded and instead of apologizing, defended the line and labelled people who objected to the line as homophobic.

While this is an extreme example, small instances like this happen all the time. As a person who has participated in fandom spaces since I joined the Internet, one belief that I will always defend is that creators shouldn't be a part of fandom spaces. Individuals take whatever meaning from a story, and what they chose to do with it is not the author's business unless they are explicitly tagged with the intention of them seeing and commenting on it. In a fandom activity system, carrying out motives, goals, and objectives requires a certain kind of freedom—both the freedom to adapt the text to the fans' own experiences and the freedom to comment on the text as they choose.

> **BookTok Activity System: Take 2**
>
> When authors got involved in BookTok, the activity system became more complex, because the goals of the community of users and creators were no longer as unified. Different users, using the same space, were trying to achieve different object(ive)s.

As a result of the evolution of the book review genre on BookTok, authors are being forced to confront both negative and positive content about their books. They may join the platform because, from the outside, it looks like the perfect way to market their book. But what I think a lot of authors on BookTok fail to realize is that they are joining a previously reader-dominant activity system and are therefore going to be forced to see people both talk about and interact with their book. This actually points to an important and contentious way the review genre evolved on BookTok.

Reviews, for the most part, are not for authors but for readers. And on other social media platforms, authors can avoid reviews or comments in which they've been tagged. But due to the switch in platform and the algorithm that aided this genre's evolution, authors can be forced to see reviews of their own book without ever wanting to or seeking them out. A collaboration of sorts was starting to begin with authors and BookTokers. BookTokers previously held all the control over what books became popular, what content was being made, and how people promoted books on BookTok. But with the addition of authors to this space, BookTok creators lost some of this previously held control. Authors and BookTok creators both had similar content on the platform, but entirely different goals. They were using the same tools and platform, but they were actually engaged in different, often competing, activity systems. Authors specifically wanted sales and pre-orders of their own books. That's really all an author can ask for. But BookTok creators don't really care about actual sales. We aren't getting a commission for every copy of a book that we sell. A lot of us just want more people to read and enjoy a book that we liked. I know a lot of people on BookTok, including myself, don't really have friends in real life that like to read, so we wanted to talk to people who read and like the same books as us. If you noticed that no one had read a book that you loved, you posted about it hoping that more people would read it and you could talk about it together. The evolution of this genre, and the competing activity systems, created friction for both authors and BookTok creators that hadn't previously existed.

Publishers on BookTok (aka Capitalism Ruins Everything Once Again)

Once BookTok gained popularity and started affecting book sales, publishers saw a cheap and efficient way to market their upcoming books. BookTok, in the early days, was made up mostly of teenagers who were bored during quarantine and had no idea how much money to ask for in exchange for a post, so publishers could get a lot of free advertisement and make creators feel as if they were lucky to be getting an ARC (advance reader copy) as a form of payment (ARCS are early copies of a book sent out to reviewers before publication). This is still a fairly common practice for publishers. Instead of actually paying for marketing, they instead send you a finished copy of the book, in exchange for you posting about it. While this is nice, because then you don't have to buy the book, it is not a fair exchange for the number of people who see your video about the book and who then go out and buy it themselves. With the addition of paid posts and posts in exchange for a book, a new problem arose—another change in the genre and activity system that had some negative consequences, for readers and for creators.

When BookTok first started, you knew that if someone was posting about a book, they actually enjoyed it. No one was getting sponsorships yet, so everyone was recommending books that they would genuinely stand behind. But with the addition of sponsorships and paid posts, it became harder to figure out if someone enjoyed a book or if they were just getting paid to say that they liked it. What made BookTok so great at first was that people were giving out genuine recommendations and those recommendations made a book blow up to the point where it could get on *The New York Times* Best Sellers list years after its initial publication. This aspect of the activity system, its grassroots power, was tainted when publishers joined the game. This is an example of the idea of commodification that I wrote about earlier in the article. Publishers wanted to use the activity system for still another, different object(ive): they wanted participants to review specific books, as a way for them to make a profit, which is a commodification of both the people (BookTok creators) and the platform and genre. What started out as an activity based on fun and shared interest started to morph into a way to make money—although not for the creators themselves. This also had an impact on the activity system as a whole, because viewers of content on BookTok had a lot of suspicion and distrust related to the idea of sponsored content, so it changed the way they interacted with reviews on the platform.

Book of the Month (BOTM) Barges In: Activity System Take 3

This next evolution of the activity system of BookTok, in which publishers became involved, worked to change the activity system and the genre of the BookTok review even further. Book of the Month (BOTM) is a monthly book subscription box that markets itself toward nonreaders who aren't up to date with new releases. Participants who pay a yearly fee are allowed to choose books from a list. A bare bones subscription box only comes with the one book that you choose out of five selected releases. BookTubers (book-focused YouTubers) were some of the first paid supporters of the service a couple of years ago. But when BookTok started to gain more and more popularity, BOTM knew that they had to take advantage.

See, BookTok is one of the first, if not the first, book-centered social media platforms that is accessible to both readers and nonreaders. If you don't already read and aren't specifically searching out new recommendations, you aren't going to find Book Twitter or BookTube. Because of TikTok's algorithm, the people that are seeing BookTok recommendations are both readers that just want new recommendations and people innocently scrolling on TikTok when suddenly a BookTok video popped up and now they are

excited because they had previously convinced themselves that people stopped reading with the invention of cell phones.

BOTM saw this level of reach and ran with it, sponsoring a *ton* of different BookTokers to promote their box. BOTM is one of the most popular sponsored posts on BookTok (Figure 5). Creators that work with them have to post three videos each month and are brought on month by month. Some creators only work with BOTM for one month if their posts don't do well, and some work with them for months at a time. If you want to keep getting paid and receiving five free books each month, you have to have a consistent and growing reach with these videos. Having to post three videos every month for a subscription box that may not even have a book that interests you can get quite exhausting. Some of my friends on BookTok often talk about running out of ideas for original content to make and having to resort to creating very weird videos like seeing how high you can stack all your BOTM editions.

Figure 5: This QR code leads to a sponsored post for Book of The Month (BOTM).

Because of this particular commodification of BookTok content, there is definitely an oversaturation of BOTM content on BookTok. Everyone who is seeing these videos and would be interested in subscribing, already has. I can tell which day BOTM asks creators to post about the first book in that month's box because my following page will suddenly become a BOTM ad. Every creator on BookTok knows that these are sponsored posts and many of the creators don't even read the books they are promoting for the box. What once was a place where people could talk about and recommend books and services that they genuinely enjoyed and wanted more people to be aware of has now become infiltrated with sponsored content by people that don't even really enjoy the products or books that they are promoting. This ultimately means that BOTM is making BookTok less trustworthy because of these sponsorships.

The Distrust of Sponsored Content

To show an example of this, I'll talk about my recent posts about season two of *Bridgerton*. Netflix and Avon Books, the publishers of the *Bridgerton* books, sent me a massive package to promote the upcoming season. I didn't know that they were sending me this box, but I do love *Bridgerton*, so I was excited nonetheless. I posted a video in which I open the box and do a little bit about being all fancy watching the show. This post currently has 500

views and only seventy-eight likes which is pretty low for me. The day after season two of *Bridgerton* came out, I quickly made a video in my car as I waited to go into work about how I related to the characters of Kate and Anthony. This video that was not sponsored and that was made in about five minutes currently has 64.3k views and 6.9k likes (Figure 6). If this doesn't show how viewers value personal opinions rather than sponsored ones, I don't know what will. This is a clear example of the consumers themselves rejecting the commodification of BookTok. They see when someone is paid for a post or sent free stuff, and from that fact alone, they don't

Figure 6: This QR code leads to a TikTok about the Netflix series *Bridgerton*.

trust the content that they are watching. BookTok and the genre of the book review has generally been something that could be trusted. But because of this commodification, the level of trust in BookTok creators decreases with every sponsored post they make.

Final Thoughts

BookTok, while not without its faults and failings, is a platform that is truly changing lives. Not only for the authors whose books go viral, but for the creators as well. BookTok is a space that emphasizes and supports diverse creators and content. There is a Muslim BookToker who posts mainly about smut in romance books. There are many disabled BookTokers that I am friends with who share books with positive representations of people with physical, sensory, or mental disabilities. And there are so many queer creators that post about the lack of representation in books and share upcoming books *with* representation. At its heart, BookTok is a truly amazing place. But it's at its best and has the most success *without* the intervention of authors and publishers. Books don't go mega viral because they are already bought by a major publisher and have a big enough budget to pay people to post about it. Books go viral because they have everything set up against them, but then someone reads them, posts about them, and the fates of those books and their authors are changed forever. The evolution of a genre doesn't *have* to be a bad thing. It can have its positives and negatives, and that's something that especially happens in the evolution of writing in online spaces. For example, we can focus on how the evolving commodification of BookTok is both a positive and a negative. It's amazing that book reviewers are being paid, something that is still fairly new in the publishing industry, but we also need to look at how this commodification interacts with the honesty of the book review that we have been able to trust for such a long time. While the

activity system of BookTok will continue to change and be commodified, the platform will also continue to support the underdogs of the publishing world.

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Scientific Name

For naming plants there is usually 3 parts

[genus] [species] [family],

however some names don't include the full 3 part name. For example the Boston Ivy's scientific name:

[Parthenocissus] [Tricuspitata]

Fertilizer

Plant supplements for elements like nutrients, Boston Ivy should be fine without it though

Soil

The soil with help the plant grow. This plant requieres loamy soil, not to picky.

Ceramic material

Location

When picking a good location taking into account sun, temp., and likelyhood of being knocked over (if indoors). This plant however is unique because it grows and spreads, making the surround--ing environment it's own so moving this plant, even just the pot will probably break the plant's vines and roots permanantly

Label (Front)

This label shows the name as well as the plant's look when it grows in full bloom

Bostonely

Label (Back)

This label shows how much this plant must be watered how hot or cool it must be and how direct the sun light must be

This plant, a Boston Ivy, needs a healthy amount it's first season to make strong roots, but after that is just regular, water just when thirsty. This Boston Ivy grows between partial to full sun exposure, and temperature can not be too cold or in the negetives.

Ceramic Pot

This plant will be indoors so it can not stay in it's plastic container.

This cute one from Target will do very well since it is well ventalated for water.

Ventalation will make sure that the plant not only doesn't drown, but so mold won't grow killing the plant. Even raising the pot on top of a non obstructing height will gaurantee that water will not be backed up if it is laying on the ground directly. Be careful of wooden floorings.

Ventilation for Water below

Here's a Tip: Receipts Are Genres

Ola Al-Refae

In this article, Ola Al-Refae shares her experience with reading receipts in the US and in her home country, Jordan. She discusses different types of receipts and how they are considered genres by closely looking at their conventions. Al-Refae further explains how receipts work in an activity system using P-CHAT terms as a guide.

When I moved from Jordan to the US to obtain my PhD in English studies at Illinois State University (ISU), I knew I would face many challenges living by myself. Back home in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, my parents did everything for me; they paid the bills, bought groceries, and paid for our meals when we ate in restaurants. Life was much easier. When I went out with my friends, I used to pay for my own meals, but it wasn't complicated at all. The cashier tells me the price, and I pay the same amount with no issues whatsoever. However, when I moved to the US, I did not know that the first confusing thing I would encounter would be paying for meals.

My first meal here in the US was in Chicago, IL. I went to a restaurant after a twelve-hour flight from Jordan, and all I wanted was a nice meal to make me forget how sad I was to leave my country, friends, and family. I ordered a great meal that I enjoyed, and the waiter was really welcoming and nice. After eating the meal and paying for it, the waiter came back with two other receipts and a pen and left them on my table. Because I was extremely tired, I did not bother to read what was written on the receipts. The only

thing I saw was that one said customer's copy and the other said merchant copy, so I took my copy and left with no questions asked.

The next day, before heading to Normal, IL, I thought I would go to the same restaurant to have a nice meal because I knew I had a long journey ahead. What surprised me the most is that the waiter this time was not as welcoming as they were the day before. I wondered why the service was so radically different. I also wondered why I paid more than what the menu listed, so I told my friend about it who lives in the US, and I asked her why this was the case. The only answer I received from her was, "You're in the US now, you pay tax. And the waiter is maybe upset because you didn't leave them a good tip." My response was, "What? But I'm a foreigner!" and "What do you mean?"

I realized, later on, that tax is added right before they give you the receipt and that tipping in the US is a part of the culture. It is considered rude to not leave a tip, while in my country it is something optional that people don't usually expect to receive. And that's why I decided to explore receipts as a genre and an activity system.

Food for Thought: Genre and Activity System

According to the ISU Writing Program, an **activity system** is key to understanding how a particular genre works. Receipts are a **genre**, which is defined as a type of text that is used to make an action possible or impossible. For example, when we want to buy groceries from Costco, we need to make a payment in order to take the groceries home and receipts are one of the tools we need to make the process possible as it is proof of payment. Therefore, each payment we make has its own activity system with its own purposes, and each one of these payments has a receipt that helps achieve the goal. When thinking about the activity system that includes receipts, it is fair to say that receipts are not the only genre involved in situations where people are purchasing goods and/or services. For example, in the activity system of eating in or ordering food from a restaurant, other genres and tools involved might include menus, food items, apps, credit cards, cash, conversations, and so on. And all of these things are understood by participants in particular ways based on their prior experiences with other similar activities. Not

Activity Systems

According to David Russell and Arturo Yañez, activity systems are cooperative interactions aimed at achieving a goal. As a lens, the activity system helps us to analyze the psychological and social processes of achieving that goal. Each system has a goal(s), which is achieved through the work of people and the tools they use (Russell and Yañez).

only would the activity system be different if one were ordering for take-out or delivery vs. dining in, different kinds of restaurants and places that sell prepared meals use these tools and genres differently. In addition, as in my case, in different geographical locations and cultures, the activity system of ordering meals might have genres that are identified as similar (e.g., a receipt), but that work differently. If we take restaurant receipts from the US and Jordan as examples, the process would not be the same, and I'll explain why in the following paragraphs. Table 1 below shows how the activity systems would compare:

The subject here is the customer in two different places trying to achieve the payment goal or get proof of payment, which is done using receipts as tools.

But how are receipts a genre? Aren't genres horror, romance, and comedy? According to the ISU Writing Program, it's much more than that. Another definition of a **genre** is "a typified response to a recurring situation" (The Word Bird). In other words, it is a text that is produced in response to

Table 1: This table compares the process of interacting with a restaurant—and receiving receipts—in Illinois to an equivalent activity system in Jordan.

Steps	In Illinois	In Jordan
1	Search online to find and read about the restaurant.	Same as in Illinois
2	Go to the restaurant and interact with the wait staff.	Same
3	Read a menu and choose what you'd like.	Same
4	Receive the order and enjoy it.	Same
5	Receive the receipt.	Same
6	Pay cash or card or use an app.	Usually, pay in cash, but sometimes you might use cards.
7	Receive another receipt.	End transaction.
8	Add the tip.	
9	Leave one receipt on the table for the restaurant.	
10	Take the copy of the receipt that says "customer's copy."	

a situation. For example, we can say that a receipt (the response) is produced as proof of payment or in some cases to make the payment possible (the recurring situation). There are many different types of receipts. There are receipts that we receive from restaurants, shops, pharmacies, grocery stores, movie theaters, etc.

We can also have physical receipts that can be either printed or handwritten depending on the store and the country. You can have the receipt sent to your E-mail or as a text to your phone number, which is being used in various countries lately to reduce paper waste and save the environment. All of these texts are called receipts, but if we think about it for a moment, what is it that makes us understand these virtual interactions as the same genre as the printed version? How are they used similarly and differently? A lot of people would prefer to have their receipts as a physical copy because that would be easier for them to read and go back to instead of losing them with other documents on their digital devices. Many banks nowadays send receipts as notifications, E-mails, or even text messages to the owner of the bank account to notify them that a transaction has occurred from their account, which makes it easier when someone else is using the card because you would know where and when they used it, as well as the amount that was taken out of your account. There are many more receipts that can be examined and studied, as each one has its own purpose for existing. If we were to try to determine the conventions of receipts, we might list features that are found on many but not all of them. And we might also find texts that we could call receipts, but that don't have some of these key features or conventions. In particular, if we move into very different kinds of related activity systems (like eating in restaurants in one country or another), we might find more variation and key elements that are quite different from what we'd expect from a basic analysis of the conventions in the activity system we know more intimately. Let's discuss this in more detail.

Receipts are everywhere, so people are used to seeing them without thinking of them as genres. Although we have different kinds of receipts, we know how to read each one and differentiate between them without any confusion or extra effort. They have many common and different **genre conventions**, or features, that help us recognize one type of receipt from another. Some of the common conventions that we might see on almost every receipt are the date and time, which are there as proof of when the transaction happened. This makes it easier for both the store and the customer to go back and check records or surveillance when an issue occurs. The name of the store or restaurant is almost always there at the top of

Genre Conventions

Genre conventions are the features of each genre that can help us recognize it and differentiate it from other genres (ISU Writing Program).

the receipt to make it easier for everyone to know where the transaction took place. The phone number of the store/restaurant is also a convention that you can often find on the receipt as a means of communication that the customer can use to contact the store. The items or the service provided are also listed on the receipt to make it clear what the customer is paying for. The price is usually there next to the item to clarify how much each item or service costs and at the end of the receipt you will see the total price paid.

There are conventions that are common amongst all types of receipts, but there are also those conventions that are different, such as tips and tax. When Americans see the word "tip" on a receipt, they would immediately understand that it is for a restaurant or a café. However, people from different countries can find this confusing if they don't tip in their home countries, because they wouldn't have that printed on their receipts. In this case, it is our **antecedent knowledge** that is telling us how to read this genre based on our past experiences and knowledge. For example, my antecedent knowledge tells me that I'll pay the same amount I see on the menu. However, a person living in Illinois would have antecedent knowledge telling them that tax will be included later on. To better understand the differences in these genres and the activity systems, let's use the lens of P-CHAT.

> **Antecedent Knowledge**
>
> Antecedent knowledge is the knowledge that is gained from our past experiences and learning that comes into play when taking up any kind of genre (ISU Writing Program). This happens in ways that are both conscious and unconscious.

P-CHAT: A Seven-Course Meal

P-CHAT is a term used in the ISU Writing Program, which stands for pedagogical cultural-historical activity theory. It can be easily understood when it is broken down into its seven sub-concepts, which are distribution, reception, ecology, production, socialization, representation, and activity (Figure 1).

For this article, I'll use three of these sub-concepts to analyze receipts as genres: production, distribution, and reception.

Let's first take a look at what a receipt is. A receipt is a document that is usually handed to the customer as proof of payment or ownership. They are produced for various reasons, such as when they are legally required for certain kinds of transactions in order to keep track of the tax owed to the government. It is also produced so customers can use it to return or exchange items. Some customers like to keep receipts to calculate their
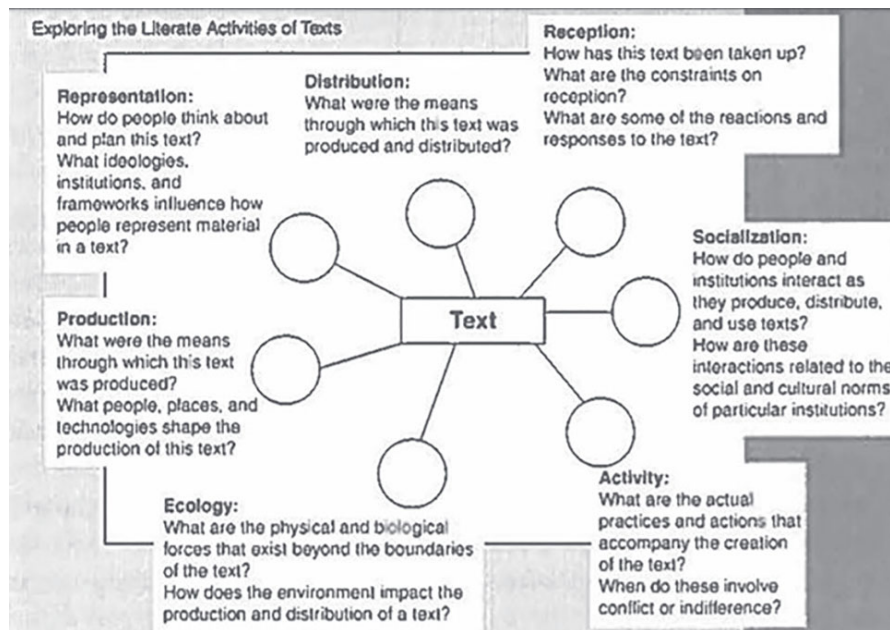
Exploring the Literate Activities of Texts

Representation:
How do people think about and plan this text? What ideologies, institutions, and frameworks influence how people represent material in a text?

Distribution:
What were the means through which this text was produced and distributed?

Reception:
How has this text been taken up? What are the constraints on reception? What are some of the reactions and responses to the text?

Production:
What were the means through which this text was produced? What people, places, and technologies shape the production of this text?

Socialization:
How do people and institutions interact as they produce, distribute, and use texts? How are these interactions related to the social and cultural norms of particular institutions?

Text

Ecology:
What are the physical and biological forces that exist beyond the boundaries of the text? How does the environment impact the production and distribution of a text?

Activity:
What are the actual practices and actions that accompany the creation of the text? When do these involve conflict or indifference?

Figure 1: A graphic describing the P-CHAT concepts from the ISU Writing Program.

monthly spending. Therefore, there are many types of receipts for different purposes, so when we think of **production**, we must consider various things since it is an umbrella term that involves the interactions of people, tools, and regulations that go into producing a genre. A receipt is usually created after a group of people talks about the products they are selling or the service they offer. Then, they decide on the price of each item or service and register it into their system or write it down. They make sure the receipts include the information needed for the specific service or product. However, the information on a receipt is also concise since, in most cases, receipts are not written in sentences or paragraphs, and they are not usually very long. Thus, different receipts have different information as the goal in an activity system varies. For example, a sales receipt when you buy new shoes might have a return or a refund policy written on it, so when you return the shoes, you need to have the receipt with you to show the date you bought the shoes to see if it's eligible to be returned or refunded.

There are also two different types of receipts that we interact with in our everyday lives, such as invoices and sales receipts. Sales receipts are the ones we receive when we buy goods, and they work as proof of exchange and payment. Invoices, on the other hand, work as payment requests; for example, we receive an invoice for the amount we need to pay for our electricity and water, and after paying the amount, we receive a receipt as

proof of payment. Also, if we want to paint the house or the apartment, we receive an invoice after the work is done to tell us about the service we received and the money we owe. Invoices are usually more detailed than sale receipts since they have been created to ask for money, give the customers more details about the amount for each service provided, and include the due date for the payment. Therefore, the way they are produced differs according to their goal and type.

When creating a receipt, the seller might check with the government regulations to check the amount of tax they need to apply. In a more complicated transaction, a lawyer might also play a part in the production to make sure everything is being done according to the law. Additionally, these days, the seller usually needs specialized equipment for printing out receipts and taking payments. In the past, when receipts were still mostly written manually, a seller might buy a pad of receipts and handprint information on them. These receipt pads often use some kind of carbon paper or similar technology that creates a second copy of what is written on the sheet.

The second P-CHAT sub-concept is distribution. **Distribution** is the way in which a genre is given to a certain audience. Receipts can be distributed hand to hand on printed papers, which might require a computer and printers, or be done using handwriting on a receipt pad. Some places do not offer paper receipts anymore to avoid harming the environment. However, they offer to send receipts as texts or E-mails; to do this, a computer, Internet connection, and a special program are needed. In other places, you get to choose to have a printed receipt, E-mail receipt, or both.

Reception involves the way that people take up or use a genre they encounter. The reception of receipts can be a bit complicated because people will perceive them differently according to their antecedent knowledge. Let me explain this further. Some people, or I should say, me, don't really like receipts. I always pay the amount and leave the receipt. However, when I came to the US, I learned to keep every receipt in case I want to return, refund, or just keep track of my finances. Other people might keep the receipts for their tax returns. Others like to keep receipts in case they need them for different reasons; my mom, for example, still keeps receipts from twenty-seven years ago. Whenever I ask about the price of something we bought a long time ago, she will immediately search for the old receipt to find the information.

The way different people react to or read a receipt is different. Some people enjoy learning about how many items they bought and the price of each one individually on one piece of paper. Other people like to look at the amount of tax they paid when they bought the items or received the service.
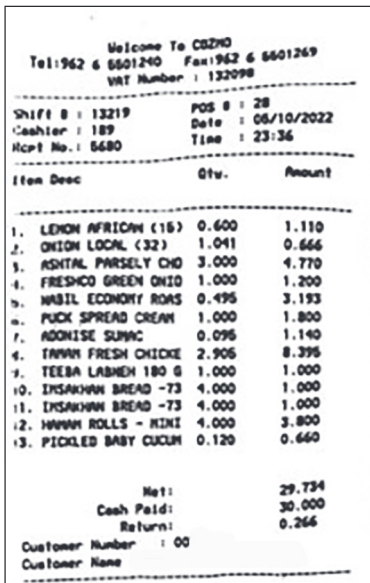
Figure 2: A US Walmart receipt.

Figure 3: A Jordan grocery store receipt.

Others like to check the information and other details provided on the receipts, such as special offers or return and refund policies. The receipt in Figure 2 is from a Walmart in Bloomington, IL. This receipt's goal is to give the customer proof of payment. For a customer who lives in Illinois, their antecedent knowledge would help them read this receipt, so it is not confusing at all because they already know what this kind of receipt looks like. However, a person who is from out of state or comes from another country might immediately wonder why they are paying more than what they thought the price was or why the return and the refund policy is not written on the receipt itself. The tax rate in the US differs from state to state because each state has its own laws. That is why at the end of the receipt, you would see a percentage of tax added to your total. But maybe, for a person who comes from Portland, which is in a state where they don't have a sales tax, it would take them some time to understand why the price is different than what the item says.

For me, in Jordan, the prices of items almost always include the tax percentage, so the amount you see on the item is the exact amount you pay at the cashier. The receipt in Figure 3 is from a grocery store in Jordan. You can see that in the receipt, we don't have the convention of tax. That doesn't mean that we don't pay tax in Jordan, but unlike in the US, this country has a unified tax system. This means that no matter where you go in Jordan, you pay the same amount of tax, which is included in the price of each item.

Therefore, we can say that the conventions of genres or receipts not only differ according to their goals but also according to their location. Let's look at another example: restaurant receipts usually have a "tip" on them. However, in some cultures, such as China, tipping is considered disrespectful, so you don't usually find it on the receipt. In the US, giving a tip is something expected from the person who's receiving the service. In some restaurants,

the customer receives one receipt with the total price of the food, which is usually labeled the "customer copy" (Figure 4), then they receive another receipt that allows them to add the amount of tip they want to give. This amount is usually a certain percentage of the total price (ten to twenty percent), so the customer needs to do the calculations and add the tip to the total of the receipt. Even if they consider the service not as good as expected, they usually give the least percentage (ten percent) and rarely leave without providing a tip as it is a cultural norm. In some restaurants or cafes, the customer is asked to add the tip to the machine before printing the receipt, and this way the customer will only get one receipt instead of two, as in this receipt from the Starbucks at the Hyatt in downtown Bloomington, IL (Figure 5). Yet, most receipts from a restaurant, café, bakery, or other store that serves edible things in the US (not just Illinois) would include a place for a tip.

I have mentioned earlier that tipping in some countries is considered disrespectful, but in other countries such as Jordan, tipping is considered something optional that the customer provides when they feel like the service was exceptional. It is only applicable if the customer would like to show appreciation to the provider or the worker. Tips in Jordan, if given, are usually given by palming (placing money in your palm and shaking the server's hand) or simply by leaving it on the table before leaving. Therefore, receipts in Jordan do not include the tip even if it was given to the worker. Another difference is that on this Starbucks receipt from Jordan (Figure 6), there is a return and refund policy that is written at

Figure 4: A US restaurant receipt.

Figure 5: A US Starbucks receipt.

Figure 6: A Jordan Starbucks receipt.

the bottom of the receipt. In Jordan, returns and refunds are not really that common; many stores prohibit such policies, and no one understands the reason for that. However, when a store or shop offers such a policy, it would be written at the bottom of the receipt so people could learn it.

I'm Stuffed–Check Please!

Learning about genre and the activity system of receipts might seem like a complicated process for looking at something that is so simple, but tools such as P-CHAT can help us understand how things around us operate within their sociocultural context. To understand the differences in these receipts, I had to talk to my friends in the US so they could explain the tipping system to me, and I had to search online to better understand why the price doesn't include the tax. I had to go through the process of searching, asking questions, and experimenting with the P-CHAT map and activity system in order to understand how receipts are genres and how that genre might look and operate differently depending on the place where the genre is produced.

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Practice Made Perfect: The Key to Turning Music into a Literate Activity

Sam Kelly

In this article, Sam Kelly describes his perfect method for practicing music by thinking about practicing as part of a literate activity system. Throughout the article, he notes different elements of activity systems through his and others' personal experiences to show the complex activities involved in becoming more proficient at playing music (or writing).

Like many other activities, playing music can often be rather challenging. There are so many rules, regulations, and standards in place that it can be difficult to even know where to begin. For the last four years of my music career (also known as the first four years of my music career), I have been plagued by the issue of being unable to find an efficient means of practicing (as there is no one correct way). It wasn't until I enrolled in English 101 in the Illinois State University Writing Program and paired it with my marimba lessons that I found the most clear-cut and effective way to practice by turning it into a literate activity. Throughout this article, I will be sharing with you the steps I try to take when practicing any sort of new music— essentially creating a literate activity—and how my experience could help you get started with any activity you choose.

Step #1: Score Study

Before starting the first step in the learning process, you must be aware of what a literate activity is. If you are currently enrolled in a course in the

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Figure 1: You can read Brianna Zangara's article about learning to cook by scanning this QR code.

Figure 2: You can read Charley Koenig's article about learning to play chess by scanning this QR code.

ISU Writing Program, you may already know the components of literate activity. But for those unaware, a **literate activity** is any activity that can use writing or language to document and analyze the different systems, people, events, tools, objects, or places that make up an activity. For example, although fixing a car may not be a literate activity on its own, in Kevin Roozen's *Grassroots* article "Unraveling 'Writing': Interweaving Maverick Literacies Throughout a Literate Life," Dan (a mechanic) used receipts and pictures from the purchasing of car parts to create a record of the different interactions and tools someone would need to repair one. This, in turn, created a new literate activity out of fixing up a car. Just to reiterate, documenting a literate activity can be done with all sorts of activities, especially things that are complex, like learning to cook (Figure 1), or that require a lot of learning and remembering, like learning to play chess (Figure 2). It can be as simple as writing down how you feel about a subject to writing a 2000-page thesis and analysis of your activity! Additionally, when learning a new activity, you slowly build up your "literacies" over time, as Charley Koenig did with learning chess. She used various tools, people, texts, and strategies to build her knowledge.

Now that we understand the exciting and complex process of a literate activity—documenting the how, why, and where of our learning—it's time we dive headfirst into my learning documentation of how I study and learn new music for performance. Now there are many different reasons for an individual to want to learn music. Most of my efforts are placed into learning a variety of the percussion instruments, such as the keyboards (Figure 3), drums, and auxiliaries, needed to become a well-rounded percussionist.

Figure 3: This is a marimba, one of the keyboard percussion instruments I spend most of my time with. It is the largest of the keyboards and uses wooden bars with notes laid out similar to a piano that sounds when struck by a mallet.

However, the type of literate activity I will discuss here is the general process of practicing a piece of music that will eventually be performed. The first step is studying the score and following along while listening to the music. This step is mainly about gaining all of the preliminary information you can about the piece of music. If you need help with things to look for, try researching questions such as: Why did the composer write this piece? What emotions do they want the audience to feel? Are they painting a picture? Are they telling a story? Who/what else was involved in the creation of this piece? And so on . . . These are some of the questions that Kayla Connett asked herself in her *Grassroots* article, "Exploring Music," as she analyzed a piece of choral music. Kayla notes throughout her work how important it is to use activity systems, specifically music's socialization, to connect the audience to the performer. An **activity system** is any group of people who work together, combining history, communication, and the ability to evolve and change over time to achieve a specific goal (ISU Writing Program). In Kayla's specific case and mine, the activity systems revolve around the performers and the audience for whom the band or choir is performing. To pull this off, though, all parties in the system must have historical knowledge of the activity, which may include doing research.

Conducting research prior to learning is crucial to understanding the piece of music and how you will begin to practice. For instance, Shannon Harman uses the P-CHAT model in her *Grassroots* article "Scales, Saussure, and Socialization: Applying CHAT and Linguistic Theory to Music Notation" to note the differences in musical notation between guitar tablature and the traditional sheet music that most people think of with regard to "reading music." Shannon notes that cultural history has pushed sheet music to the forefront of the genre. Even though both tab and sheet music notate the same idea, sheet music covers a broader range of instruments while also implementing the use of many different symbols that take time to learn. However, because sheet music requires learning a whole language of symbols and a wide range of instrumentations, those who read tabs are not commonly seen as being able to read music because they only have to look at a number correlated to the fret on any string. In fact, tabs won't even tell you the name of the note you are playing, only where to play it. Yet, if you are working on learning to play a particular instrument, many of them have specific types of notations that are specialized for those instruments. For example, a clarinet player would not be able to use snare drum notation to have meaningful practice as the notes do not change, and the rhythms and techniques used are vastly different from what a clarinet could produce. And it would be the same if you purchased clarinet music for the snare drum. Without a bit of score study before you practice or even before you purchase the music, you
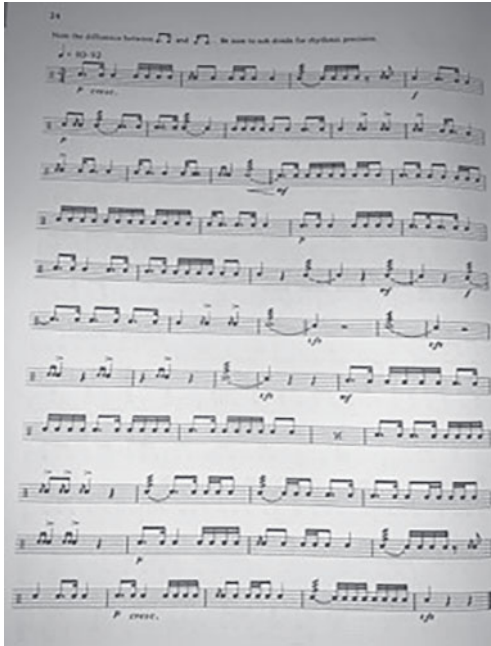
Figure 4: A moderately difficult piece for snare drum that would not go over well (but might be quite funny) if played on the clarinet.

may find that the new sheet music you are excited to learn is impossible to play with your skill set or instrument (see Figure 4).

Step #2: Chunking the Music

After you have done the research and plotted out your tactics and goals with the musical piece, it's time to start playing your instrument. However, learning the whole piece in one sitting can be daunting. Even if a first read-through to the end may be helpful (depending on the difficulty of the music or time constraints), I find that it is always more beneficial to break the music into chunks and learn it slowly until you finally bring them all back together (Figure 5). Many musicians despise this slow learning

Figure 5: This is one of the pieces for vibraphone (a metal keyboard instrument that can be sustained with a pedal) that I am currently working on. It definitely needed to be chunked and practiced with a lot of repetitions in order to learn the notes and the stickings (the decision to use your right- or left-hand mallet to play a note).

process and become very impatient and try to learn as quickly as possible. However, this is a perfect example of them not using their **antecedent knowle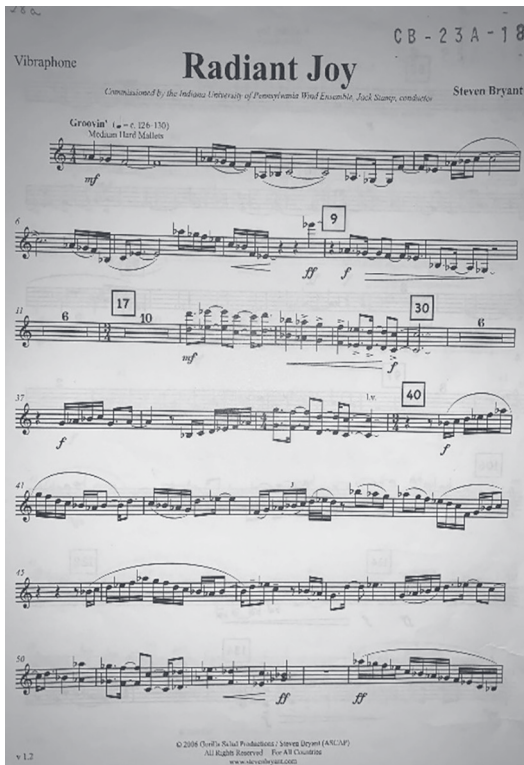dge** (the Writing Program's fancy term for any prior experience or knowledge on a subject). For me, this has been realizing that the slow process of learning notes yields more significant results in the long term. I also have to use my antecedent knowledge to know what notes and rhythms are found in the music. If I began looking at a piece of music and had no idea how to identify the notes correctly, this whole process would be utterly useless. Antecedent knowledge connects everything and drives the need and want to gain more understanding to add to your library of information in order to have a higher skill set when facing a similar task in the future.

Step #3: Practice, Practice, Practice . . .

After all the chunking has been completed and the notes in the piece have been studied, the grueling process of daily scheduled practice begins. This step is the most difficult for many musicians as creating a schedule and sticking to it is not an easy task, especially if you often get distracted like me. However, like writing, the need to consistently practice is vital to improving, or else feelings of inadequacy and loss of skill will eventually creep in and take over. Trust me when I say that no one likes that (especially not the author of this article). I experienced that feeling of inadequacy when I came to ISU. Using my antecedent knowledge from my high school AP English class, I knew that if I constantly wrote over the summer, then English 101 would be a piece of cake for me. However, I did not listen to myself and decided I needed a break from formal writing, which was a mistake. Taking a break put me through the wringer when college classes started. Although, as I wrote more and more throughout the semester, I noticed that it became easier to hit higher word counts than I could in high school.

As you progress in your skill and practice of any activity, making it as enjoyable as possible for your audience and yourself should be a high priority. This can be done in music by adding phrasing or dynamics (how loud or soft a particular note is played) depending on how you want to shape the message for the audience. These additions can be a tricky skill to master, but the perfect way to see if you are making your unique statement is to simply record yourself during practice and use writing to analyze the recording. This method may sound simple, yet not only will you learn how to assess your playing, but you will also increase your ability to judge and assess the playing of future students if you plan to become a music educator. Taking an outsider's view of your playing will open many opportunities, but to achieve

this, you must use writing and create a new writing identity. As I assess myself within music and continue to build my new writer identity, I have increased my skill and ability to conjure up words to describe what could be improved in my musicality. I would take the bet with 100% odds that being able to assess yourself and come up with the right words to describe your assessment will allow you to be that much better of a teacher or a learner, as you will soon realize that you too have faults that require improvement.

Step #4: The First Rehearsal *Gasp*

Some musicians apply their antecedent knowledge, new knowledge, and practice without recognizing others. As a result, they never feel the need to combine their efforts with other musicians. But if, for instance, you are a marimba or tuba player, or your dream has always been to be the lead guitarist in a heavy metal band, then you, my friend, might consider moving on to the next step: rehearsal with the band. Although rehearsal is another form of practice and there is no real danger, there is always the fear that you might mess up in front of your peers and they may make fun of you, or worse yet, you may feel that you are not good at this mutually beloved activity. Of course, no matter what, don't put yourself down because everyone makes mistakes. Secondly, (and this is coming from personal experience), even if you get embarrassed, that still counts toward the socialization portion of your new activity system. Once again, harking back to the Illinois State University Writing Program, an activity system analyzes the cooperative (that's key) interactions through psychological and social processes that make up an activity that must constantly evolve socially from its original historical context. An activity system does not belong to one person but instead sees an entire collective working for one or more unified goals, and such is the case for a full musical ensemble rehearsal. This is where every musician collectively gathers to use their instruments in a social context to evolve their music into a form that the audience can enjoy. The ensemble represents just one small part of the activity system. Other components found within the same space of a single activity system include the makers of the instruments, construction workers for the building, parents and teachers of the students, and all the instruments themselves (which are tools).

Step #5: Bringing History into Your Playing

While on the subject of a band's activity system, I will briefly explain the rich historical activity that wind bands in schools have to offer for that system.

It stems from the American colonies in which hymns would be taught to students to bring them closer to God and teach them music ("History of Music Education"). The music program stayed on that fairly steady track until John Philip Sousa gave rise and popularity to marching bands in the nineteenth century. Many people fell in love with the sound that the bands provided, and they wanted their kids to join an organization and learn how to play classics, such as Sousa, without the need for expensive string instruments. From that day on, the tools and socializations within the wind band have evolved and grown from that original historical context, making it inseparable from today's musical groups.

Along with the band's history in schools, we must, more importantly, take the time to look deeply into our histories. My experience with music in a more classical environment was very limited before high school. In fact, I never even considered joining a school band until my friends convinced me to try it during freshman orientation. However, I knew that I wanted to stay in the program as soon as I went to the first rehearsal for our marching band, and my director put me on the xylophone, which I instantly fell in love with playing. Being in a school band gave me such a thrill as I worked with my peers around me and made lifelong connections that can only be attributed to that activity system (see Figure 6). Even to this day (as a music major in college), I think back to the pure excitement and struggle of learning a new skill with my favorite group of people, and it helps me to push myself

Figure 6: My fellow percussionists and I taking a picture after having performed wonderfully at my first ISU Symphonic Winds concert in my freshman year after months of rigorous literate practice.

forward if I'm ever feeling discouraged. Besides my music history, it always helps to consider my other antecedent knowledge and life experiences to bring my emotions and story into the music I am trying to learn. That is how you create art out of music written on the page—which is why I find this step to be one of the most crucial in the list, because of your creativity and life being introduced and connected to someone else's creation. That is the activity system fully at work!

The Final Step . . . The Concert *DUN DUN DUUUN*

The culmination of all your hard work put into one night, one performance, is roughly nine levels above rehearsal on the stress scale. Only one shot shows the audience precisely what you have worked on for months in a heart-pounding, thrilling, and terrifying experience. In other words, it's just a concert (that's what you have to tell yourself). This night is full of socialization and production, allowing your audience to feel and hear the effects of all your hard work with research, chunking, practice, and rehearsal. The way I am describing these concerts is genuinely how they feel in the moment. It is very similar to giving about four or five different presentations all in one hour, each one more complex and stressful than the last. But this concert is where beautiful communication between the band and the audience happens, and we can also understand that interaction through literate activity. The writing in the program notes, the marking on the sheet music pages to let wind players know when to breathe, and the sticking that the drummer wants to use on their solo all contribute to the concert experience. Additionally, the audience's use of literate practices, such as texting a friend (better not be during the songs) about the performance, further transforms the concert into a collective experience. Through these various forms of writing, the activity systems of the show expand from just a few buds rocking in a garage into a large group of individuals enjoying their favorite activity.

Although you may have originally thought, "There is no way this music nerd can connect practicing music to a literate activity," I hope you're thinking now, "WOW, this music nerd just blew my mind! I can't wait to involve writing in all my activities more consciously, just like him!" And to that, I say, "Thank you! Thank you! You are all too kind!" However, with great seriousness and all jokes aside, I hope you can better understand the process of practicing writing to improve, and how that process involves more time and people and tools than you might first have imagined.

Bonus Step: Relax and Reflect

Now that the stressful concert has concluded and the audience has witnessed your hard work, you can finally relax and unwind. You know that you have developed repeatable skills that will allow you to maximize efficiency in future concerts and practice sessions. Whether your performance is submitting a paper or testing a car that you have fixed up, you can sleep soundly knowing that you have worked hard to create a literate activity and given it your all.

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Sam Kelly (middle) is a freshman music education major at Illinois State University. He loves all things related to band and music despite only being involved for the last four years, starting in his freshman year of high school. He comes from a small town known as Pontiac, IL, where his love for music began. Sam hopes to further his career in music by becoming a high school band director to inspire other kids to love music and each other. His love for God, his friends, and his family keeps him going throughout his everyday life, and he truly feels there is never a dull moment to be had with other people around.

"You Want Me to Do What?": The Trials and Errors of Coding

Jessica Kreul

In this article, Jessica Kreul explores her personal experiences learning about computer coding by focusing on the genre research and repeated practices that were needed to engage in this new genre.

When I chose to add a Digital Rhetorics course to my schedule for spring 2023, I had no idea that I was going to be expected to code. I thought to myself: I'm an English major! What could coding possibly have to do with English studies? When I enrolled in the course, I figured that we would be discussing the ways that rhetorical strategies are used in online spaces. This is not terribly far off from what we discussed in class, but it certainly doesn't encompass everything that the class has to offer. So, although I approached the idea of coding with a lot of skepticism and the belief that I could never figure it out, I've ultimately realized that there are many similarities between my coding and writing processes. In other words, I can consider coding to be a new kind of literacy. It has its own rules and strategies, as well as a range of learning resources that I had to figure out how to engage with. While I would definitely still call myself a novice coder (a thing I never imagined I would say), I've learned to see my coding process as similar to struggles I sometimes have when writing. Both include multiple rounds of revision accompanied by agony, doubt, hopefulness, and finally, triumph.

Read My Lips: I Don't Code

I had the expectation that coding was going to be too difficult for me to learn because of my antecedent knowledge of the topic. Having **antecedent knowledge** is often positive, like when your experience in doing one thing translates easily to a new task that is similar. For example, imagine you are learning a new game and you come to find that it's pretty similar to one you've already played. In situations like this, your foundation of knowledge, or, at least, your awareness of possible connections between two activities, can be useful as you continue to learn about a topic and progress your skills. But prior knowledge (which is what Ambrose et al. call this kind of knowing) can also be problematic when the things you already know get in the way of new kinds of learning. Unfortunately, this is something like what happened to me. My previous experiences with seeing code and hearing it explained made me resistant when I began to interact with and attempt to understand it myself. I was expecting it to be incredibly difficult. This is because I had seen code being produced by experts who had studied it exclusively, and I never dreamed that it would be something I could begin to learn in a semester. Of course, I am only learning the basics of coding. However, the same codes that I now see as simple, I stared at with confusion a couple months ago because I believed that I would never understand them. For example, when I first opened the application that I would be working with to practice coding, which is called Brackets, I could not even begin to decipher what I was looking at (Figure 1). It looked just as complex as the coding I had seen before taking the class, and, honestly, I wasn't sure that I was willing to learn it. In fact, I was incredibly doubtful I would end up succeeding in the course and that terrified me. Despite my worries, I had committed to taking the class, and, therefore, I committed to learning how to code. After a few weeks of taking the course and having done some surface research and practice coding myself, this page was no longer as daunting to try and interpret. I can look at that code and understand what lies within the boundaries of the web page thanks to the <body> element and the fact that any of the code that appears above that element will not appear on the web page. I know that the <h1> element specifies what the main heading, or title, of the web page is, and the <h2> element specifies a subheading.

> ### Prior (Antecedent) Knowledge
>
> "[P]rior knowledge will not support new learning if it is insufficient or inappropriate for the task at hand. [Additionally], research indicates that inaccurate prior knowledge . . . can distort new knowledge by predisposing students to ignore discourse or resist evidence that conflicts with what they believe to be true" (Ambrose et al.).

Knowing the basics of computer coding has allowed me to pick apart seemingly complex code strings to find some sense of clarity. So, while my

Figure 1: The introduction page on the Brackets application.

antecedent knowledge surrounding coding was not necessarily incorrect, it did alter my perception because I did not have the additional context that I needed to properly situate that knowledge. Had I known what I would be able to achieve through my efforts, I don't think I would have viewed coding as something outside my realm of capability. Yet acquiring this new skill and shifting my mindset didn't come without a process of studying and experimenting, as well as going through a range of emotions that took me from horror to actual enjoyment of what I was learning.

Let's Learn About Code . . . I Guess

In order to learn how to code my own web page, I needed to first conduct **genre research**. This work is accomplished by researching the information and tools that are required or would be useful in creating a text within a particular genre. For me, this meant consulting the book, *HTML & CSS: Design and Build Web Sites* written by Jon Duckett. Before learning the specific codes that I would need to create a text for my class assignment, it was an absolute necessity that I understood what the purposes of the different elements were and how they generally operated. This meant recognizing the general structure of code and how it would translate and appear on a web page. Within a single web page, there are multiple elements that are surrounded by defining tags. Those tags are the codes that tell the computer exactly how to read and render what is situated within them; the tags will not show up on the web page, only what is written inside of them does (Duckett). While I understood what the text was getting at, I still didn't know how

to translate this idea into what it would look like in action. Once I came across a couple of images that showed exactly this process, I compared the text to the image to see how the tags defined and affected the text within them. These images helped me see that the <body> element outlines the boundaries of the page and whatever resides between them will appear in the browser window after it has been rendered. Within the bounds of this element are more elements that define headers (<h1>) and paragraphs (<p>). I use headers and paragraphs constantly in my academic writing, so the familiarity of these terms certainly helped me grasp the purpose and order of these elements—they were describing a structure that I was used to. I began to feel more confident moving forward, but I was still conscious of how I could best learn the process and did not want to overwhelm myself before I attempted to code.

Now that I had an incredibly basic understanding of what tags I needed to simply create and define the boundaries of a web page, it was time to try it out for myself. It would not have been beneficial for me to keep learning codes without actually practicing the basics first—there are simply too many codes to learn and memorize before even putting them on a page. My research needed to be a simultaneous effort of interpreting knowledge and then immediately putting it into practice. Luckily, I did not have to search hard for an application that was capable of rendering code, as my professor told us that we would all be using Brackets. This tool is incredibly simple to use; the only complex aspect is the code that will eventually be entered by the user. Although, I did have to conduct some outside research of my own to get better acquainted with the application and appreciate its many affordances before I could begin to play around with my new coding knowledge.

```
/chapter-01/body-head-title.html                    HTML

<html>
  <head>
    <title>This is the Title of the Page</title>
  </head>
  <body>
    <h1>This is the Body of the Page</h1>
    <p>Anything within the body of a web page is
    displayed in the main browser window.</p>
  </body>
</html>
```

                                                    RESULT

This is the Body of the Page

Anything within the body of a web page is displayed in the main browser window.

Figure 2: This image is from the book *HTML & CSS: Design and Build Web Sites* and shows code and how it would render in a browser.

One of my first coding mistakes remains a vivid memory of frustration. I was struggling to set up a brand-new page that was capable of interpreting HTML, which is a specific language used for tagging different areas of text. I had attempted to enter similar codes from the images in Figure 2, however, I did not define the page correctly as being HTML, so it would not allow

```
1 ▼ <html>
2 ▼      <head>
3              <title>My First Web Page</title>
4         </head>
5 ▼      <body>
6              <h1>Welcome to My First Web Page<h1>
7                  <p>This is an HTML page that I created in Brackets.</p>
8              <p>I have absolutely no idea how to code, but I feel like I'm doing it?</p>
9         </body>
10  </html>
```

Figure 3: My first attempt at coding using HTML.
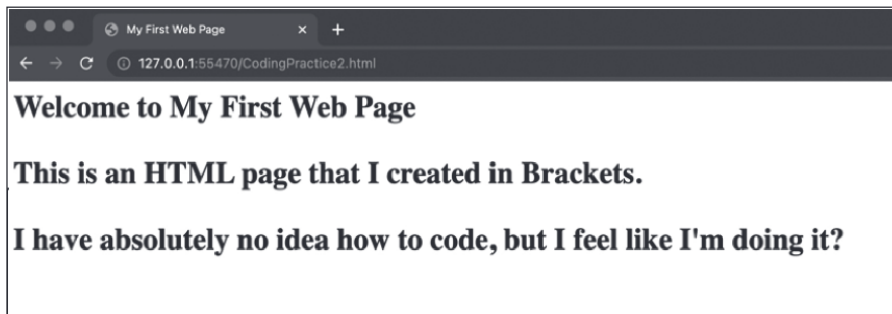
Figure 4: My first attempt at coding using HTML after it has been rendered.

the browser to open and display the text. To try to figure out what was going on, I headed to my favorite place to watch other people do the exact skill that I'm struggling with and explain it in more concise and clearer terms: YouTube. I'm a visual learner, so YouTube is my best friend. Within twenty seconds I had the solution to my first obstacle, which was two simple clicks at the bottom of the Brackets file. All this research to figure out what coding is, how it is structured, how it appears, the tools that I needed, and a few other details had to come together before the action of coding took place. Because I was able to find a solution so quickly, I did not have enough time to get so irritated that I needed to step away. My determination to learn was still going strong.

Coding as a Genre

Earlier, I mentioned that my process of learning code is like my writing process. However, the genre of HTML code, as it appears on the computer screen, is unlike the typical writing genres that I am used to. It's highly specific, and there is not a lot of room for error. If a mistake does slip through and the computer still manages to read the code, there is a good chance that the

mistake will reveal itself by altering a different element further down in the code. I suppose this is somewhat like writing an essay where one might make a statement and then contradict themselves later in the paper. However, there is a key difference that makes coding a genre that requires extreme precision. If I miss a comma in my paper, the likelihood of my intended meaning being lost is slim—the reader will carry on. If I miss a specific character or bracket required in a tag, then the element will not render correctly, which can affect the appearance of the code and ruin it. In Figure 3, there is a mistake in my code where I did not complete the element by using a slash in my closing tag, so all the text underneath it appeared as a heading instead of the paragraph style, which is set in a smaller font. You can see how this rendered incorrectly in Figure 4. Brackets is handy because it highlights the mistake in red and lets the user know that something is not working. Once I consulted the book again and this was fixed, I was able to successfully render my page and it appeared correctly in the browser for the first time (see Figure 6). The feeling was glorious; I could not believe how cool it was to see my work in action, and I wanted to code more. Although I now have the instinct to make sure I have opening and closing tags to surround my text, I did not realize how crucial this step was until I experienced the frustration of having written a block of code that was going nowhere.

While sometimes I have to go back and figure out the error in my tags, occasionally the entire element is wrong. This can happen when certain tags may have worked once before but have since evolved, or it can happen when I attempt to enter a code that my application and/or browser does not recognize. I came across this discovery while conducting genre analysis, which may sound similar to genre research but actually has a key difference. According to the ISU Writing Program, **genre analysis** examines the genre as it appears in different forms, as each variation of it may contain different features. Genre research allowed me to understand the overall basics of how code is written and how it appears once it has taken its final form on a web page, in addition to the tools needed to be successful. My genre analysis of coding was my exploration into the different ways that codes are written for particular purposes. For example, when I wanted to add a video to my web page, I needed to consult the Internet because I did not have any idea how to make that happen. Luckily, I discovered endless websites that provided me with an answer to my problem, except that they all proposed different codes. This is where the frustrations of trial and error come into play. How was I supposed to know which code would work with both my application and my browser?

There was no way to know until I tried the code, and it ended up working out. Figure 5 shows the multiple codes for inserting videos that I

```
 1 ▼ <html>
 2 ▼       <head>
 3              <title>My First Web Page</title>
 4          </head>
 5 ▼     <body>
 6
 7
 8
 9 ▼         <video width="auto" controls>
10                  <source src="img/bobmarley.mp4" type="video/mp4">
11          </video>
12
13
14          <video src="bobmarley.mp4" width="320" height="240" controls></video>
15
16
17 ▼         <video width="320" height="240" controls>
18                  <source src="bobmarley.mp4" type="video/mp4">
19          </video>
20
21
22
23      </body>
24  </html>
```

Figure 5: Three different codes for embedding a video.

found on different websites. They are all supposed to code the same video, but the video only appeared once because only the top code worked. Although I wanted to be content with my success, it was to my benefit to understand why some codes worked for me and others did not. Studying the **genre conventions**, or features, of the code proved to be the best course of action to give me a better idea of what my application favored. Codes must be written in a certain order, similar to the way that words connect to form sentences that can be understood; there are rules. However, going from one website to another, that order started to change, and certain elements appeared in one code but not in another. Despite how similar they all looked, I needed to see which specific codes were rendering on my page, memorize the elements present and their order, and then look for similar codes when attempting to try more things later.

Where Coding Meets Writing

All of this research contributed to writing what some may consider to be simple code. Now, as an English major, I write almost daily. So, it might seem kind of silly that I am so proud of a single page that contains a header and a couple sentences (Figure 6). But as I learned more about how to do different things with code, I realized that I was actually starting to like the processes of coding, both in the research that I was doing to learn how to do different things and also the satisfaction I felt when the code that I wrote loaded and functioned properly. Through all of this activity, I think I went

Figure 6: My first attempt at coding using HTML corrected.

from reluctant learner to a proud (if still novice) coder, and I might even have a new hobby.

I have come to see coding as another way of writing and communicating. Writing code and writing as an English major are different, yes—in many ways. But coding is a really useful tool for making different kinds of texts that I didn't have access to before. For example, before this class I could have written the content for a web page but would have had to find someone else to actually create it. Now, I can do both! I have managed to compare my experiences with coding to writing in multiple ways so that the activity better fits in with what I am already used to doing despite the differences between these two genres. I am constantly writing papers because of my major, and coding has found a way to fit right in. Both require research at varying points throughout the process, whether it is looking up how to use a word correctly in a sentence or how to use code to change a font color. I have written a terrible sentence or two in my academic career, and I have written multiple incorrect codes in my incredibly short coding career. There are many ways that I can write a sentence and many ways that I can write a code, but it is about finding the best means to achieve my goal. I can then store that knowledge so that it gets easier each time I sit down at my laptop, whether gearing up to write *or* code. With both, I am constantly improving my skills and adapting my antecedent knowledge. Before I took this Digital Rhetorics course, my antecedent knowledge told me that I would have to study computer coding for years and then *maybe* I would understand, and even then, I was doubtful. Now, because of my experience with coding, my antecedent knowledge tells me that I don't know everything, but I am capable of finding answers, learning, and doing.

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The *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* Presents: Picturing Literate Activity

The Early Bird Battles the Night Owl

Nichol Brown

PLA Narrative: "The early bird gets the worm." Sure, but what if the early bird keeps falling asleep at her desk? In my first semester as a graduate student, I had class at 8 a.m. and regularly arrived on campus at 6:30 a.m.—with the hope that I would suddenly be super productive while trapped in my office. Lo and behold, ninety percent of the time, I found myself asleep at my desk. I had to admit to myself that I was a night owl through and through. My most productive times were from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m., and that was OK.

Yet now I am, reluctantly, a newly hatched early bird. Lately, I have been falling asleep at 10 p.m. on the couch; my brain tells me that my most productive hours are still ahead of me, but my body disagrees. As my night owl and early bird tendencies go to war with each other, I have found myself in transition—a transition that is common when our schedule changes every semester, but that is even more decisive now that I'm getting older. With this transition, I have found that my space to be productive can stay the same—my trusty couch and cozy blankets—but the time of day has had to change. Good morning, productivity!

Figure 1: The cozy space where Nichol both naps and works . . . depending on the time of day.

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Nichol Brown is a PhD student in Children's Literature at Illinois State University who researches fairy tale retellings and posthumanism. In her free time, she channels "grandma energy" by knitting, baking, reading, and falling asleep on the couch at 10 p.m.

My Football Life in Four Quarters: Rediscovering a Lost Literary Identity

Evan Craig

In this article, Evan Craig discusses the role of football in developing his desire to write in sports media. He breaks down that evolving interest throughout his life and explains how it helped him to reclaim a literary identity that was once lost.

First Quarter: Kicking off My Path into the Writing Field

There's an opening kickoff at the start of every football game. This is where a special teams player kicks a ball off a tee toward the end zone. A player from the opposing team who receives the kick can choose to kneel, automatically placing his team's offense at the thirty-yard line, or run it out. If a player elects to return the kick, a mad dash toward the opposite end zone ensues. The overall goal is to score a touchdown before being tackled by any of the eleven pursuers on defense.

There's nothing quite like the excitement an opening kickoff brings. It signals a fresh start and new beginnings as both teams begin the first quarter in a scoreless tie. Of course, there's still plenty of time for one of them to disappoint, but until then, optimism and the deafening screams of fans packing the stands fill the air.

From the moment I started watching football as a kid, I have wanted to get into sports writing. Something about the game spoke to me, yet I began with a scoreless tie when I first entered my football life.

Football symbolizes Americana much like rock and roll, hot dogs, Tom Hanks, and apple pie. However, many Americans are only exposed to the sport while watching the Super Bowl—that used to be me. I only cared about football when it meant I could slip into a food coma from all the chicken wings I'd consumed. So how did I shift from being a wing-eating fair-weather fan to one who lives and breathes the sport, ready to write about it in a future career? I'd say my fandom started when I was thirteen years old, about to enter seventh grade. I expressed a growing desire to learn about the game, how it was played, and about different teams. I guess it kind of came out of nowhere, but the origin didn't matter. Once the ball was in the air, I was committed to my route.

Now, this isn't a story worthy of its own *ESPN* documentary, but it's still deserving of (some) hype. As I kick off the story of my football life, I'll explain how I navigated through all the challenges in my path and how those obstacles assisted me in rediscovering my writing identity.

Second Quarter: Overcoming an Early Deficit with Research

Entering the second quarter, I found myself down only one possession. I didn't really know much about the game beyond the basics. It should be easy to tie the score back up, as long as my dreadful defense doesn't find a way to blow it . . . *again*.

To get a better understanding of my newfound football life, I decided to look into why it had fascinated me so much. But, for the life of me, I couldn't tell you how or why it happened. It just *did*. I've never pinpointed

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Learning New Literacies

When people are trying to learn to do something (a process which can take a lifetime) the process will require them to engage with a huge range of different semiotic resources.

Semiotic resources are the actions, materials, and artifacts we use for communicative purposes, whether produced physiologically—for example, with our vocal apparatus or the muscles we use to make facial expressions and gestures—or technologically—for example, with pen and ink or computer hardware and software—together with the ways in which these resources can be organized. Semiotic resources have a meaning potential based on their past uses, and a set of affordances based on their possible uses, and these will be actualized in concrete social contexts where their use is subject to some form of semiotic regime (van Leeuwen).

what exactly got me into watching football, but I will be forever grateful for the ignition of my dormant internal football switch. I was just thankful the shift was something other than puberty for a change.

Given all the years of football I had missed, there was *a lot* to catch up on. The most dedicated players always devote a large chunk of their time watching film, dissecting their opponent to death, until game time. My process was no different, as I would spend entire afternoons sprawled out on the couch watching football, even if my team wasn't involved.

I was addicted from the moment I watched a football game from beginning to end. I became a football encyclopedia, able to recite every single super pointless statistic that popped into my head. Not only did I learn from obsessively watching games, I also used a range of other **semiotic resources**, like Pro Football Reference, in-depth ESPN profiles, watching old game highlights archived on YouTube, and yes, even that infamously untrustworthy database Wikipedia. So, if anyone is ever in a bind with sports questions during trivia night, now you know who to call. Remember, I'll always do it for free wings!

A thought occurred to me during my extensive researching phase. Given I had enjoyed gaining a comprehensive understanding of football, I felt I could make a career of it somehow. Yet I wanted to find something involving writing on the side. I didn't have a clue as to how I would make either one happen. Perhaps immersing myself in research subliminally led me to combining my passions.

I also wanted to explore the history of professional football and my favorite team, the Green Bay Packers. So, on back-to-back vacations, I

Content and Genre Research

Learning about football through the lens of content research helped me narrow down the types of sources I currently use in my writing. Part of overcoming my personal deficit included researching numerous players and teams in an online database called Pro Football Reference, a site I still use for my SB Nation job (keep following along with this article to see how I landed this position).

But immersing myself through genre research in the spaces where football was central to the culture helped me develop a greater appreciation for my subject. I gained an understanding as to what made those places special and why the stories of those who had played in Green Bay or made it to Canton continue to be told. Once I realized what made these subjects who and what they are, that essentially is what drew me to wanting to tell more of those stories myself.

ventured to Green Bay, Wisconsin, and Canton, Ohio, forever known as the birthplace of the National Football League.

Green Bay is a special place considering most professional teams aren't synonymous with the cities they play in. Visiting there was an important part of the content and genre research I did to gain football literacies. The Packers *are* Green Bay. The Packers' home stadium, Lambeau Field, dominates the skyline and has a seating capacity that can hold most of the community in its 81,000 seats. It was there that I spent my twenty-first birthday, taking in the team's hall of fame and a tour of the facility. I even did a Lambeau Leap, which is how all Packers players celebrate after scoring a touchdown (Figure 1)—on my first try and without *much* assistance, I might add.

Packers fans are known for wearing foam pieces of cheese on their heads during games (Figure 2). Before you ask, I did *not* buy a cheese head while I was there. I've always found them off-putting. Cheese belongs on a half-pound beef patty with a side of chili fries, not on somebody's head.

As for my other pilgrimage, I had previously been to the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Unfortunately, I was too young to remember it (Figure 3). In 2004 when I was six years old, my dad took me on a trip to Canton to witness the induction of his favorite player of all-time: Broncos quarterback John Elway. My only recollections from that afternoon consisted of eating a hot dog and falling asleep in the stands on a blistering August day. Seventeen years later, I got to see the bronze bust of the player I once traveled to see immortalized (Figure 4). That time, I happened to stay awake and let me say, it was *no bust*.

Figure 1: My glorious Lambeau Leap.

Figure 2: A cheesehead is the ideal topper to support the Packers. Flip it over and you also have a convenient serving piece for your queso!

Figure 3: Sporting my Blue's Clues attire at the Hall of Fame.

Figure 4: My fully awake return to see John Elway's bust.

I began the second quarter at a deficit, yes. Yet through the help of a time-consuming drive (aided by a handful of questionable penalties), I went into halftime, nearly caught up in my football life. Little did I know that the love I was developing for the game had sparked something inside of me I never could have imagined.

Following some halftime adjustments made for the remainder of the game, I was ready to start the second half of my football life on fire. The profanity-laced speech my coach gave at the break had me ready to run through a brick wall. Hot damn, I was pumped!

Third Quarter: Pressure to Overcome Self-Inflicted Wounds

I entered the third quarter in a double-digit hole. There was still plenty of time left in the game to overcome the deficit, but I had to move quickly. I couldn't afford any mistakes in my comeback attempt, which ramped up the pressure. Unfortunately, life will make tweaks on the fly to counter your adjustments. There is no worse feeling than being blindsided by a would-be tackler racing at you, ready to blast your head off.

That is what makes life such a mean-spirited football player. It doesn't care what odds or deficits you're trying to overcome. Life refuses to play by

the rules, forcing nervous referees to pick up the penalty flags to avoid facing its wrath. Although with the way officiating has evolved, I doubt they would throw the flag to begin with.

Perhaps the only thing worse than being blindsided is allowing a fumble of your own creation.

Writing has long been a passion of mine, and it's what I should've stuck with once I got to college. In my final semester of high school, I took a creative writing course. After years of testing out different classes, I was always led back down the writing path. It seemed like my journeyman search for a future profession was over. I figured I had found my calling. However, at the same time, I made the costly mistake of listening to outside noise, which nearly derailed my football life off the tracks.

Coaches can have a profound impact when making critical decisions about one's own football life, but taking their advice all the time isn't necessarily the wisest career move. The problem is that coaches always think they know best. That's what they're paid the big bucks for, I suppose. Most of the time, they're pulling stuff out of their asses like the rest of us. Where I errored was listening to a coach-like figure during an impressionable period of my life: high school. This individual wildly jacked up on haterade happened to be my English teacher during junior year. I remember a time during one of his daily ramblings when he told my class with zero context, "Why would *anyone* major in creative writing?"

Dick Butkus?

Dick Butkus is a Hall of Fame linebacker who played for the Chicago Bears from 1965 to 1973. Butkus was known as the most ferocious defensive player of his era. His name also sounds funny, but I wouldn't say that to his face.

He was an English teacher, so I figured he knew something I didn't. I should've known he was just a Dick Butkus. It didn't matter, as the damage was already done. Those words were seared into my brain.

The second I left my creative writing class, I buckled down to find something . . . *safe*. In professional football, there is an off-season period known as free agency where players can sign with any team they choose. Locking down a major in college is similar to free agency in the pros. The only difference is that instead of having teams toss absurd wads of cash in my direction, *I* was the one who had to foot the bill. Gotta love college life, am I right?

As you would expect, free agency is a huge gamble. Every player longs for that perfect fit to advance their career to stardom.

Figure 5: This photo was taken during my TV-10 training shift. If you squint hard enough, you can clearly see I don't know what the hell I'm doing (Moody).

When I got to Illinois State University, I thought journalism was the perfect free agent fit for me. I wanted to go into sports broadcasting and envisioned hosting my own ESPN show or calling an NFL game for CBS or FOX. Those visions of grandeur were nutty and perhaps unattainable, but sometimes isn't that the point of our dreams?

Deep down, I had nagging doubts that I had signed with the wrong team, but I chose to ignore them. I expected they were probably nervous jitters rather than signer's remorse. Those feelings only got worse when I began working at the university's news station, TV-10 (Figure 5).

It only took two weeks for me to realize the class wasn't for me, so I dropped the course. However, I was still a weatherman during Tuesday shows on Facebook live streams for the rest of the semester.

I didn't feel as though I could use my creativity in writing for the station because the only writing I was able to do was for on-air news segments. News segments have a very specific format. Their goal is to get breaking news out in a hurry while concentrating on the five W's (who, what, when, where, why) and how the event happened. This practice is fine for that particular genre of writing, but it also meant that there was zero time to be all artsy-fartsy, which I love to do. Sure, I may be viewed as giving up on my team, but my heart was never in it. I frequently caught myself dreaming about a life that didn't involve journalism. College students flirt with free agency all the time. Some never even find the right team to go to battle for.

I used to be the player who would fully devote my loyalty to one team all my career. It didn't matter whether the organization deteriorated around me. I just had to buckle down and work for my team, ignoring whatever internal strife was boiling within me. Eventually, I had to face that I was butt fumbling my career away on a team I didn't love. There's absolutely *no* coming back from a butt fumble (Figure 6).

Similar to my football awakening, something switched on inside me which clued me into obvious signs I was missing. One being that journalism never felt like the team for me, no matter how much I tried to convince myself otherwise. I was also surrounded by talented individuals who had an undying passion for what they were creating. That just wasn't me.

Once I realized that I would never get to that point and experience true happiness in the profession, I called an audible and decided to test the free agency waters again.

Quarterbacks in the offensive huddle with their teammates can call an audible, which means changing the play call before the ball is snapped. My brief tenure with TV-10 was the perfect time to bomb the ultimate Hail Mary. That was when I decided to change my major to creative writing, much to that dopey English teacher's chagrin.

Hail Mary

A Hail Mary is a long passing play, typically an unsuccessful and desperate attempt to score late in a game. In my professional opinion, it's one of the most awe-inspiring plays in the sport. I wish teams would launch them for fun on every passing down. You only live once, you know.

I needed to find an outlet to fuel my artistic endeavors through writing. So, during the shift from journalism to English, I transformed my old reporting website into a football blog (Figure 7). It's not half bad, and feel free to tell me my head is full of cheese or I'm the G.O.A.T. (Greatest of All Time) at writing in the comments. Either one works for me. Anyway, that was my first sports writing experience. I'm certain only a handful of people (on a good day) read my work on

Figure 6: The Butt Fumble was a notorious play that occurred during a Thanksgiving Day game played between the New York Jets and New England Patriots. Jets quarterback Mark Sanchez ran into his teammate's backside and fumbled the ball where it was then scooped up by a Patriots defender for a touchdown. Scan the QR to see it for yourself. Watching it on repeat is guaranteed to brighten your day ("The Butt Fumble!").

the site, but that didn't matter to me. I was ecstatic, finally doing something I enjoyed for a change, even if I got bored with it after a couple months. I wasn't sure whether English would be the team for me initially. My blog was my only confirmation at the time that I didn't make a huge mistake with my gamble. If my brief time as a blog writer on my site taught me anything, it was that I had the drive to be in sports media. All I needed was a team willing to take a chance on me.

Figure 7: Check out this QR code to view my football blog, *All The Bacon*.

Fourth Quarter: Finding My Way Back Home (& Winning My First Super Bowl)

The story of how I got my first writing job was neither glamorous nor will it ever be adapted into a major motion picture. If it did, I would love for Keanu Reeves to portray me. I understand he looks nothing like me but please let me have this.

As the story goes, I was googling the NFL and scrolling through the top stories that particular morning. I eventually came across one titled, "Want to become an NFL writer?" from an SB Nation blog community for the Los Angeles Rams called Turf Show Times (TST). Owned by Vox Media, SB Nation is a community of 300 blogs for all professional and college sports teams in the US.

Being the die-hard Packers fan I was, it felt almost blasphemous to even consider cheating on my favorite team. I wouldn't call what I was doing *cheating* per se. Experimenting was probably more like it. But, yeah, I realize that's not much better.

The first E-mail I got was from the editor in charge of the site, who thanked me for my interest and told me about the overwhelming response his post had already generated. As part of the application process, I was given a list of questions to determine whether I would be a perfect fit for the site (Figure 8).

I answered the questions as thoroughly as possible, figuring I wouldn't get the job. Don't confuse me for a Debbie Downer who didn't believe in my abilities; I just fully expected TST would go for someone who had previous writing experience, which I didn't exactly have. My crappy little Weebly blog doesn't count (but I will keep shamelessly plugging it . . .).

How many posts per week do you think you could contribute? (It is always better to aim low with your answer than to overshoot the estimate.)

Will you be available to help cover the Rams DURING the games? (Note: 14 of their 17 games are on a SUNDAY)

Will you be available to help cover the Rams IMMEDIATELY AFTER the games?

Will you be available to help create content for the MORNING AFTER game day? (This usually requires writing on a Sunday evening for a Monday morning, or just writing Monday morning)

Strengths - There are many types of NFL writers and content creators, and we're looking for all of them! This may mean that you have a STRONG grasp of Xs and Os (coaches, players, film-obsessed fans), or you love analytics and stats, or you know how to work at a newsdesk and that deadlines are everything. Maybe you already create podcasts, videos, or have a background in social media. Or your strength could be something completely different!

Do you have a preference for what kinds of articles you'd like to create, or a specialized background related to football?

Do you have experience working a newsdesk or covering breaking news?

Do you have a background in creative writing or AP-style English? Have you worked with an editor before?

I may ask if you would write a sample Rams article -- Is that something you are okay with? Anyone who makes it a point to write a Fanpost in immediate response to this question, *thank you.*

Career Goals - I have worked with dozens of writers over the years, including ones who have gone onto key positions at SB Nation, as well as writers at The Athletic, The Ringer, and some who have gone onto work in the NFL. And there have been many others who were great writers and contributors, they simply did not aspire to do anything else outside of our websites, and that's perfectly acceptable too! They've been some of the best people and writers I've been around!

Questions:

What are your career goals? This question just helps me know how best I can serve *you.*

Figure 8: Questions asked for Turf Show Times.

The editor appreciated my swift response, a strong first impression if I do say so myself. He eventually asked me to do a 300-word fictional story on the Rams signing a Pro Bowl linebacker (Figure 9). I was told this wasn't exactly an "audition," but that's how I treated it.

Rams Make Wright Move in Signing Former Seahawks Star

Between 2012-2015, no defense struck more fear into the hearts of the NFL than the Seattle Seahawks' Legion of Boom. They were nasty, physical and who every team tried to emulate. Now, it's the Los Angeles Rams' turn to become that defense as they continue building around the likes of Aaron Donald and Jalen Ramsey. The Rams decided to do this by ransacking their NFC West rivals even further by coming to terms on a two-year deal with linebacker KJ Wright. This move hopes to accelerate the Rams' Super Bowl hopes as they surge forward through yet another strong offseason.

While the news leaves Bobby Wagner as the lone LOB member remaining (poor Hawks…jk), Wright's signing shores up a slightly questionable linebacking corps on a team that had little to worry about on defense last season when they finished number one in the league. Aside from Leonard Floyd being penciled in at OLB following a career year, the remaining competition leaves much to be desired.

Figure 9: My audition article on linebacker KJ Wright.

Quarterbacks with ice in their veins notice how everything slows down as they lead their team on a game-winning drive. That's how I felt at that moment. I couldn't afford to chuck the ball into double coverage and risk it being taken away by the opposing team. I would never forgive myself if my only opportunity to that point was intercepted before proving I had what it took. My post had to be a winner, which it was. The editor said I appeared to know what I was doing. Boy, did I have him fooled! He then welcomed me to the show . . . *The Greatest Show on Turf* (or at least on the interwebs).

At the time, I was among the half-dozen new writers. Football players are constantly in the spotlight so they have to develop a thick skin. The same applies to sports writing, as I can't cry home to Mama every time a fan comments something like, "You are the stupidest person on the planet. May the opposing team bus run you over." Or, "I really hope you get maimed by your team's mascot while you sleep."

Luckily those were not real comments, although creative jabs like that absolutely would have brightened my day. Sometimes I decide to be clever with my word choices, and people dislike them or take them too literally (see Figures 10–13 for QR codes to some of the articles I wrote for TST). For example, in my first year, I had a weekly post that took an inside look at teams within the Rams' division. This particular week, their rival, the Arizona Cardinals, was blown out by the Detroit Lions. I made a play on the name of Lions quarterback Jared Goff with the headline, "Jared Goffs a triple bogey in Detroit's win over Cardinals." My golf terminology was panned by one fan who told me "A bogey in golf is not all that good . . . it is an over par shot." They really didn't have to do me *bogey* like that. I think that time I used it right.

Figure 10: In this post, I discuss 49ers fans flocking to Los Angeles for the 2022 NFC Championship.

Figure 11: In this post, I discuss Tom Brady's retirement in 2023.

Figure 12: In this post, I discuss the 2022 Los Angeles Rams.

Figure 13: In this post, I discuss cornerback Jalen Ramsey.

If we're being really honest, I never would've gone into such a career if I was worried about what people were saying about me. You can't please everyone in the writing business. Not everyone will be singing your praises, even if you consider your latest work a masterpiece. In all honesty, having fans insulting your intelligence is the clearest sign that someone has made it as a sports analyst. As far as I know, that has not happened to me yet.

There was a time when I frequently read the comments, anxious to see what kind of debates I started between fans. I sometimes tend to stir the pot as I enjoy chaos with every fiber of my being. More on that in a moment. Soon after, I quit reading the comments because they usually had nothing to do with the content I wrote about. For example, on one post, there was a comment on the dangers of Critical Race Theory in our educational systems (yes, really), and another wanted to show their loyalty to the LA Dodgers (those bastards!).

Perhaps the final time I quit reading the comment section in its entirety was during the team's Super Bowl run. In 2016, the Rams relocated back to Los Angeles and had difficulty filling up their stadium in a congested sports market. As a result, when the team hosted the NFC Championship, they were going as far as blocking ticket sales to San Francisco 49ers fans living outside of LA due to fears of their opponent dominating the home crowd. The Rams' actions caused me to drop this snarky comment in my post on the subject: "While the Rams rushed to limit ticket sales faster than those in power trying to take away your voting rights, the team failed to realize a key foil in their diabolical plan. Did they not realize that (God forbid) some 49ers fans live in the Los Angeles area?"

For some reason, combining sports and politics strikes a chord with people. Many commenters in denial told me, "No one is stopping any American citizen from going to the polls and voting. Take your stupid political nonsense over to the CNN comment section. This is a Rams football site, stick to football," and "Nobody is trying to take anyone's voting rights away in this country as those rights are protected by the US constitution (15th, 19th, and 26th amendments). Take that political crap and shove it up Deebo Samuel's you know what." Another fan disagreed, stating, "As someone who works in the political world, and specifically on this issue, I laughed hard at this line. It's extremely accurate, but I love how easily it was worked in." The funniest part was that I was fully expecting it to be deleted. After I finished writing

Deebo Samuel?

Deebo Samuel is a wide receiver for the San Francisco 49ers. Leading up to the NFC Championship, he called out the Rams for blocking tickets to non-Los Angeles residents.

the post, my editor told me he would publish the article himself just to put a link to ticket sales for the game. When the article was published, my jaw dropped to the floor upon seeing the line still intact.

The comments have never gotten in the way of writing what I wanted. Since that "controversial" line, I've covered tough topics, including how the NFL has repeatedly failed in its concussion protocol. It's perfectly fine if people don't agree with my viewpoints or opinions. If they don't, whatever. Go Dodgers then.

During my first year at TST, I was paid a stipend of $100 a month for two articles a week. That amount grew to $300 in my second year. When I took on sponsored posts the following season, I was bringing home nearly $1000 in stipends. My first few articles weren't something I would ever include in my portfolio, but for the first time in what felt like a lifetime, I was proud of the content I was producing.

I was fortunate enough to cover a team with Super Bowl aspirations and one that was also very active. The Rams were constantly seeking ways to upgrade their roster throughout the season. Two such moves included a blockbuster deal where they acquired Broncos All-Pro linebacker Von Miller in a trade and then signed superstar wide receiver Odell Beckham Jr. in free agency. Following these transactions, I was tasked with grading the moves and giving initial player reactions.

Another exciting development occurred as I covered LA: They ended up making it to the Super Bowl! I'm not saying I was their lucky charm or anything. I will say that they got their act together after a few of my midseason articles called them a "pretender" rather than a "contender." I believe their front office should've awarded me a ring just for the added motivation. Or at least they could've sent me to Disney World with the rest of the team.

Prior to the Big Game, where the Rams would be facing the Cincinnati Bengals, I had the opportunity to be interviewed by a writer from the opposing blog. I dropped a prediction saying the Rams would hold on and make a key defensive stop in the final minutes. My prediction was spoken into existence by the Rams' defense, who sacked Cincy's second-year quarterback Joe Burrow a record-tying *seven times* en route to a 23-20 win in their home stadium. The game actually did come down to LA making a key stop on what would've been at least a game-tying drive for the Bengals. Perhaps I'm psychic after all. Forget sports! I should try my newfound abilities on the lottery instead. The Powerball won't know what hit 'em!

The Packers disappointed me earlier that postseason so celebrating my adopted team felt right. That doesn't mean I'll start calling them Dad, though.

After the game, fellow TST writers in the E-mail chain I was part of, being that we were from different parts of the country, went crazy once the clock hit triple zeroes. In the midst of cheers ranging from "Go Rams" to "World Champs," one notable comment that stuck with me from that night was, "I've never met any of you before, but I love you guys!"

It was at that moment that I realized I had finally found a team I belonged on. I wouldn't consider this writing team anywhere near to the strength of the Avengers, but on that magical night, they came pretty darn close.

Once the final remnants of confetti have dropped from the rafters and the chills have shot up my back after receiving an icy Gatorade bath, I'll be able to finally soak in the victories I have achieved in my football life.

I've come a long way and nothing about it has been easy, but that's what has made me a stronger writer. What's the fun of living a life without being presented with a challenge every once in a while? I've understood that not every decision I've made has led to a touchdown or has left me feeling the high of winning a Super Bowl.

I've learned it's OK to have pregame jitters. Those jitters led to paths I could never have imagined. There's no way I would've known I'd be writing about an NFL team after listening to my high school English teacher. I'm about to move onto the next chapter of my sports writing life. Wherever it may take me, I'll be ready.

Until then, I should probably change out of my Gatorade-drenched jersey before I catch hypothermia.

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Evan Craig graduated with a Bachelor's degree in English from Illinois State University in December 2022. When he's not writing posts about his adopted team, the LA Rams, he's probably being disappointed by the Packers yet again.

Tolkien, Genre, and Uptake: The Process of Handwritten Letters

Edcel Javier Cintron-Gonzalez and Ellen Sundermeier

In this interview—transcribed from an episode of the Writing Program's podcast series—Edcel Javier Cintron-Gonzalez has a conversation with Ellen Sundermeier about her process in researching and writing her *Grassroots* article "The Magic of Handwritten Letters: Socialization in J. R. R. Tolkien's *Letters from Father Christmas*," along with advice she'd give to future *Grassroots* authors.

From brainstorming ideas to performing different kinds of genre research to revising one's work, writing can be messy, "but in really fascinating ways," as *Grassroots* author Ellen Sundermeier tells us. In this transcript of an interview from the podcast series *A Conversation with a* Grassroots *Author*—presented here in print but also available to listen to online (see Figure 1)—Edcel Javier Cintron-Gonzalez interviews Ellen about her article-writing process. Her thoughtful and engaging responses highlight crucial elements of her article and its production: the role of genres, genre research, uptake, and activity systems, as well as the connective power of storytelling and, ultimately, the magic of handwritten letters.

Edcel Javier Cintron-Gonzalez: Hello, and welcome to the podcast series *A Conversation with a* Grassroots *Author*. Today we're talking with Ellen Sundermeier about her article, "The Magic of Handwritten Letters: Socialization in J. R. R. Tolkien's *Letters from Father Christmas*." So, let's talk about the genre of letter writing. In this article, Ellen examines how socialization, one of the elements of [the ISU Writing Program's version of pedagogical] cultural-historical activity theory [see the article

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P-CHAT

Our take on **pedagogical cultural-historical activity theory (P-CHAT)** is developed from the work of Paul Prior (see the QR code in Figure 2 for a more detailed description). In our program, we use P-CHAT to help us think about and study the complex genres that we encounter in the world. In traditional rhetorical models, one might describe the author, the audience, and perhaps some of the features of the genre. P-CHAT allows us to focus on any aspect of the myriad elements of textual production, so it is more robust than these other methods for investigating texts. The key terms in P-CHAT are:

- Ecology
- Production
- Representation
- Socialization

- Activity
- Reception
- Distribution

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referenced in Figure 2], can be used as a tool to better understand the way shared stories are built through handwritten letters. Sundermeier primarily focuses on letters written by J. R. R. Tolkien (author of *The Lord of the Rings* series) to his children, and also reflects on her own letter-writing practices. Ellen, thank you so much for being here.

Ellen Sundermeier: Thanks for having me.

Edcel: So, to get us started, how did you come up with the idea for your article?

Figure 1: You can listen to Ellen's *A Conversation with a* Grassroots *Author* podcast episode by scanning this QR code ("Episode 6: Ellen Sundermeier").

Figure 2: Scan this QR code to read an article explaining the ISU Writing Program's version of P-CHAT (Walker).

Ellen: So, I started by thinking about everyday writing genres that are important to me, and writing letters is something that I enjoy and that I tend to do often—my desk is always covered with stationery, and I often have a few letters sitting on my bedside table that I need to respond to. So, they're a really huge part of my life. And once I kind of settled on that genre, I started thinking about which of our ISU Writing Program learning outcomes would provide an interesting lens for that particular genre. Letters are really unique in the way they're written for a really specific audience. But they can also be heavily influenced by larger cultural and historical practices. So, I settled on socialization, which is an element of P-CHAT, as a main focus. And I really liked that bringing these things together allowed me to reflect on the way people build stories through letter writing.

Edcel: Wow, that's really fascinating. And I really like how you mentioned that you have like a bunch of stationery in your workspace, because it kind of reminds me of how I really enjoy like, you know, having different stationery or sticky notes around me and kind of like taking those quick notes.

Ellen: Yeah, I think having those tools around and easily available is really helpful for the writing process.

Edcel: Oh, yeah, I definitely agree. It's a really useful writing tool. So, to keep the conversation going, what did the writing process look like for your article?

Ellen: So, it's really fun for me, because I actually started the process of writing my article by writing a letter to a friend of mine and just really paying attention to the activity surrounding my letter writing. So, I actually did some uptake on my letter writing process and considered questions like, what does the environment look like when I write a letter? What steps do I take before I actually put pen to paper? What sort of memories and ideas do I tend to draw on as I write to this particular friend on this particular day? And all of these things are related to elements of P-CHAT, which was a really central part of my article. And I think that uptake kind of grounded me in the genre of handwritten letters and helped me think about what it means to me specifically. So, you'll see a lot of those thoughts from that uptake process in the introduction to my article, and that's kind of how it started.

Edcel: Wow, that's really interesting. And I'm glad you mentioned uptake, because the only time I ever get to write letters is during the holidays. Back home, I really didn't have a chance to like write Christmas

letters to anyone. But ever since I moved here to Illinois, also, my friends and colleagues would send me letters. And I'm like, "Oh, this is a fun little way to finally get involved in this genre."

Ellen: Yeah, I agree. I think it's such a special thing to receive something like that in the mail. And yeah, as you said, I think at the holidays, it's a really popular time to do it. But it's really special any time of year and kind of fun when it comes out of the blue like that.

Edcel: Oh, yeah, I do agree very much on that. We talked about the uptake aspects of your article, and you've mentioned how you were thinking about what other terms within the Writing Program best fit with your article, so I'm kind of curious, what did the genre research look like when you started writing this article?

Ellen: Yeah. So, once I decided on letter writing as my genre— handwritten letters—I started by researching letter collections from some of my favorite authors. I actually talked about this a little bit in the article itself. But I'd really encourage anyone to do this. If you're a big reader, I think you learn so much about a person through their correspondence. And there are historically a lot of letters available from authors. So that's a really fun research exercise, actually. But I study children's literature, and J. R. R. Tolkien has been a longtime favorite of mine. I grew up reading and watching *The Lord of the Rings*. And I just really love the worlds that he creates. So, I did some research into letters of his, and I actually found this collection of letters that he had written as Father Christmas to his children. And it was full of stories and illustrations, and he's actually responding to letters that his children had written to Father Christmas. So, they're part of this kind of ongoing correspondence they've had for many years. And they provided some really interesting material to focus on socialization. And then once I found that letter collection, that required some additional research into the genre of Father Christmas so I could better understand how he had changed over time and in different cultures, and also how he was appearing in Britain at the time that Tolkien was writing the letters. And then finally, I also looked back at some of the letters my friends had written to me. And I kind of started paying more attention to the patterns and the shared stories that we've created in those letters. And then I incorporated some of those ideas into the article as well.

Edcel: Wow, that's really fascinating. And I really liked the part where you mentioned that you also looked at letters you receive from your friends, for example; that makes it like really special in terms of like

thinking about the genre research and the kind of work that you did for the article.

Ellen: Yeah, it was something that was really, I mean, personal to me. So, it was fun to be able to incorporate those things that I've kind of had as artifacts in my own house.

Edcel: All right. So, can you talk a little bit about the review process of your article?

Ellen: Yeah, absolutely. So, I went through a few drafts with the editors of the journal. And it was actually a really fun process because I think they helped me really think through how to bring in different learning outcomes and make my article maybe richer in the way it delved into them. I didn't talk about activity systems initially, for example, but they helped me to kind of articulate how there were many activity systems in play while Tolkien was writing these letters and kind of helped me flesh that out more. And I think they really gave me a new appreciation for how closely connected our learning outcomes are and how messy writing can be, but in really fascinating ways, so that process was really fun for me.

Edcel: Wow, I'm really glad to hear that both the editor letters and the experience of like receiving that back and forth about your article was really positive.

Ellen: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, it was a really positive process and moved pretty quickly and ended up being really fun for me to kind of look at my writing through new eyes, I think.

Edcel: Yeah, that's awesome. So, I wanted to ask, what kind of advice would you offer someone who maybe is thinking of writing a *Grassroots* article?

Ellen: Yeah, so, as I mentioned earlier, I really love that the journal can allow you to write about things that are really personal and meaningful to you. So, I think if you're considering writing an article, in your initial brainstorming, spend some time thinking about what you love about literate activity and what genres are really exciting for you, and then kind of run with those ideas. And I also think that the journal allows for a fairly informal tone. So, I think it's a really fun opportunity to explore your voice and allow your personality to

Figure 3: You can read Ellen's article, along with Edcel's work and other past articles of the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*, in our online archive (ISU Writing Program).

come through as you write. So, I think I'd encourage you to kind of think about how you want that to come through as well.

Edcel: Awesome sauce. Thank you so much, Ellen, for your time. And thank you for doing this interview.

Ellen: Yeah, thanks so much for having me.

Edcel: Thanks again to Ellen Sundermeier for participating in today's interview, and check out her article, "The Magic of Handwritten Letters: Socialization in J. R. R. Tolkien's *Letters from Father Christmas*," and the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* issue 12.1. Thank you for listening!

You can check out Ellen's article in issue 12.1 of the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*. Edcel has also written for the journal, and you can find his work in issues 12.1, 12.2, and 13.1 (see the QR code in Figure 3).

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Edcel Javier Cintron-Gonzalez is a proud Puerto Rican, scholar, and graduate worker who is pursuing a PhD in English Studies with a focus in Children's and Young Adult Literature. When he is not working on academic things, he enjoys cooking, playing video games and writing about them for the website *Gamers with Glasses*, and writing his monthly children's picture book review in Spanish for the *Palabreadores Newsletter*. Edcel's creative work has been published in *Palabreando*, *Euphemism*, *Sabanas: Literary Magazine*, *Ediciones Enserio*, *El Vicio del Tintero*, *Abolition Dreaming: A Zine Project*, and *White Noise Zine*. Edcel has a forthcoming poetry chapbook titled *Irma, Maria, Fiona, and Me* to be published in May 2023 by PRESS 254.

Ellen Sundermeier is an instructor and English Studies PhD student at Illinois State University. She is currently focusing on children's literature and also has an interest in Renaissance literature, which was the focus of her MA. Her hobbies include baking, traveling, watching period dramas, and writing letters to her favorite people as often as possible.

Notes

Publishing with the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*

GWRJ Editors

Our Mission Statement

The *GWRJ* is dedicated to publishing articles **and other compositions** by writers and scholars whose work investigates the practices of people writing (and acting) in different writing situations using a variety of different genres. **As we enter our second decade of publication, we expect to develop and put out calls for new genres for the journal that are multimodal in nature or shorter than an average article. If you have a genre or project you would like to propose, please E-mail us with your suggestion.** We encourage both individuals and groups to submit work that studies and explores the different ways that writers learn how to write in different genres and settings—not just within the boundaries of academia, but in all kinds of settings in which writing happens.

We identify "writing research" as any type of composition that endeavors to uncover new information about how people work with writing or how writing works, which means a wide range of techniques and styles of writing might be applicable. For example, a first-person narrative, an informal conversation about writing, a formal study of writing, or even an artistic production could all be useful techniques for developing a *GWRJ* article. Accepted articles will be informed by either primary research into writing behaviors and activities and/or scholarship in the field of writing studies that addresses theories of how people learn to compose in different situations.

General Information

Submissions

Articles can be submitted to the *GWRJ* at any time. However, it may take time and a couple of rounds of revision before an article is ready to be published. Please contact the managing editor at *grassrootswriting@gmail.com* with queries about possible submissions.

Queries and Drafts

The *GWRJ* has a strong commitment to working with interested authors to help them prepare for publication, so if you think you have a good idea but are not sure how to proceed, please contact us. One of our editorial staff will be happy to work with you one-on-one to develop your idea and/or article.

Honoraria

The *GWRJ* offers an honorarium of $50.00 for each article published in a print issue of the *GWRJ*.

Style and Tone

Because we encourage so many different kinds of textual production and research in the *GWRJ*, issues of appropriate style and tone can be complicated. However, we can offer the following basic style criteria for authors to consider:

1. The readership of the *GWRJ* is writers. It is not "students," even though the journal is used by writing instructors and students. (The *GWRJ* remains the primary text for Writing Program courses at Illinois State University, and it is used by teachers and students in other programs as well.) *GWRJ* articles should attempt to provide valuable content to writers who are engaged in the activity of "learning how to learn about" genres.

2. "Teacher narratives" are not acceptable as *GWRJ* articles. We are interested in material that looks at literate activities from the position of a "writer" or a "researcher," but articles that discuss ways to "teach" people about writing are not appropriate for this journal.

3. Language and style that is overly formal or "academic" may be unappealing to our readers.

4. A tone that situates the author as a "master" writer is often problematic. (We call these "success narratives," which are often how-to type articles in which the focus is on the author's learned expertise.) Authors should remember that no one "learns" a genre completely or in a completely simple way. While writers (especially of first-person narratives) may write about successes, they need to complicate the genres with which they are working.

5. Tone or content that situates the reader as a certain kind of writer (whether as a master or novice) with shared experiences can be

problematic because the readership of the journal constitutes a wide variety of writers with different writing abilities and experiences.

6. Whenever possible, articles should make use of published research about writing practices, but the research should be incorporated into the text in a relevant and accessible way so that readers who are not used to reading scholarly research can still benefit from the references.

7. Articles should be as specific as possible about the genre or set of writing activities they are studying. Generalized studies or discussions of "writing" are not encouraged. Additionally, examples of "writing-in-progress" are always encouraged and are often necessary for articles to be useful to our readers.

Media, Mode, and Copyright Issues

The *GWRJ* can publish both visual and digital texts. We encourage multimodal texts, including still images, audio, video, and hypertexts. However, authors working with these technologies need to be careful about copyright issues as we cannot publish any kinds of materials that may result in copyright infringement. We can sometimes seek copyright permissions, but in the case of materials such as works of art or graphics/images owned by large companies, this is often not possible. This is true for print-based articles that use images as well. We can, however, include materials that are covered by fair use; see *https://www.copyright.gov/help/faq/faq-fairuse.html* for fair use guidelines.

Also, video/audio of research subjects can require special kinds of permission processes, so you should contact the *GWRJ* editors before beginning this kind of work. Research using subjects who are considered "protected" populations (people under eighteen and medical patients covered by HIPPA, among others) are not acceptable for *GWRJ* articles unless the author has received approval from Illinois State University or another institution to conduct research with human subjects.

Researching for *Grassroots*

What does it mean to "do writing research?" For the *GWRJ*, it means people observing, investigating, critiquing, and even participating in the activities that humans engage in that involve literate practice.

But what does it really mean? In more practical language, it means finding some situation where humans are doing things that involve language (which

can mean composing in genres that are oral, aural, visual, etc., not just writing on paper) and thinking, "Hey, that looks interesting," then taking the time to investigate that practice in some detail.

But this kind of research isn't just about people. It's really about what we call "activity systems," which just means that we want to learn about all kinds of complicated interactions, not just what a particular kind of text looks like or what a particular person does when they produce a text (although we are interested in those things too). We also want to know about the interactions between people as they produce texts, as well as the interactions between humans and their tools, practices, and different kinds of textual productions. And we are interested in how certain kinds of texts work to shape our interactions; for example, the ways the genre of resumes might shape how people interact when they engage in the activities of finding and offering work.

To help researchers who might be thinking about or engaging in literate practices that they'd like to investigate, we have created this list of research projects that might be interesting or appropriate for the *GWRJ*:

Investigating Genres

These kinds of research projects usually investigate the nuances of particular genres: how they are made and who makes them, the distinctive features they have, who uses them, how and where they are used, and how they do particular kinds of communicative work in the world. This research is often straightforward, and—as some of the articles in our early issues reveal—this kind of genre investigation might have a "how-to" feel because many of the authors creating these pieces are also trying to learn how to produce that genre. However, genre investigations can move far beyond these "how-to" pieces. There are countless ways that genres can be examined in relation to how they do work in the world, such as by investigating technological and social implications that our readers would be interested in. Following genres to see where they go and the kinds of work they are made to do can take an author well beyond simply describing the features of a particular kind of text. One issue of concern to the *GWRJ* editors is that genre investigations can problematically "fix" genres—that is, situate them as stable productions that are always the same. So we encourage researchers to consider the ways in which genres constantly move and shift over time and in different situations.

Personal Explorations of Literate Practice

This kind of research is often closely connected to genre investigations. Authors examine their own practices in order to discover how they have

learned to produce certain kinds of writing in certain situations, or they investigate particular kinds of composing practices, such as different practices for engaging in research or revision. Like genre investigations, these kinds of projects sometimes have a "how-to" focus as authors learn to think about— and explain to others—the things they know (or are coming to know) about different literate practices.

Composing Practices

This kind of research looks at particular composing practices, including invention (coming up with ideas), research, revision, etc. It often overlaps with personal exploration research because authors are usually investigating their own practices. However, this research could certainly involve interviews or observations of how other individuals or groups engage in these practices. One issue that concerns the *GWRJ* editors is that this kind of research can lead to assumptions that these composing practices are "universal"; that is, people might assume that composing practices work in similar ways across all kinds of genres and writing situations. While it is possible to trace similar kinds of literate activities or composing practices across different situations (and, in fact, it can be really interesting—see, for example, Kevin Roozen's writing research, "Tracing Trajectories of Practice: Repurposing in One Student's Developing Disciplinary Writing Processes"), it is important to remember that we really can't talk about an activity like "revising," for example, as if it is something that a person does the same way in every kind of situation.

Literate Activity in the Wild

While writing in classrooms or for school settings can often seem very cut-and-dried, these practices are more complicated than they seem. Part of the reason we do not see the complications of many kinds of literate practices is that once we become "embedded" in the activity, it no longer seems complicated to us! We know how to do it, but we don't really remember how we learned to do it. Another reason that we sometimes miss the complications of writing is that there are "tropes"—or particular ways of defining/understanding these practices—that make them look simple and straightforward. An example of this is the activity of "writing a paper," which can bring up very stylized and simplistic images of how a person just sits down, does some research, and then writes a paper for a particular class. But in fact, not only are the acts of researching and composing much more complicated than this limited view might offer, but also, this kind of literate practice is actually much more interactive than we might generally think. The *GWRJ* is interested in investigations that look at specific situations/locations

where all kinds of literate acts are happening. We want to see researchers "unpacking" what is actually happening when people try to compose particular kinds of texts in particular situations. We are also interested in research that looks at the ways that textual production is interactive—how it involves all kinds of interactions between different people and different objects, tools, and other entities over time. This kind of research can involve the interactions of people and genres as well as different cultural norms and practices.

Case Studies of Individual Literate Practices

This type of research focuses very closely on particular individuals and the kinds of literate practices they engage with in their daily lives. Some of our previously published articles that take this approach include research into the ways an individual learns to interact with a particular genre or particular literate situation. But we are also very interested in research that looks at literate practice more broadly and deeply. So, for example, how does an individual take composing practices from one situation and apply them to another? How does an individual learn to interact within a particular setting in which different types of genres are being produced (so, say, a new kind of work environment)? This kind of research can be constructed as a collaborative process in which one researcher acts as an observer while the other engages in an exploration of their personal practices.

Linguistics Writing Research

Previous work that exists in the journal in this area tended to focus specifically on grammar conventions or on the usage of particular kinds of stylistic or punctuation devices. However, we have noted our desire to encourage linguistic writing research that is more robust and complicated, including projects that explore corpus linguistics (using a collection of data to look at particular kinds of textual practice) or sociolinguistics (investigating the particular ways that humans use language within social systems). In the last several issues we have seen authors take up this call in interesting ways. Issues 7.1 and 7.2, for example, include articles featuring research into the role of language variation and its effects on both meaning-making and composing practices. See Agathe Lancrenon's article "Everything You Need to Know About Transferring Metaphorical Ducks" and Cristina Sánchez-Martín's article "Language Variation Across Genres: Translingualism Here and There" in issue 7.1. And, in issue 7.2, see Su Yin Khor's article "Multilingual Notes as a Tool to Understand Super Dense Readings." We look forward to continuing to publish additional studies that investigate these concepts in innovative ways.

Global or Intercultural Literate Practices

It is only within a few issues of the journal that the *GWRJ* has been able to publish research on literate practices as they move across cultural and/ or geographical spaces. For examples, see Adriana Gradea's article in issue 3.2, "The Little Genre That Could: CHAT Mapping the Slogan of the Big Communist Propaganda"; Summer Qabazard's article in issue 3.2, "From Religion to Chicken Cannibalism: American Fast-Food Ads in Kuwait"; Wesley Jacques's article in issue 7.1, "The E-Cat's Meow: Exploring Activity in Translingual Mobile Gaming"; or Sanam Shahmiri's article in issue 7.2, "Translating the Untranslatable: Making Meaning of Idiomatic Expressions Across Languages." We would like to encourage more of this kind of research in future issues as we are highly interested in research that studies the ways that people and textual practices move across these kinds of boundaries.

The Researcher's Process

According to one of our *GWRJ* authors, Lisa Phillips, it can be useful for authors to investigate and articulate a personal process that will be meaningful for them when developing ideas for research projects. She offered us her notes on the process that she followed to create her article for the journal in issue 3.2, "Writing with Tattoo Ink: Composing That Gets Under the Skin." Her process is presented below in ten "steps" that *GWRJ* authors might find useful:

Step One

Come up with a general "topic" description. So, the first question to answer is: "What is it about writing in the world that interests me?"

Step Two

As the process continues, think more specifically about the genre, setting, and/or specific practices under investigation. (Using the types of research we have listed above can be useful for focusing a topic.) So the second question an author might want to answer is: "How will I go about finding what I want to know?"

Step Three

Next, think about both the research practices that will be needed to gather data as well as the style of article that will be most appropriate. One excellent

way to do this is to read existing articles and examine the different ways that authors have approached different topics and different kinds of research.

Step Four

Because *Grassroots* articles are a fairly unique kind of writing, authors may find it useful to consider past writing experiences that they might be able to draw on as they write. We call these "antecedent genres," and they can be important to think about because these prior experiences always shape how an author writes, especially when they are writing in a new and unfamiliar genre. While these antecedent genres will certainly be useful, they can also cause problems because aspects of an author's past writing may not exactly fit with the style, tone, or content that is appropriate for *GWRJ* articles. Some questions to ask here are: "What kinds of writing do I already know how to do that I can use to help me? How are they similar and how are they different?"

Step Five

It can also be important to think about "target genres," or types of writing that might be used as examples during the research and writing process. Obviously, previously published *GWRJ* articles can be useful in this way, but it can also be interesting to think of other kinds of writing that might serve as examples. Writing research in the field of rhetoric and composition can be useful (for example, books and articles found on the WAC Clearinghouse website at *http://wac.colostate.edu*), but other kinds of research into social practices, or even different kinds of journalism, can be used as interesting models.

Step Six

Consider what kinds of visuals a text might need. Visual examples of different kinds of writing can add interest and information to a text but copyright issues will need to be considered. Charts, graphs, and other illustrations that highlight important aspects of the data you have collected can also be important.

Step Seven

Thinking carefully about what information (data) is needed to make the article credible and useful for readers is a critical step. Thus, once an author has made decisions about the type of research they want to do, it will also be important for them to make a plan for how to do that research. Will it be necessary to visit sites where writing is happening? Interview people about

how they produce or use different kinds of writing? Find historical examples of types of writing?

Step Eight

If the article is going to include observations of people's writing activities, interviews, or surveys, you will need to obtain the proper permission. The interview/image consent form for *GWRJ* articles can be found on our website: *http://isuwriting.com/research-and-release-forms/*.

Step Nine

Although the *GWRJ* does not require any particular style of citation, we do require that authors cite all of their information. The editors will help authors think about what needs to be cited and how it can be done, but authors will want to think about the best way to cite. This includes considering the different ways that citation works in different kinds of writing; for example, scholarly journal articles cite very differently than newspaper or magazine articles or blog posts. Sometimes the style of citation can really affect how a reader thinks about the information in an article, so it is important to think not only about what to cite but also how to cite it.

Step Ten

As the text is being produced, it is critical to keep in mind the needs and interests of *GWRJ* readers. They are interested in reading about a wide range of topics, and they enjoy articles written in a wide range of styles. Because our readers have such a wide range of interests, it is important not to take them for granted. Writing that is interesting, lively, and accessible is important, but perhaps the most important thing to remember is that your research, no matter how it is presented, represents your knowledge and thinking about a topic related to writing that is important to you. And since we are all writers and all of us are learning all the time about how to "do writing" in the world, sharing your knowledge is, ultimately, an act of community.

Questions?

If you have any questions about the journal or any of the articles, you can send queries to *grassrootswriting@gmail.com*. Part of our mission is to welcome and encourage all kinds of writing research, so if you have an idea that you want to develop, please do not hesitate to share it with us.

Works Cited

ISU Writing Program. "Key Terms and Concepts." *Grassroots Writing Research*. Illinois State University, isuwriting.com/key-terms/.

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