

GRASSROOTS WRITING RESEARCH JOURNAL

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From the Editors

Issue 3.2 of the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* continues much of the work we have established in previous issues, which focuses on writing and genre research informed by genre theory and cultural historical activity theory. We open up the issue with “Taking the First Step: Discovering Genre through Blog Analysis,” which is **Kate Wilfinger’s** introduction to genre analysis and CHAT as illustrated through an analysis of a professional blog in her field of medical laboratory science.

This introductory analysis is complicated by cultural considerations in the next two articles, **Kristi McDuffie’s** “From Contributions to Costs: The Cultural Implications of Obituaries” and **Shoshanna Van Tress’s** “Quilt Labels: Piecing Textual Textiles.” **McDuffie** inquires about the genre conventions of obituaries and what those conventions indicate about American culture. Similarly, **Van Tress** probes quilt labels in American history and notes how they help preserve that history.

Summer Qabazard’s “From Religion to Chicken Cannibalism: American Fast Food Ads in Kuwait” and **Adriana Gradea’s** “The Little Genre that Could: CHAT Mapping the Slogan of the Big Communist Propaganda” further deepen the cultural aspect of genre analysis by looking at international genres. **Qabazard** compares Kuwaiti fast food advertising to American fast food advertising and studies the implications of those differences. **Gradea** investigates propaganda slogans from the historical Communist regime in Romania, framed by a writing exercise she conducted on her childhood.

Ryan Edel follows this narrative thread by presenting a fiction story with metacommentary on writing fiction and meta-metacommentary provided by Velociraptors in “Dinosaur Fiction: How Velociraptors Help Us Write Past Childhood.” In “Dissecting Butterflies: An Analysis of Realistic Fictional Narrative Writing,” **Christian Zwick** also offers advice about writing fiction, albeit with a different approach, based on his own experience and an analysis of *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov.

In “The Importance of Understanding Genre...and Memos,” **Jessica Safran** presents a semi-professional genre of the memo and describes how this experience helped her understand the importance of thinking about genre when writing. “Writing for Use: Intersections between Genre and Usability” by **Rob Koehler**, reprinted from a previous *GWRJ* issue, continues this business thread by considering how the technical communication concept of “usability” intersects with genre study.

The final articles, some of our favorites from past *GWRJ* issues, are celebrations of visual genres. **Shane T. Lucas's** "Things That School Couldn't Teach Me: Writing A Kick-Ass Manga" describes his process of learning to create Japanese comics, **Evan Nave's** "In Search of SOL: Graffiti and the Formation of a Writing Identity" compares graffiti artists to writers and considers graffiti artists as writers to understand the connection between writing and identity, and **Karoline Kniss's** "Writing Lines: Blurring the Boundaries between Visual and Written Genres" describes her composition of a political cartoon. **Lisa Phillips** concludes the issue with her research on tattoos, inspired by her childhood memories of her grandfather, in "Writing with Tattoo Ink: Composing that Gets Under the Skin."

We hope you enjoy these articles and find the information useful for furthering your own writing and researching practices. The *GWRJ* publishes issues twice a year and welcomes submissions at any time. For additional information on writing and submitting articles, please see the "Publishing with the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*" article at the end of this issue.

Taking the First Step: Discovering Genre through Blog Analysis

Kate Wilfinger

In this article, Wilfinger explores genre analysis through the eyes of a non-English major. She introduces the terms “genre” and “genre analysis” in such a way as to make them less intimidating to other writers, while focusing on the genre of professional blogs to guide them through what is possibly their first formal analysis. She ends the article by discussing the benefits of genre studies.

What comes to mind when you hear the word “genre”? If you’re like me, you automatically think of broad categories most commonly seen in music, film, or literature. Romance, mystery, science fiction; pop, rock, metal; ring a bell? The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines genre as “a category of artistic, musical, or literary composition characterized by a particular style, form, or content.”¹ This is probably the most common definition for genre, but it’s not the only one. Jordana Hall defines genre as a “common way of responding rhetorically to a situation.”² Make sense? Don’t worry; if you’ve never learned about genre from this perspective before, this definition probably sounds like gibberish. The important thing to notice is that we have two very different definitions of genre. Understanding genre is at the heart of this article.

Genre doesn’t need some long, convoluted definition full of big words. At its most basic level, genre is communication...any type of communication, written, oral, or visual, that is used to convey a message. Within the written scope, genres can range from academic journal articles to text messages and from promotional fliers to grocery lists. Oral genres can include job interviews, video chatting, and even simple conversations with friends or family. As for visual genres, any form of art, whether it’s a painting, a sculpture, or even a movie or TV show, is considered a genre. Each genre has its own mode of communication, as well as a specific list of features that go into the how and why it is produced.

So that's pretty straightforward, right? Now let's add in another word: analysis. Genre analysis. Take a deep breath. Genre analysis isn't as bad as it sounds. In fact, I'll go so far as to say you've already produced countless analyses over the years. You may not have actually written anything down, but you probably subconsciously looked at and thought about features of a genre before you created one (and yes, this would be considered "analyzing" that genre). Think about the first text message you ever sent. If you're like me, you probably have no clue what you wrote, but I'm sure you remember the tone. Your first text message was most likely to a friend, was some witty inside joke or comment, containing numerous abbreviations and emoticons and probably not ending with "sincerely, your good friend." My point is, even if you can't remember the content of your first text message, we can agree on the features of it.

I'll also point out that you were never "taught" these characteristics. You simply picked them up along the way. Genre analysis can be thought of similarly. You may not yet be trained, but I believe you can already unintentionally create genres by working through what are known as "antecedent genres." Antecedent genres are genres you have experienced before; therefore, you can use your previously formed ideas about them as a guide when looking at a new genre. Once you realize you have been inadvertently analyzing genre in your mind for years, the majority of the work is over; now all you need to do is attach reasoning to the choices you're making, and voilà! You're on your way to producing your first genre analysis.

Before we begin, note that there is not only one way to produce a genre analysis. While I prefer to investigate genre by analyzing its features, some students use a writing theory known as CHAT (Cultural Historical Activity Theory) to approach genre analysis by looking at the social and cultural aspects of a genre. Joyce Walker defines CHAT as "a set of theories about rhetorical activity (how people act and communicate in the world—specifically through the production of all kinds of texts), that help us look at the how/why/what of writing practices."³ CHAT includes a list of terms that are useful in breaking down and investigating unfamiliar genres, and allows us to easily spot inconsistencies between our personal draft of a genre and the model we've used. But neither approach is the only way of producing a genre analysis, nor are these two the only methods.

Now that we all have a better understanding of genre and genre analysis, I will guide you through recognizing the features of a genre by highlighting the moves that we, as writers, do naturally. Let's begin with a common genre some of us are familiar with, a blog, and think about the length. Before we look at an example, you should note that there is a difference between a social blog written for your family and friends and a professional blog. Professional blogs are written by experts of a particular field and typically have one of two goals: (1) to present research on a current topic in the field and provide personal

thoughts on the subject to spark discussion, or (2) to share one's thoughts, opinions, and day-to-day activities. This article will examine the latter.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 2007

● ● ● Why Students Are Good For Us

I just worked with a new batch of students today. They were great! Fresh and interested, this class has a sense of humor and it shows. They were joking and talking with each other like they'd been friends for years. More importantly, they were excited about starting something new and excited to be training. There's a sort of contact high you get being around so much positive energy. I love working with them.

I've read other people talk about how different professions "eat their young" and we do too in the lab sometimes - although not as much as you might think. There's usually a period of hazing, especially in areas with a lot of structure. I think what we do is a little different than what nurses do - our hazing is less based on displaced aggression and more based in a total discomfort with change so complete it is, at times, pathological. The fact that most of us are over 50 doesn't help much.

I try to help the students as much as I can. I tell them to ask their trainers how their doing because most of us are too shy to give feedback, even when they're driving us nuts. I also encourage them to be little happy rays of sunshine. Working amongst perfectionists, we forget to talk about the 85% of things that are good and focus only on the depressing (and all consuming at times) 15% that is less than ideal. One of my favorite people to work with is a wonderful woman who sprinkles praise in her conversation like the sugar covered raisins in raisin bran. People like her are all the more noticeable for their rarity.

I've also seem some great changes in local labs as more new people have come in - the more experienced folks are kinder (in some cases) to the newbies and really try to recruit them so there's one more person to cover Christmas. And new people means more tolerance for change - a slow shift. I'm looking forward to seeing how things are altered over the next ten years because I think replacing half the staff with energetic newbies will make it a much more exciting and fun place to work. When they ask questions, we'll be forced to peer into the darker more cobwebby bits of our memories for the answers (or to discover just how much you can find out at [labtests online](#).) The new crew also is increasingly international which should make the pot lucks exciting. Fun times ahead!

Posted by M.williams at [8:12 PM](#)

● 0 comments 

Figure 1: Sample Blog ("Tales from the Clinical Lab")

Now let's take a look at Figure 1, a blog post from a medical laboratory scientist.⁵ By examining the features of this blog, we can see it is only a few paragraphs long, not much longer than a page, and definitely much shorter than a research article, which could easily be 10 pages long. Although this is the norm for many of the blogs I have seen, there can definitely be variation; some blog posts might be a paragraph, while others may be as long as a research article. Now let's think about why this is.

One explanation why online texts are typically shorter than texts produced in other formats is to hold the reader's attention. The Internet offers endless possibilities for information and entertainment, so why should a reader spend too much time on any particular blog posting? Short and concise blog postings have the greatest probability of being read. Also, texts appear more accessible if they are broken up into multiple short paragraphs. For example, a post that is one long rambling paragraph probably won't have

The image shows a sample layout for a blog post. At the top left, the title "Tales from the Clinical Lab" is displayed in a serif font. Below it is a short introductory paragraph: "No one knows what happens down in the lab. Here's your chance to find out." To the right of the title is a decorative header consisting of a grid of light gray circles, with one circle in the second row, first column being solid black. Below the header, the date "THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2008" is shown. The main title of the post is "Creative Photography Entry Bone Marrow", preceded by three small gray circles. To the left of the main content is a sidebar with a smaller version of the "Tales From The Clinical Lab" logo. Below the logo is an "ABOUT ME" section featuring a small profile picture of a plant and the name "M. Williams" with a link to "View my complete profile". Underneath is a "LABELS" section with a list of tags: "change (1)", "communication (1)", "microarrays (1)", "microbiology (1)", "research (1)", and "sample collection (1)". The main content area on the right features a large, square, black and white micrograph of bone marrow, showing a complex, cellular structure with varying shades of gray. Below the image is a paragraph of text: "I saw this creative photography site and thought, 'why not enter?' I just finished taking pictures of bone marrow for a hematology class and I took this photo in an area of the slide that you couldn't look at for morphology because everything's all mooshed together. But it was a good place to get a feel for the diversity of cell types and the presence of fat. It also kind of looks like marble. This was taken on an Olympus microscope under 100X oil emersion lenses and given a little touch of yellow in photoshop for contrast." At the bottom of the post, it says "Posted by M. Williams at 7:41 PM" and "12 comments" with a small icon of a speech bubble.

Figure 2: Sample Layout from "Tales from the Clinical Lab"⁶

many viewers, but if the same blog post is broken up into shorter paragraphs (like the one above), the text will look more appealing and will have a greater probability of being read. And there you have it! We've just identified our first genre feature—blog posts are usually short and made up of short paragraphs.

Now, let's move on to another feature of our blog genre as illustrated in Figure 2: layout and design.

We can easily see the author's design choices, including font, images, and background, but the first thing to consider is *why* the layout of a blog is important. A blog posting must be appealing to the eye so a viewer will take the time to browse the site. Think of the last time you used a search engine. No matter what you were looking for, the websites you ultimately clicked on were probably ones that were well organized, with the desired information near the top of the page. And there's our next genre feature—some people decide whether to read a blog based on the design of the blog alone. Next, let's use this information to write an actual section of our analysis (Note: a useful feature I have found is the use of headings and bullet points, although some writers might find paragraph style more effective for them.):

Layout

- Must be appealing to the eye so the viewer will take the time to browse the site; want to grab reader's attention; if the blog appears unorganized or messy people may not view or read it.
- Consider new styles of organization to catch the viewer's eye, such as different fonts, colors, and images.
 - Using crazy colors or fonts may distract the reader and detract from the author's overall message; try considering more subtle ways to change the design.
- Examples:
 - Bolding titles or headings, skipping a line between paragraphs, using different line spacing or margin sizes.
 - Different font and color choices can be made, but text should be easy to read.
 - Images should be relevant to the topic (in the screenshot above, the author includes an image of bone marrow taken on a microscope).

Although we could expand this analysis, there is no “right way” or “right depth” to produce a genre analysis. My advice is to examine a feature as

much as you can, but not to stress out about it too much. There will always be something left out. Genres can be immensely complicated and complex, but using some of the techniques outlined above to discover the boundaries and key features of the genre is a great starting point.⁷

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2007

● ● ● Way You Can Tell You've Been Hanging Around A Pathologist

1. When someone tells you that a relative died, your first question is, "What'd they die of?"
2. You're watching a horror movie and someone says, "Wow! They got that splatter pattern just right."
3. You know random things like what the number one cause of amputation is in the U.S.
4. You can't talk about work without radically departing from the norm of polite dinner conversation
5. When you complain, they say, "it could be worse, you could be dead!"

Posted by M.williams at 8:27 PM ● 4 comments

Figure 3: Language Example from "Tales from the Clinical Lab"⁸

Do you think you have the hang of things yet? Let's take one final look at "Tales from the Clinical Lab" (Figure 3), this time analyzing language choices. We can easily pick out the tone from this excerpt. The author is trying to be

conversational and humorous, while still paying attention to misinterpretations and sarcasm. Notice the types of words the author uses, in particular contractions and exclamations like "Wow!"

Acanthamoeba

Acanthamoeba spp. are small, free-living amoebae. Their phylogenetic classification is a Genus within the Kingdom Protista, Class Lobosea, Family Acanthamoebidae, and several species have been identified as agents of human infection.¹ There are more than 20 species found in the environment, and *A. polyphaga*, and *A. castellanii* are most often associated with human infection.² *Acanthamoeba* spp. are ubiquitous in nature. They are found in almost all aquatic environments and soil and have been documented in chlorinated swimming pools, tap water, water storage tanks, anaerobic materials such as sludge, feces, many types of soil, and other habitats with low oxygen content.³ *Acanthamoeba* spp. have been associated with human infections of the central nervous system, keratitis, cutaneous lesions and sinusitis and pulmonary infections.

Now take a look at this excerpt from the academic journal *Clinical Laboratory Science* (Figure 4). Unlike the blog post, the tone here is informational. Neither contractions nor exclamation points are used and the author includes a lot of jargon. As these two examples show, style and word choice can change immensely from genre to genre. Let's write out our analysis:

Figure 4: Sample Language from *Clinical Laboratory Science*⁹

Tone and style of writing

- Conversational tone—as if the author is talking to you, instead of at you (which is a feeling you get after reading some journal articles or textbooks).
 - Writer appears friendly, open to comments/discussion.
- Be aware of miscommunication—it is easy to misinterpret a person’s feelings, intentions, or purpose through an electronic medium; be wary of sarcasm, and always be courteous and polite to avoid these situations.
- Informal word choice, wide range of punctuation (exclamation points, all capital letters), slang, contractions, and emoticons are all acceptable.
 - Contrast with journal article or textbook where these types of language are not often found.
- Exclamation points and emoticons add a welcome and sociable element; document appears more accessible/laid back/friendly.
- No formal greeting/salutation, just “dive” right into the topic; no formal farewell (i.e. sincerely).
- Short, simple sentences free of more specialized jargon; many bloggers find this useful to spark discussions and further communication.

So there you have it: your first genre analysis! Well, part of it at least. Now that you have the basic technique down, you can use it to finish this analysis. In addition to the broad categories considered in this article, you can also investigate areas like audience and purpose, choice of medium, related genres, and CHAT considerations such as distribution and activity. For those of you who still may not be completely comfortable with CHAT, we can take another look at Walker’s article. She defines “activity” as “a term that encompasses the actual practices that people engage in as they create text. [This] can include conflict (attempts to disrupt or stop a text from being produced) or indifference (the refusal to participate).”¹⁰ To relate this to professional blogs, consider how typing and submitting texts electronically changes what authors write, keeping in mind that blogs are public. Additionally, authors must think about the pros and cons of writing anonymously (i.e. under a screen name), whether they are comfortable providing personal contact information over the Internet, and even whether or not they truly have the time and energy to update a blog regularly.

It is important to note that genre analysis is more than just pointing out features and characteristics. Everything that goes into our writing is dependent

on our particular place in time and our own particular culture. One of the most useful aspects of genre analysis is that it allows us to adapt as genres change. This is especially evident in online blogs because the Internet is a constantly changing and evolving medium. Years ago, blogging was a completely unknown genre, while today it can actually be considered a profession (consider Perez Hilton or Jared Eng¹¹). The analysis we just put together to describe the ins and outs of writing a blog is probably different from one that could have been done five years ago, and will most certainly be different from one written five years from now. Perhaps résumés will evolve to an online forum, where employers will be looking more for a sense of your individual voice than your statistics and affiliations. On the other hand, blogging may even disappear altogether to be replaced by other social media sites. However it changes, analysis of the social aspects of a genre can be used to gain a better understanding of language and culture within a field at large. Perhaps even more importantly, genre analysis can help writers succeed in new writing situations, where we are often left on our own to navigate new conventions.

Endnotes

1. "Genre." *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*. An Encyclopedia Britannica Company.
2. Jordana Hall discusses her definitions of certain literary terms in "Genre Terminology" from the 2011 English 145 *Resource Compendium*. <http://isuwriting.com/resources/program-documents/>.
3. Walker, Joyce R. "Just CHATting." *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* 1 (2010). <http://isuwriting.com/resources/grassroots/>. For more information about CHAT, including full definitions and uses of production, representation, distribution, reception, socialization, activity, and ecology, see Walker.
4. Williams, M. "Why Students Are Good For Us." *Tales from the Clinical Lab*. 11 Sept. 2008. <http://clsmt.blogspot.com/>.
5. A medical laboratory scientist (MLS) works in the laboratory of a hospital running the tests ordered by doctors. If you have ever had blood drawn and later heard your doctor referencing things like cell counts or hemoglobin levels, an MLS was responsible for running those tests on your blood and providing your doctor with that information.
6. Williams, M. "Creative Photography Entry Bone Marrow." *Tales from the Clinical Lab*. 04 Sept. 2007. <http://clsmt.blogspot.com/>.

7. Walker talks a little bit about the complexity of genre, and the rewards of using CHAT on page 72.
8. Williams, M. “Way You Can Tell You’ve Been Hanging Around A Pathologist.” *Tales from the Clinical Lab*. 11 Oct. 2007. <http://clsmt.blogspot.com/>.
9. Fydryszewski, Nadine A, and Peter H Hanna. “Acanthamoeba Keratitis—A Diagnostic Challenge.” *Clinical Laboratory Science* Vol. 24 No. 4 (2011): 202-207.
10. Walker.
11. Perez Hilton and Jared Eng, authors of the websites www.perezhilton.com and www.JustJared.com, are American bloggers both known for posting celebrity news and gossip.



Kate Wilfinger is a senior Medical Laboratory Science major at ISU hoping to go onto pharmacy school where she can continue to avoid “real life” until she’s at least 28. On Wednesdays, after class, Kate rescues blind puppies and orphans from Disney villains. She can create elaborate four course meals using only a spice grinder and a toaster oven. Years ago, Kate discovered the meaning of life, but forgot to write it down. She is a master of disguise, an expert ice cream scooper, and an outlaw in Peru. She is the most interesting woman in the world.

From Contributors to Costs: The Cultural Implications of Obituaries

Kristi McDuffie

In a quest to understand keepsakes about loved ones who have passed away, McDuffie explores the genre of obituaries in American culture. She finds what information is typically included in obituaries and what is not, along with who writes and pays for these publications. She also determines what this information reveals about our own culture and determines that obituaries are often insufficient mementos to adequately memorialize our loved ones.

Obituaries as a genre always used to seem pretty straightforward to me. They showed a picture of the person who died and described the circumstances of the death. They included funeral arrangements and names of family members still living. Growing up, I always saved the obituaries of loved ones as a keepsake, to help me remember them, and I still have several stored in a shoebox with all of the birthday cards my grandmother sent me every year. In more recent years, I have been able to find obituaries online and save them on my computer, but the information in the obituary has been roughly the same and I never thought twice about it.

But last year, I came across an article that discussed differences in obituaries between cultures. The author, Ann Johns, investigates the cultural variations that create differences between obituaries in different places.¹ Johns wrote,

If we think about obituaries only in terms of our own cultures, we might assume that texts from these genres are very similar in content, form, and purpose. However, after completing studies of obituaries from a variety of locations throughout the United States, Fielden (1995) found that there can be considerable variation even within

one country, particularly in terms of content. In small towns, for example, much of the text is devoted to blood lines and relationships: Generations of ancestors are mentioned, as are all of those in the family who survived the deceased. In larger cities, the focus is more on the profession and accomplishments of the deceased and the contributions he or she made to the community. (Johns 41)

In addition to these variations between obituaries within a country, Johns also describes cultural differences in obituaries across countries. One researcher, Pena, studied Brazilian obituaries and found that they were focused on describing the funeral masses or on giving thanks to people who helped during the person's final illness, without information on cause or time of death (Johns 41). Another researcher, Kishida, analyzed Japanese obituaries and found that the cause and date and time of death are included, probably because time is important to Japanese literary genres (Johns 43). Kishida also found that Japanese obituaries named the chief mourner and the home address of the family because the chief mourner is the "ceremonial family representative, who expresses appreciation to those who attend the memorial service and send condolences" (Johns 43). The home address is given so that people will know where to send condolences and gifts, which seems like a fairly formal practice because Kishida notes that Japanese companies will often assign someone to read and respond to obituaries of business acquaintances or politicians (Johns 43).

Johns' article alerted me to how much I have taken this common genre of the obituary for granted. With this understanding that the obituary is not straightforward, especially between different cultures, I wanted to look at my own family members' obituaries to see what kinds of genre conventions emerged and what that might reveal about my own culture (however that might be defined).

Since I couldn't find my keepsake shoebox (although I think it's at the top of a closet), I had to conduct this search online. I began by looking at the websites of newspapers that might have obituaries of my family members in Ohio, since I was born in Sandusky, Ohio, and much of my extended family still lives there. Thus I looked at the websites of the newspapers the *Clyde Enterprise* (my maternal grandparents still live in Clyde, which may be familiar to some readers because it is the "Winesburg" in Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*), the *Findlay Courier* (a neighboring town), the *Fremont News-Messenger* (another neighboring town where my paternal grandparents lived), and the *Sandusky Register*. Sadly, I had no luck finding many family members' obituaries online, including my paternal grandparents. I'm guessing that they passed away too long ago for the obituaries to have been digitized. I did, however, find the obituary of my step-grandfather from Blissfield, Michigan,

because he passed away just last year. His obituary was helpful, but as I will discuss below, everything that I learned about obituaries in the search process is even more interesting.

To begin, many obituaries don't look like I thought they did. Of the four people included in the April 6, 2012 obituaries on the *sanduskyregister.com*, only two of the four had anything substantive written. Here is one of the cryptic obituaries:

05:40 PM **OHIO, ROCKY RIDGE, SANDUSKY**
 APR 06 **SANDUSKY**
 2012
 • **John "Jack" A. Mesner, 84, of Sandusky, died Thursday morning, April 5, 2012, in Stein Hospice Care Center, Sandusky. Visitation will be 4-7 p.m. Tuesday, April 10, at David F. Koch Funeral Home, 520 Columbus Ave., Sandusky, where other arrangements are pending.**

Figure 1: Sample Death Notice²

Upon investigating further, I learned that such short obituaries are part of a subgenre called "Death Notices." Death notices are only a couple of sentences and contain basic information about who has passed away, when, where, and what funeral arrangements are in the works. These notices are often written by the funeral homes. Full obituaries, on the other hand, are often 300-350 words and contain details about the person's life, including place of birth, parents, name of high school, marriage, military service, hobbies, family, and so forth. Almost always included in these longer obituaries are the names of both deceased and surviving family members, such as spouses and children. Funeral arrangements are included, along with a statement about where to send donations (in lieu of the tradition of sending flowers to the funeral home). Many obituaries also contain a photo, but not always. Longer obituaries are often written by close friends or family members, assisted by the funeral homes.

The genre convention that surprised me the most about obituaries was the alternate suggestions for people to make donations (often called contributions or memorial contributions) rather than send flowers to the bereaved, and this inclusion seems to be a staple in today's obituaries. This convention indicates to me that it became commonplace in American culture for people to send flowers to the funeral home or the deceased's family members. The few funerals I have attended support this idea, as the caskets were always surrounded by flowers and I always feel like I'm supposed to send flowers if someone close to me suffers a loss. But the trend of including alternative donations in obituaries reveals that people are finding this use of money wasteful, so instead, people are asked to make a donation somewhere

in honor of the deceased. Therefore, the obituaries include a line about where to send a donation, such as the deceased's favorite charity (churches seem to be a common choice). My mother told me that she prefers to give a donation directly to the family, perhaps to a surviving spouse or a child, to help with funeral costs or other needs that they may have. This makes sense to me, since funerals are super expensive, but I suppose that such suggestions would not be appropriate in an obituary because it would sound as though the family were asking for money, which would not be well-received in our culture. Although I was a bit surprised to read that the family's home address would be made public via an obituary in Japan, I like that the convention there makes it more acceptable (and perhaps even socially required) to send something like a donation to the family rather than somewhere else.

These genre conventions that I have detailed were supported by numerous obituaries that I looked at, but to demonstrate, Figure 2 shows my step-grandfather's obituary, along with annotations about the genre conventions.

Dean Brubaker

ARTICLE | MARCH 1, 2011

Dean Wayne Brubaker, 75, of Blissfield, passed away at Highlands Regional Medical Center in Sebring, Florida, on Friday, February 25, 2011.

Dean was born August 3, 1935, in Blissfield, Michigan, the only son of Clarence and Alma (Walper) Brubaker.

He graduated from Blissfield High School and married Shirley Braun on April 15, 1956.

Dean served in the United States Army and was stationed in Italy. Upon returning from the service, he farmed the family farm in Blissfield until his retirement in 2004.

He was also on the Board of Directors for both the former Blissfield Co-operative and the Blissfield State Bank. He owned and operated a buffing and polishing shop, D.W.B. Manufacturing, in Blissfield for 17 years.

Dean was a licensed builder. He built a speculation house, remodeled homes, and performed numerous home repairs for family and friends. Dean enjoyed traveling and saw much of Europe, the U.S., and Canada. Six days out of the week, he never missed his 6 a.m. coffee with his friends at McDonald's. Dean was a loving husband, father, grandfather, great grandfather and friend. He will be missed.

Dean is survived by his wife of almost 55 years; four daughters, Linda Kohlenberg of Blissfield; Amy (Tom) Principe of Mount Morris, Ill.; Betty (Dan) Ganger of Bristol, Ind.; and Barbara (Kiernan) Mack of Arlington Heights, Ill; 10 grandsons and five granddaughters; five great grandsons and six great granddaughters; sister, Shirley (Jerry) Coolidge of Toledo; and many nieces and nephews.

He was preceded in death by his parents and two sisters.

The funeral service for Dean will be held at 11:00 a.m. on Saturday, March 5, 2011 at Blissfield Baptist Church with Rev. Thomas Frantz officiating. Burial will follow at Pleasant View Cemetery. Friends may visit the family at Wagley Funeral Home, Tagsold Chapel on Thursday and Friday from 2 to 4 p.m. and 6 to 8 p.m. In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made to the Blissfield Baptist Church or the charity of the donor's choice. You may also send condolences to www.wagleyfuneralhome.com.

The obituary opens with the standard date and place of death, date and place of birth, parents, high school, and marriage.
Military service is often included.
Occupation is sometimes included.
Details about friends and hobbies must have been supplied by the family because they are personal and extend beyond the types of facts normally included.
Preceding deaths and surviving family members are usually included.
Funeral arrangements are among the bare minimum.
Contribution suggestions are also common, and in fact may now be obligatory.

Figure 2: Brubaker Obituary³

Personal details beyond factual information seem rare in obituaries, although they do appear; consider that Tieriney Schiewe's obituary on February 4, 2012 in the Sandusky *Register* contains a description of this young

mother as “one of God’s brightest angels” who left behind “two beautiful angels of her own” and also included these additional details:

Her free spirit and bright smile brought joy to everyone she encountered. Her passions included her children, her family and friends, “Twilight,” and tweeting. She loved music, playing her violin and was a huge New England Patriots fan. “You touched so many lives and your laugh was so contagious, you will be greatly missed, always loved, and never forgotten — until we see you in heaven.”

Figure 3: Example of Personal Details⁴

These details and this tone are rare compared to the typical factual, objective tone of obituaries; this indicates that a family member wrote or at least contributed to the obituary, even though the author listed is a regular contributor for obituaries.

My research shows that the depth and length of the obituary depend primarily on whether the deceased’s family members want to write an obituary and whether they want to or are able to pay to publish it. (It also depends on the funeral home, since funeral homes help family members write and place them.) Famous people often receive free obituaries written by newspaper journalists because their deaths are considered newsworthy events, but for most people, substantive obituaries cost money. Although it can be difficult to find out how much newspapers charge because not all list their fees online, most charge by the line or inch. There is a wide variation in the amount—the *Idaho Statesman*, for instance, charges \$2.50 per line while the *Seattle Times* charges \$94.80 per inch!⁵ Most newspapers probably charge something in between, like the *Tampa Bay Online*, which charges \$8.21 per line.⁶ (Their website demonstrates that a typical obituary of 32 lines costs about \$200.) Photos often cost extra. In general, larger newspapers coming out of big cities charge more and are more selective about which obituaries they publish, while smaller newspapers in small towns are more likely to publish all obituaries and to publish them for free as deaths are bigger news events in small towns.⁷

Another model of charging for obituaries is based on what information is included. *TheCourier.com*, for example, publishes obituaries for free with the following information (which we now understand to be generic conventions for American obituaries), but charges for anything more:⁸

- name, age, residence, date, time, place of death, and former residence;
- survivors, including name, residence, and relationship;
- funeral type, date, time, officiant, place, and burial and visitation information;

- designations (which I assume to mean designations for donations); and
- contact information for the person submitting the form (which won't be printed).

The economics of obituaries has cultural implications related to the fact that all newspapers are trying to meet the demands of their constituents. Larger newspapers invest money in obituaries for famous people because it will help sell papers and they are selective about what obituaries to publish because they do not want to devote a large amount of space to describing people whom few readers will know. As Johns notes, obituaries in cities are more focused on accomplishments. In small towns, however, chances are better that readers will know the deceased and that their deaths will be of interest to their readers, so obituaries are more important, as indicated by the cheaper price and greater inclusion. Johns also pointed out that small town papers are more likely to focus on family members than accomplishments, which supports the greater sense of community. My grandparents' experience supports these findings; they have lived in Clyde, Ohio, for their entire lives and scan the obituaries daily for people that they knew.

To sum up my findings, this investigation tells me that in American culture, the quality and length of an obituary is largely dependent on the remaining family members doing the work to communicate with the paper, provide any additional details, and fund those details. Given obituaries' focus on fact-based details and funeral arrangements, I also deduce that in our culture (and maybe in most), the audience of obituaries is people outside of close family and friends. I used to consider obituaries keepsakes, and although they can still serve as reminders or sources of factual information (I'm thinking family trees here), I now realize they are not terribly useful in helping me remember details about my loved ones. My step-grandfather's obituary can't help me remember that he teased me incessantly, let me drive his golf cart around his farm, or let me eat cookies 'n cream ice cream before bed. The responsibility to remember those things is going to remain with me, not with any newspaper, regardless of the culture that I'm in.

Endnotes

1. Johns, Ann M. *Text, Role, and Context: Developing Academic Literacies*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
2. Mesner's death notice was found at <http://www.sanduskyregister.com/ohio/obituary/death-notice> on April 7, 2012.

3. Brukbaker's obituary can be found at <http://www.blissfieldadvance.com/article/dean-brubaker>.
4. Schiewe's obituary can be found at <http://www.sanduskyregister.com/sandusky/obituary/tieriney-j-schiewe-oct-23-1978-feb-3-2012>.
5. See <http://custserv.idahostatesman.com/reader/obituaries.php> and <http://services.nwsources.com/ClassifiedWeb/ObituaryNotice.aspx> for the Idaho Statesman and Seattle Times obituary rates.
6. See <http://www2.tbo.com/static/obituaries/placeanobit/> for Tampa Bay Online's obituary rates.
7. See http://dying.about.com/od/obituaries/bb/obit_note.htm for general information on obituary rates.
8. The form can be found at <http://www.thecourier.com/news/obits/ObituaryForm.asp>.



Kristi is a Ph.D. Student in English Studies at Illinois State University with a concentration in Rhetoric and Composition. She misses her family members who have passed on, especially her grandmother Tillie, and wishes she had more than an obituary to remember her by. She is proud to publish this article in the last issue she is producing as Associate Editor of *GWRJ*.

Quilt Labels: Piecing Textual Textiles

Shoshanna Van Tress

Examining the elusive nature of the genre-within-a-genre known as the quilt label, this article describes how a seemingly simple genre may be difficult to define, complicated by questions of history, culture, artistic style, and intended audience. These factors and others influence the ways in which these texts are created and how they are read by various audiences.

First and foremost, dear readers, I must address a question that some of you may be asking yourselves: What, exactly, is a quilt label? I am sorry to say that the more I think about quilt labels, the more I realize there is really no short answer to this question. In fact, I may spend my entire allotted space attempting to pin down a definition, leaving you at last with only the realization that quilt labels as a genre are as elusive, mysterious, and unique as quilts themselves. (And believe me, quilts are mysterious and unique. But that is a subject for a different day.)

A basic definition first: a quilt label is a written, textual part of a quilt, providing information such as the quilter's name, the date of completion, the city wherein said quilt was created, and who the recipient of the quilt was. Quilt labels carry historical messages both personal and academic. Instructional quilting books include brief yet urgent little sections encouraging quilters to make quilt labels for their work; for example, Kaisard and Keltner in the *Better Homes and Gardens Complete Guide to Quilting* remark: "Since your quilts may outlive you, it makes sense to preserve their heritage for future generations by marking them with your


"Hmm... what does this remind me of?" you ponder, gazing into space, thoughtfully drumming your fingers. "Ah, yes!" you think, "This reminds me of citation conventions of other genres that include the author's name and publication information!"

name, your city, and the date at a minimum. Adding other information, such as a poem, a good-will wish for the recipient, a special-occasion note, or even the fabric content and care instructions, further personalizes the quilt” (16). The book then spends about one page carefully describing methods of permanently marking fabric and attaching it to the quilt. This article investigates the genre of quilt labels, examining how cultural and individual meaning, intention, and style contribute to the creative expression of this seemingly simple text.

Quilt Labels in Historical Research

As noted in Figure 1, quilt historians are one audience for quilt labels; this particular audience will look to quilt labels for information relevant to their specific research. Quilt labels help historians research the creation and development of often-used quilt patterns, tracing changes in patterns and the routes of popular patterns as quiltmakers and gift quilts relocate about the country. Label information also indicates the

popularity of methods and fabrics, interests and concerns of quiltmakers, and more broadly, the economic status of specific areas in specific time periods. Some information may be gained from knowledge of available textiles, outside sources, family stories or the recollection of friends, but quilt labels, when they do appear, are much appreciated for placing a quilt in its historical context. A glance through any book on quilt history reveals photographs of hundreds of beautiful quilts, each the result of creative thought and hundreds of hours of work. Look at the captions accompanying these photos, and very often you will find remarks such as “quiltmaker unknown,” or “probably Lancaster County, ca. 1880.”



"After all the care and thought that goes into a quilt, it should be signed and dated on completion. Quilt historians of the future will appreciate the information, and friends and viewers in the present will enjoy the personal touch."
- Dianne Finnegan

Figure 1: Image by Author, Quote by Finnegan (144)

Case of the Missing Quilt Label

The caption accompanying a photo of the quilt pictured in Figure 2 reads, “*Log Cabin Variation*. Possibly New Jersey, c. 1890. Silk, hand-pieced,

hand-applied, and hand-embroidered, 78x62 inches. This unique quilt's 280 blocks include more than one hundred small houses and many depictions of African Americans....The fact that all the figures are black and that they are portrayed in a straightforward, uncaricatured manner strongly suggests that the artist was an African American depicting what she/he knew. The wide variety of silk used in the quilt also suggests that the artist may have been a dressmaker" (Shaw 171).

In the absence of a quilt label or other historical documentation, quilt historians can only make guesses about this beautiful quilt. Fabric dating methods help indicate an approximate time frame, and knowledge of fabric use in that time (silk for fine dresses) indicates a possible occupation for the quilter. A dressmaker, employed by well-off ladies, would have access to silk in all colors. The guess that the quilter was African-American is based on the uncaricatured representations, in contrast to many white artists' renditions of the time. Still, these identifications are guesswork. Quilt historians, as well as possible descendants of this quilt artist, would no doubt like more conclusive evidence about who this artist was.



Figure 2: Log Cabin Quilt (Shaw 171)

That copyright and publication data on the inside of your favorite novel? The part you might never read? Historians find this part of the book as gripping as the cliffhanger ending, just as quilt historians appreciate and depend on quilt labels. Indeed, discovering contextual clues could change the way we read books.

"Like an enigmatic dedication page, deliciously evocative but obscure to all but a favored few?" you ask. Yes, but as I muse, it occurs to me that the quilt itself, unlike a published book, may not be meant for outsiders' eyes. "Perhaps," you suggest, "we might better liken it to a greeting card: personal, appropriate to the occasion, and coordinating with the gift."

Quilt Labels for Personal Memories

The other group that serves as an audience for quilt labels, family and friends, is very different from the historian group. In the future, family members may share historians' questions about quilts' origins and authorship, but in the present, family and friends know who the quiltmaker is.

A label created with this group in mind will likely be more personal, noting a special occasion or referencing some inside joke or secret. It may provide the name of the quiltmaker, but perhaps with a title beforehand, such as "Grandma Thomas" or "Aunt Martha." Some quilt labels provide more information about the recipient than the artist, such as: "May, 2009 for baby Lucy with much love." A special poem, going-away wishes, or

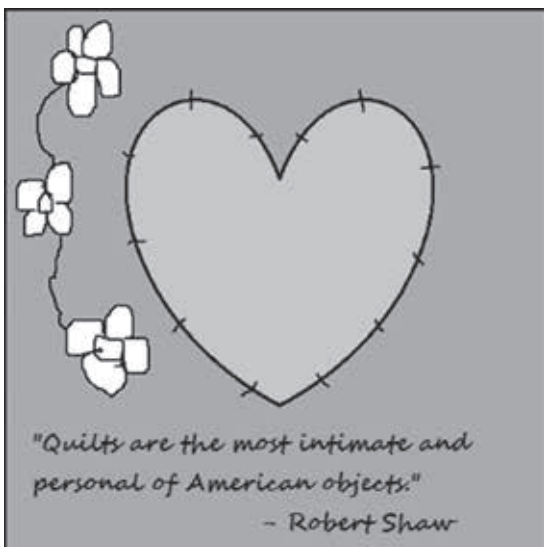


Figure 3: Image by Author, Quote by Shaw (4)

consideration because it includes the quilter's full name, the location, and the year. The inclusion of the year may also be helpful for James and William if there is ever disparity in their memories of when exactly it was that they had the chicken pox. ("It was when I was seven." "No way, 'cause I remember it was the summer I got my bike!") Unlike quilt labels that express deep sympathy, this label can be intimate in a more playful way, displaying the quilter's sense of humor as she puns "cooped up" and chooses a chicken-wire print fabric and an embroidery stitch reminiscent



Figure 4: "Cooped Up" Quilt (Burdin)

words of encouragement may all appear in a quilt label. As noted in Figure 3, quilts are intimate objects. Even the fabric may suggest intimacy, leftover bits of projects and castoff garments inspiring memories. The style will typically reflect that of the quilt. It may be simple or ornate, embroidered or digitally printed, pieced or appliqued. The label fits the quilt as well as the occasion and the quilter's style.

A Quilter Aware of Multiple Audiences

A quilt label can also tell a story or nudge a memory. The quilt label pictured in Figure 4 seems to take historians into consideration because it includes the quilter's full name, the location, and the year. The inclusion of the year may also be helpful for James and William if there is ever disparity in their memories of when exactly it was that they had the chicken pox. ("It was when I was seven." "No way, 'cause I remember it was the summer I got my bike!") Unlike quilt labels that express deep sympathy, this label can be intimate in a more playful way, displaying the quilter's sense of humor as she puns "cooped up" and chooses a chicken-wire print fabric and an embroidery stitch reminiscent of chicken tracks. In addition to the simple historical data provided, some of the information that might seem to be of only personal value might actually be useful for cultural researchers and historians. Researchers interested in areas of study such as mother-son relationships, attitudes toward childhood illness, and humor might find a label like this of interest. The cultural and historical surroundings of a quilt label, including the intended audience, then, affect the artist's composition choices and inform our understanding of the quilt label's meaning.



Figure 5: "Merry Minis" Quilt Label Template

Techno-Signatures

Some companies sell premade quilt labels, while others sell access to digital images. Others, like the one pictured in Figure 5, are available as free downloads. Quilters print the design on fabric, adding messages or visual images in the center of the frame provided. Some premade or special-order quilt labels come with machine-embroidered messages and names already stitched on. Authorized by the quilter, this signature is nevertheless created by someone else. This concept is nothing new: "The development in the 1830s of a permanent ink that would not damage fabric probably contributed to the signature-quilt fad. Writing in ink on fabric was not, however, a technique that was easily mastered. Generally, one or two especially skilled writers would provide the inked names" (Warren and Eisenstat 23). Quilts created by groups of women were often decorated with the quilters' signatures. Rather than a small label hidden away in a corner or on the back of the quilt, these community-oriented pieces proudly displayed the names of the artists.

Names displayed prominently on a gift differ from a greeting card. Perhaps, dear reader, you might have seen such a commemorative gift? A matted picture frame with wedding guest signatures? A crayon drawing you created in kindergarten and signed with your teacher's assistance? A quilt label, then, may function as a permanent gift card, its presence on the gift reminding the recipient of the gift-giver.

The Semi-Anonymous Quilt Label

As is suggested by the awareness ribbon in Figure 6, quilting clubs and guilds put in hours of collaborative work creating quilts for charities and fundraisers. For example, Gems of the Prairie Quilt Guild, which is a guild for Peoria, Illinois area quilters, donates about 300 tiny quilts each year to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at OSF Medical Center. They also donate quilts to St. Jude Research Hospital and the Center for Prevention of Abuse (Gems). Quilts such as these are often the work of several quilters. One might purchase fabric and measure out the amount needed, another might cut and piece the quilt top, and yet another might quilt the layers together. Besides the work of putting the quilt together, clubs and guilds often have members in charge



Figure 6: "Mothers and Daughters" Quilt Label

of coordinating these efforts and making sure that all materials used are appropriate for the intended recipient (fabric content might be important, for example). Rather than create individualized labels for each quilt with the names of every single person who worked on the project, many such groups opt for a standard label stating the group's name. For collaborative, quilting community efforts such as this, serving as donations to people who likely would not recognize the names blazoned across the quilt top, it makes sense to stitch on a label that simply states the quilt was donated by the Gems of the Prairie Quilting Guild.

When the Name on the Quilt is Not the Artist's

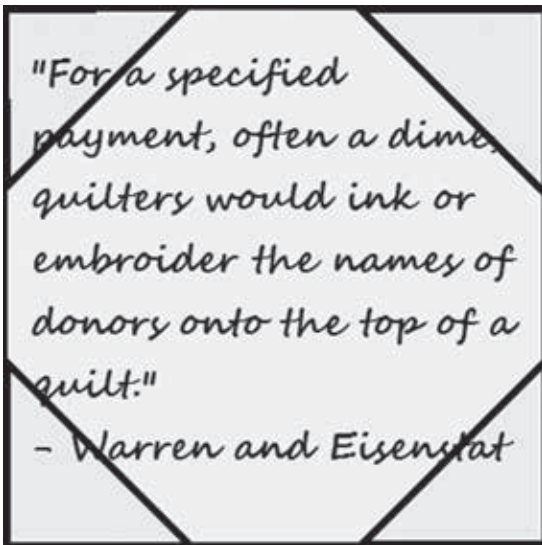


Figure 7: Image by Author; Quote by Warren & Eisenstat (35)

Fundraising quilts may be auctioned or raffled off in order to raise money for charity. Some art quilts are created with designs promoting a social justice concern or in memorial of an event or loved one. In cases such as those mentioned in the quotation in Figure 7, what appears to be an album quilt or signature quilt with quilters' names may in fact turn out to be a fundraising quilt. Names of donors, rather than quilters, appear on the quilt top, which has become a giant quilt label. Some names of individuals may appear, but names could be those of organizations or local businesses who donated toward the fundraiser.

And Now, to Finish, We Bind the Edges of Our Quilt

We return at long last, dear reader, to the question we began with: What is a quilt label? Similar to many genres, this multiplicity of similarity renders it unlike any other genre but itself. Despite all our discussion and your insightful suggestions for comparison, I find that the answer is still elusive. The information I have shared with you is only the snowcap on top of a mountain, the steam rising from my teacup. A writer of quilt labels must consider the immediate audience—the recipient of the quilt. She must also consider whether or not to take into account the further trajectory of future quilt historians. The quilt's purpose will affect the label, as well as the style

and materials of the quilt itself. The quilter's own preferences will also be of use in designing a label. Technology choices come into play, as do decisions regarding whether the label is actually made by the quilter or by someone else. Quilt labels are not even definable by size or location, as they may be any size between a few inches wide or the entire quilt top, on the back or the top of the quilt. In fact, quilt labels may even be significant in their absence.

In my home, I have a quilt my grandmother gave to me. It is a lovely purple silky fabric, beautifully quilted. Some relative made it, I was told as a ten-year-old, but I have forgotten who. Probably I will never know. My interest in family history makes me feel a bit sad about this, but at the same time, not knowing imparts an intriguing air of mystery to this family artifact. What is a quilt label, after all? It is a communication across time, a signature, a story. It is a work of creative expression and artistry, of the written word sewn to a visual text, a memory often forgotten.

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One might describe a donor quilt label as an acknowledgement, such as one sees gracing the walls of museums and libraries, listing donor names. You interject, "The lengthy dedication pages in some books and music records are similar! Thanking all who have contributed or supported a project." Very like, indeed. In fact, I would like to take this moment to thank my mother, who taught me to sew, the GWRJ staff for their helpful suggestions, the vast circle of the quilting community past and present, and my husband, for supporting my sewing and my writing.



Shoshanna Van Tress likes reading old books, baking cookies, and sewing quilts for her tiny nieces and nephews. One day, she will have a quilting studio to work in and her husband will have a woodshop in the next room. She is currently working toward her Master's Degree in English at Illinois State University.

From Religion to Chicken Cannibalism: American Fast Food Ads in Kuwait

Summer Qabazard

This article is an exploration of the genre differences between American and Kuwaiti fast-food advertisements, where I discuss how cultural differences impact genre conventions. I conclude with some implications for writers.

I've moved around a lot in my life—mostly back and forth between Kuwait and America. Moving between the two cultures, I've noticed not only cultural differences and similarities, but also lots of cultural borrowing. Since Kuwait is made up of only 3.5 million people and is smaller than New Jersey, it is almost always the borrower. After the Gulf War, the number of Americans coming into Kuwait grew, and so did the number of American fast food restaurants in Kuwait.

When typical fast food advertisement information (texts, images, and ideas) moves from American culture to Kuwaiti culture, that information changes to fit a Kuwaiti audience's needs and expectations. When creating ads, fast food franchises in Kuwait make choices about what to change and how to change it, but these choices are *really* made by the people's demands; they are made based on the way the Kuwaiti people interpret and use the features of the genre of American fast food advertisements.

Contrasting Genre Features in Visual Fast Food Ads

Figure 1 and Figure 2 demonstrate how texts and images look different in each culture. The McChicken advertisement is from McDonald's and the flyer is from Naif Chicken, a popular restaurant in Kuwait. On the right side of the Naif Chicken flyer is a sesame bun, and on the left is the more traditionally Middle Eastern pita bread. The Pepsi on the right is juxtaposed with labaan, an Arabic yoghurt drink, on the left. The traditionally American coleslaw has not been transposed to something else on this menu, but at the restaurant it's possible to order side items like hummus and other Middle Eastern foods. Kuwaitis generally love French fries, and so they are featured as a side item along with each of the varieties of chicken. This love of French fries is influenced by their popularity in the American fast food industry.



Figure 1: McChicken Advertisement in America (2008)chode)

The chicken burger in Figure 1 is an example of the kind of image found in a typical American fast food ad. The bread and the chicken are smooth, symmetrical, and almost perfect. In American culture, people typically don't like to think about eating dead animals, so the food is made to not look like dead animal parts. The chicken burger in Figure 2, however, doesn't match what is usually on fast food menus in America; it's lumpy and looks less processed than a typical American chicken burger. That the chicken doesn't look as processed as American fast food reflects cultural attitudes towards food and food production that help show the difference between the genres of American and Kuwaiti fast food and their texts and images. In America, meat is generally served without any bones in it as often as possible (fried chicken is a common exception, as are pork chops and some fish). In Kuwait, almost no one cares about bones in their meat. There are bones in the spatchcocked (spread-eagle) chicken on the left side of the flyer in



Figure 2: Naif Chicken Advertisement in Kuwait (Paper Dump)

Figure 2. A more drastic example of attitudes toward what Americans may view as gory aspects of food and food images is the way my dad casually sucks the eyeballs and brains out of fish on a typical Friday afternoon at a Kuwaiti lunch table.

The chicken on the Naif Chicken box is holding a knife and fork. Um, what? Does the chicken want to eat chicken? Gross. This probably wouldn't happen in America because Americans don't want to think about chicken eating chicken, especially at the same time as they're eating chicken themselves. It's difficult to figure out exactly what it is in Kuwaiti culture that makes this image happen, but I'd guess that it has to do with the culture not being as put off by such images as American culture is as a whole. An animal eating itself would be horrifying in American culture. I'm thinking of societies America has that Kuwait doesn't, like The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. Americans have many cultural messages and ideologies about animal rights that are lacking in Kuwait. It's hard to imagine a KFC box, for example, featuring a chicken chowing down on chicken (or implying that it's about to chow down on some chicken) making it past the Food and Drug Administration's advertisement approval panel.

Advertising Textual Differences

In Figure 2, we can see subtle textual details like the phone number, which is six digits long instead of seven like most American numbers (not including the area code). This six-digit format is unique to fast food restaurants in Kuwait. Because the country is so small, it traditionally had only one area code, but there are so many fast food restaurants now that new six-digit numbers have been created. There is also free twenty-four-hour home delivery mentioned in the bottom right corner of the Naif flyer. There are few fast food places left in Kuwait that aren't open twenty-four hours and that don't provide home delivery service. Fewer places in America are open so many hours or offer delivery, especially not twenty-four-hour delivery. Taco Bell, for example, boasts about staying open late for a "FourthMeal," but it's got nothing on Naif Chicken.

In English, people read from left to right, but in Arabic, people read from right to left. So, in Figure 2, the Kuwaiti audience first looks at the typical American fast food on the right and then they look at the typical Kuwaiti fast food on the left. This Kuwaiti reading shows that emphasis is placed on the typical American fast food items, with the Kuwaiti foods taking less prominence. It's important to consider what specific audiences may do with



Figure 3: Cola Advertisement Made by Americans for Kuwaitis (Charania)

texts, especially when people are trying to sell a text and/or image to people who perceive the world differently, like people from an unfamiliar culture. The advertisement in Figure 3 came to me in an email forward a couple of years ago, accompanied by text stating that it was created by Americans and marketed to an Arabic audience.

Apparently, the creators didn't know how to read Arabic, so they used images to get their point across instead. There's a problem with this ad, however, from an Arabic perspective. In English, this sequence of images makes sense. The sequence suggests that a person is thirsty, so they drink some cola, and then feel energized enough to run. Since people read from right to left in Arabic, to a Kuwaiti reader, this series of images would convey that when a person is feeling good and has energy, they had better not drink cola, otherwise they'll end up flat on their back in the desert. That's what I'd call a writing researcher fail.

Religious Differences in Kuwaiti Advertising

Figure 4 is a take-out box from Naif Chicken posted by a Kuwaiti blogger who noticed and disliked the reminder to pray before eating (what the arrow is pointing at). This kind of reminder is much less likely to come up in America because of separation of church and state. Kuwait is a self-proclaimed Islamic country, however, and religion and government are not separate at all.

The prayer on the Naif Chicken box leads to another important part of fast food advertising in Kuwait. Because the customers are mostly Muslim, the advertisers have to make sure they address the Islamic diet. Muslims are forbidden from eating or drinking anything made from pork or alcohol, and all meat consumed by Muslims must be labeled "halal," meaning that the animal it came from was killed according Islamic law. In the top left corner of the flyer from Naif Chicken (Figure 2), there's a piece of Arabic text that guarantees that all meat served at the restaurant is 100% halal Kuwaiti



Figure 4: Naif Chicken Take-out Box (Danderma)

chicken. This message is next to large, attention-grabbing letters and has a double underline to make sure potential customers recognize that this company will accommodate their diet restrictions. Almost all Middle Eastern food ads have this same halal guarantee. According to a study on advertising in the Middle East conducted by Rice and Al-Mossawi, many major American fast food companies like Burger King, McDonald's, Hardee's, and Dairy Queen include halal guarantees on their advertisements and menu boards. Cultural differences about food preparation and production, as well as cultural differences about behavior around eating, are visible in the genre of advertisements. Cultural differences can prevent certain genre conventions from transferring across cultures successfully.

Thinking about Audience

Companies are focused on selling to their own immediate audience, but it would be to their advantage to think carefully about how their messages are taken in and taken up in other countries so that their international branches are able to generate profit. This is why thinking carefully about rhetorical choices such as the order of images are important.

Examples like the cola ad show me that, as a writer, if I'm aware of my audience and I try to think about who it is on every level, I have a better chance of getting my message across well. Writing and effectiveness with audiences depend on the culturally contextualized genre. I wouldn't use the cannibal chicken image here in America if I were pitching an ad to Popeye's Chicken,

and I wouldn't use the freakishly smooth McDonald's burger if I were pitching an ad idea to Naif Chicken, although I imagine they'd have less of a problem with that image than Popeye's would have with the cannibal chicken.

It's not only important to be aware of audience and intention as a writer, but it's also important for readers. As a reader, if I'm aware that the creator of a particular text may not understand who I am, where I'm coming from, and how I think and read, it's easier for me to see past weirdness and confusion (cannibal chickens and such) so I can be more comfortable with the unexpected. Each writing situation is different, impacted by author, audience, time, place, and lots of other factors. But if I slow down and really (and I mean *really*) think about what I'm creating in each different writing situation, and if I also think about what I'm seeing, I can get a better handle on writing, understanding, and cannibal chickens.

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Summer Qabazard is a Jedi.

The Little Genre that Could: CHAT Mapping the Slogan of the Big Communist Propaganda

Adriana Gradea

This article describes the political propaganda of the Communist period of Romania (1947-1989), in which the one-party political system shaped the rhetoric of public discourse. I contextualize the political slogan and the radical tone it developed over time. After analyzing the genre of the slogan and its political context, I resituate this genre into a different context. In graduate school, when I was once prompted to write a personal narrative about my childhood, I found humor in introducing this genre into my story. In doing so, I have aimed to decontextualize the slogan from a serious time, when it represented powerful Communist propaganda, and secondly, to show how in a different context, the slogan could bring to my story both local color and humor in the way its status was degraded to derision.

I came to America for the first time in the late 1990s after growing up in Romania. Years later, when I started graduate school in a creative nonfiction class at an American university, far away from my native land, my professor nonchalantly said: “Write about your childhood.”

Just like that. As if saying, “Describe this table right here.” If only it were so simple!

I grew up in Communist Romania, in the half of Europe that was under Soviet influence and at war with Western Europe and America—the Cold War. Romania had a Communist system between 1947 and 1989. In the totalitarian regime of Romania, the Communist Party was the only political party. In such a regime, everything is government-owned, there are no elections, and the president can stay in power for decades. The president of Socialist Romania, Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu,¹ was in power for almost 25 years, as he was reelected by the Communist Party every five years. In 1989, however, a wave of change went through the Communist Bloc. It was the year when the Berlin Wall fell, and change was starting to happen in Eastern Europe. The anti-totalitarian revolution came to Romania too.² In a

totalitarian regime, all schools are public, people can only own one apartment or house per family, traveling abroad is almost impossible, and people can't own a business; in short, people have limited liberties. But one thing is certain: they have to obey the government and do what they are told. That is why the government has its own specific ways of telling people what to do and how things are.

For my creative writing class, I wanted to write about a lot of things from my childhood: about my experience growing up in a Communist country, about my family, and many other things. And I did. Ultimately, I decided to retell a funny story about my cousin and me when we were between eight and ten years old, so it must have been during the late seventies. We were pretending to “interview” his four-month old brother, my youngest cousin at the time. The interview had us laughing so much that at one point, we fell and rolled on the floor in laughter, taking the baby's stroller down with us with the baby in it. (The baby was OK, though we did get in trouble!)

I remembered playing the reporter, asking mock questions, and laughing at the baby's cooing answers. It was supposed to be funny. While trying to write about these beautiful summers as a child, I wanted to show that there were also serious things going on in my childhood, not only fun: my intention, therefore, was to find a way to show the Communist dimension of the society at the time, as it had been a crucial and determining part of my childhood. So I paused, and with my grown-up mind, thought about the genre of propaganda slogans as I remembered them from those years—a genre integral to the Communist society in which I grew up.

The Genre of the Slogan

Merriam Webster Dictionary lists the following explanations under the “slogan” entry:

1a: a war cry especially of a Scottish clan

1b: a word or phrase used to express a characteristic position or stand or a goal to be achieved

2: a brief attention-getting phrase used in advertising or promotion³

In general, the slogan is a political sentence or a catchphrase intended for persuasion. They can often become clichés. The kind of slogans I grew

up with could fit a little in each of the three explanations given by *Merriam Webster*, but they were also more than that.

I realize now that those slogans were indeed like a “war cry,” that they “express a characteristic position or stand or a goal to be achieved,” and that to some extent, they attempt at “attention-getting”: “LONG LIVE THE MULTILATERALLY DEVELOPED SOCIALIST SOCIETY AND THE ADVANCEMENT OF ROMANIA TOWARDS COMMUNISM!” They were not trying to advertise or promote anything in a commercial way; after all, the audience had no actual option but to buy whatever the establishment had to sell. Advertising, in fact, didn’t even exist in those times, as the free market didn’t exist, and there was no choice but to buy whatever the government was selling.

Here are some examples of the slogans I grew up with. (See also Figures 1, 2, and 3). The slogans were always in capital letters, usually followed by exclamation points, which was a way of showing conviction about the things said, in addition to the intended imposition:

LONG LIVE THE ROMANIAN
COMMUNIST PARTY!

BUILDING SOCIALISM
TOGETHER, DAY BY DAY!

A GOOD PIONEER MAKES A
GOOD FRIEND!

MOTHERS: CHILDREN ARE THE
FUTURE OF OUR NATION!

FARMERS: MORE BREAD FOR
OUR LAND!

MINERS: MORE COAL FOR OUR
COUNTRY!

The banner in Figure 1 reads, “LONG LIVE OUR FREE AND INDEPENDENT COUNTRY, SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF ROMANIA!” Here, the emblem of the country is at the top, and at the bottom are two wheat branches, which represent the peasantry.



Figure 1: Sample Slogan from Communist Romania⁴

The slogan in Figure 2 says, “CEAUȘESCU, HEROISM – ROMANIA, COMMUNISM.” Red represents blood, violent change, militant tendency, fighting, and revolution: actions by which Communism came into existence in the world.

The Slogan According to Aristotelian Rhetoric

In a system where the political establishment never changes, the rhetoric becomes collateral damage. After a while, the classical, Aristotelian rhetorical modes of persuasion of ethos (*credibility*), pathos (appeal to *audience's* emotions), and logos (*message*) no longer apply the way they would in a society where opposing voices can exist and a plurality of ideas is at least tolerated. Therefore, from the three corners of the classical rhetorical triangle, first, *credibility* goes out the window. Because there is only one political party, one voice, and thus one absolute Truth with a capital “T,” credibility is already established by default. Thus, in the cultural-historical context dominated by one voice, embodied in one political party, the *audience* was reduced to a silently obedient mass of people over which the establishment ruled without challenge or



Figure 2: Sample Slogan from Communist Romania

accountability. Since opposing views are not allowed to exist, the audience doesn't need to be acknowledged because it doesn't actually matter: no one can disagree with the message, at least not overtly or aloud. “THOSE WHO ARE NOT *WITH US* ARE *AGAINST US!*” was one slogan with a clear message meant to cause fear at the time these Communist regimes established themselves by force after World War II. The slogan made it clear that *us* and *them* where the two teams at play. One wanted to be counted among the *us* team because *those* who dared oppose *us* in any way could end up being put in prison or killed.⁵ As a result of silencing the audience and because the establishment's credibility could not be challenged in any way, the singular aspect of the Aristotelian rhetorical triangle that remained standing was the *message*. The message could only be unchallenged, undeniable, truthful, and precise.

Situating the Slogan through Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)

In addition to using the classical rhetorical modes to analyze this genre, we can also use Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), which teaches that we should look at a text from many perspectives in order to better situate it in different contexts in the world. The seven categories of CHAT are *production*, *representation*, *distribution*, *activity*, *socialization*, *ecology*, and *reception*.⁶

In keeping with the background of the Communist political system, explained above, if one were to make a CHAT map of the Communist slogan in such a regime, *distribution* would be listed first—the most important thing. Spreading the message was paramount to propaganda, and the slogan was only a small part of the larger propaganda machine. Its distribution was intended for the political stage, journalistic discourse, textbooks, and the streets themselves, because all these places were politicized anyway. Slogans were distributed everywhere, inundating TV and radio programs, displayed on banners throughout towns, and even in classes taught in schools. Schools included at least one hour of propaganda, Marxism, or socialist political economics every week. The genre's distribution shows how that society was organized differently than other, democratic societies.

For slogans, Distribution is closely linked to *socialization*, which involved the work place and the Communist Party meetings periodically held there, because the Party, being one of *the People*, was present and represented everywhere. Meetings and demonstrations were mandatory, and people pretended to be interested, just like they pretended to do a lot of things those days for the eyes of the oppressive regime. After all, the dictator was watching from the portraits that decorated classrooms and other public places, reminding everyone who the Absolute Boss was. Moreover, these messages, displayed on street or classroom banners, were indisputable to the point that they were almost orders.

From the socialization of the genre, another CHAT category resulted: *activity*. Students talked about propaganda in classes, Communist Party members discussed it in regular Party meetings, and obviously, some people had to physically engage in the activity of displaying these banners in various places. Recall that according to our Aristotelian analysis of the genre, the message is what truly counts with a slogan. This notion ties into the next CHAT category, *production*. The production of the message was prolific and encompassed written materials and the spoken word broadcast by TV sets and radios. Although the message became the most important thing, after a while even the message became expected, self-understood, well-known,

predictable, and in the end, boring, which allowed for the most ridiculous things to be said in a communist slogan. Once the message was produced and distributed, since the audience was never really accounted for, the *reception* of the slogan was not the one intended by those who produced them. With the passage of time, people increasingly acted like they cared when they actually didn't; even children heard them and knew that they were just a part of life. The message got lost in a sea of indifference and the slogan attained its utmost status: that of a cliché.

Figure 3, which reads “LONG LIVE THE ROMANIAN COMMUNIST PARTY, LED BY ITS SECRETARY GENERAL, COMRADE NICOLAE CEAUȘESCU!” demonstrates one example of the *representation* of a slogan. As a visual artifact, the representation of the banner in Figure 3 has artistic characteristics that can be interpreted through the rules of graphic design. The capital letters and the exclamation point denote a shouted order. No other color challenges the overwhelming red of the image-text, mirroring the fact that, other than the Communist Party whose traditional color is red, no other political voices were allowed to exist in the regime. At the top of the banner sits the coat of arms of the Romanian Communist Party, the hammer and sickle (universal symbols of Communism) surrounded by stylized wheat. Lastly, the stenciled letters invoke the militant nature of Communism.



Figure 3: Sample Slogan from Communist Romania

Since the material in the banner in Figure 3 is sheet metal, the *ecology* category of CHAT is perhaps one of the most interesting to discuss. In general, the slogans were represented in what we would call today “low-tech” forms. They were sometimes made of metal sheets, which could rust, exposed as they were to the weather, sitting on the side of the road. Moreover, because the Communist economy could not sustain itself in the absence of the free market, increased attention was given to resources, especially as the economy started to decline. A well-known slogan of the 1980s, therefore, became “THE THREE R’s: REUSE, RECYCLE, RECONDITION,” which means that sheet metal banners were reused and repainted occasionally. This attention to consumption was not driven out of any genuine care for

the environment, but because production was scarce since the economy was completely government-owned and ruled by planning and centralization. The real reason for the “Three R’s” slogan was because there were not enough materials and merchandise to go around.

Resituating the Slogan by Inserting It into My Personal Narrative

When I thought again about propaganda and its slogans as a graduate student, I decided that I really wanted to insert it into my writing about my childhood. I knew that my readers in the United States could get a better feeling about my childhood if I showed that Communist slogans were everywhere. Since the totalitarian system doesn’t exist anymore in Romania, but is alive and well in other places, I thought that de-contextualizing and re-contextualizing this system for people living in a democratic system could mean something. Not only was it part of my personal history, but it could give insight into a historical time hard to imagine and impossible to experience first-hand by many people in the United States. I thought that this genre’s trajectory could serve to add humor into my narrative and teach a history lesson at the same time.

Finding the right pretext to add elements of this genre into my narrative was my next step. After all, it was supposed to be a funny story. Where would such a serious thing go into a ten-year-old child’s story of turning upside-down a stroller with a baby in it? When I started writing, I realized that the point where I was “interviewing” the baby was a good place to insert the genre, especially because even TV or radio interviews were full of propaganda. But I didn’t quite know how to do it. My first attempt looked like this:

Suddenly, I got the idea of “interviewing” the baby with an “invisible microphone.” I was so excited; I was already anticipating the fun we were going to have. I started by asking questions like a reporter talking to an important government official who had opinions on current affairs.

“So, Comrade Costea, what do you think about this year’s crops?”

“Goo-goo. Gaa-gaa,” said the baby, his vivid eyes sparkling joyfully.

Bursts of laughter came out of our mouths. We laughed so hard we almost wet ourselves. We were bent forward, our faces hurting.

Well, that’s surely funny, I thought, but what about my slogan? Would anyone in my American audience know about the national planning of the economy and agriculture sectors? A Soviet concept, many countries still have

a five-year economic plan, such as China.⁷ The urgency was to accomplish said plan in four-and-a-half years. Which slogan should I use? Something about the proletariat? The Communist Party? Should I somehow mention a street banner that was hanging outside the window of my relatives' typical Communist apartment building? I tried this:

Outside the window, a banner could be seen in the distance. It read: "Long Live Socialist Republic of Romania and Romanian Communist Party!" I got the urgent idea of "interviewing" the baby . . .

That still didn't quite fit what I really wanted.

Although this entire thinking process went through my mind fast and in not so many words, the only idea explicit to me was to present the historical dimension of my childhood, that particular time and place in modern history where I'd happened to grow up, an experience different from other peoples'. The story of the baby being overturned by his crazy cousin and brother is vivid in my memory, and the baby, who's now a grown up and still laughs at the story, fortunately doesn't remember a thing. But since as far as I'm concerned there are things I'm not ready to forget, I kept thinking about it, and at last, I came up with my final version:

Suddenly, I got the idea of "interviewing" the baby with an "invisible microphone." I was so excited; I was already anticipating the fun we were going to have. I started by asking questions like I was a TV or radio reporter talking to an important government official who had opinions on current affairs.

"So, Comrade Costea, do you think that the proletarians of all countries will unite?"

"Goo-goo. Gaa-gaa," said the baby, his vivid eyes sparkling joyfully.

Bursts of laughter came out of our mouths. We laughed so hard we almost wet ourselves. We were bent forward, our faces hurting.

"However, Comrade Costea," I tried to continue through the laughter, "Will the realization of the five-year plan in four-and-a-half years advance Romania on the road to Communism...?" I couldn't go on as I was already overwhelmed by laughter, and Cosmin, my cousin, was out of control.

When the baby cooed again, I lost my balance with laughter. Somehow, my leg, which had been resting on the bottom part of the stroller, got tangled, and I started to fall. I remember the next few moments vividly, in slow motion, and I can see them in

my mind clearly, to the tiniest detail, again and again. In my fall, the stroller itself started to turn: one end slowly rose up to a fully vertical position. I could see it move but could not make it stop as I was busy falling myself. I looked for Cosmin, but he, the rat, instead of helping, was already out of the room on his way to alert his mother. I was on my own, trying to save the baby from the fall.

The baby's eyes grew larger with amazement at the realization that his comfortable horizontal was becoming a worrisome vertical. When he reached the vertical, he started slowly sliding down along the stroller's mattress, the blankets around him wrinkling up. I could never forget his eyes at that moment. I knew he would fall face-down next, and I was trying to anticipate it.

He had started his fall forward. That's when I was able to catch him. For a moment, I thought his mouth almost hit the stroller's handle, but it didn't. I looked at him, and he was all right, only scared. He started crying.

I know the baby couldn't have been hurt, but the next instant, my aunt was already there. We were in big trouble.

Endnotes

1. Nicolae Ceaușescu was the President of Socialist Republic of Romania and the Romanian Communist Party Leader. He ruled from 1965 to 1989, when he was executed during the December 1989 anti-Communist uprising in Romania.
2. In the Romanian Revolution, about 1,000 people were shot in the streets by the army, the police, and the political secret police.
3. See <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/slogan> for the definition.
4. See <http://www.ceaurescu.org> for the images included in this article.
5. Some people who opposed the practices of the regime were killed; the Global Museum on Communism cites 435,000 killed (<http://romania.globalmuseumoncommunism.org/>).
6. For more information on CHAT, see Joyce Walker's article "Just CHATting" in the 2010 issue of the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*, available at <http://isuwriting.com/resources/grassroots/>.
7. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five-year_plan for more information about the five-year economy planning.



Although **Adriana** is from Transylvania, Romania, and consequently flies around at night, she vehemently denies she's a vampire, which obviously raises much suspicion. She hopes to obtain her doctorate in English Studies at Illinois State University soon and then to finish writing all the books that parasitically inhabit her body.

Dinosaur Fiction: How Velociraptors Help Us Write Past Childhood

Ryan Edel

This article presents a little boy's struggle to write as a way to illustrate important aspects about writing fiction. The commentary provided in the side bars discusses choices about details in fiction and how these details can change the tone and feel of a work. The Velociraptor's Notes provide additional commentary on the commentary, from the point of view of Velociraptors, of course. The conclusion provides some guidance for starting the personal types of writing that are often emotionally difficult.

"Fiction is the lie that helps us understand the truth."—Tim O'Brien

This is an article about writing fiction. To show how the components function together, I've written a short story about a boy (you), and then I've used this commentary to explain my "writerly moves" and why they're important.

You write about Velociraptors because they are the only time you feel at peace. When your mother calls you to dinner, you wish you could be a dinosaur who eats wild game instead of a little boy who chews on meatloaf and broccoli while your parents talk about adult things. If you were a dinosaur, then no one would mind that you dribbled some of your creamed corn on the tablecloth. When you are a prehistoric lizard with knurled six-inch claws of hardened bone, parents do not mind that you leave a small mess around your chair, or that you wiggle in your seat because your back itches, or that you want to stay up late watching Jurassic Park III. When you are a dinosaur, you can go to bed whenever you want.

Velociraptor's Note: Warm-blooded assault lizards from the Jurassic period happen to be chronologically transcendental creatures, and we regretfully lament the perceived lack of attention to grammar. But we are rather busy, after all. And hungry. It doesn't help that we have been relegated to call-out boxes. But that's okay. We brought snacks.

As a genre, fiction is unique in that you have complete freedom in the form of your text. Its success is determined not by how well you “convey information,” but by how well you engage the reader in a new experience of life. And this can be very confusing, even for experienced writers. Just look at *Twilight*. Many have complained that the *Twilight* Saga is “terribly written” and yet incredibly popular. Somehow, grammar lessons simply don’t explain the blockbuster success of a vampire novel which overcomes feminism and self-actualization to portray a heroine who falls in love with her undying stalker boyfriend.

But you are not a dinosaur. You are a little boy in the sixth grade. And tonight’s homework is to write an essay. You are to include transition words with each new paragraph, and you are not allowed to start sentences with “and” or “but.” But you would rather write about dinosaurs. You would rather not listen to Dad yelling at Mom because she spent too much time on the phone this month, so the phone bill is too high. It doesn’t matter that Mom pays the phone bill because the phone bill is still too high.

Many authors continue to keep Velociraptoriness from small children. This issue, which is ignored by the media, reveals the unknown suffering of imaginary people. It is, in fact, very likely that you yourself have concluded that this small boy is “just another human being” limited to your myopic preconceptions of childhood. Far be it for us to judge—to us, he’s about as interesting as a can of Pringles. Which is to say we find him quite delectable. (Unfortunately, Microsoft Word doesn’t allow us to add footnotes to the sidebar commentary. And this saddens us. We so wanted to comment on the nutritional qualities of Edward Cullen and Bella Swan.)

Because you are a boy and not a dinosaur, you sit in your room and try to figure out how you will write your essay. You want to write a story about how you and your parents went to Walt Disney World, but you didn’t go to Disney World. Instead you drove to Iowa to see Grandma and Grandpa. And your dad drove a rental car on the gravel road out to the farm, but you can’t write about that in an essay. You don’t want to write an essay about dust. Your teacher does not want to read an essay about the disgusting stuff on the rental car windows—the dings from the rocks, the dried goo flecks of insects, and the brown film of Iowa covering every inch of the car. Your teacher wants to know what you learned this summer. She doesn’t want you to talk about dirt.

The real challenge of fiction is capturing audience attention. Usually, a fiction writer does this through details and voice. In this article, we have three narratives running at once: the boy’s, the editorial dinosaur’s, and this one. The boy is sad, the Velociraptors are irreverent (not to mention irrelevant), and I am “authoritative.” Each one of these voices is believable within its own domain, and you’ll keep reading because you want to know how these voices will interact. Will the dinosaurs crawl out from the footnotes to eat the protagonist? Or will this have a fairy tale ending?

The details make you curious. You can relate to the boy because we’ve all faced describing a disappointing summer. Awkward family moments over meatloaf, grandparents who live far away—

these are details we understand. They make the boy seem real. And we want to know what happens to real people facing real problems. And as for those Velociraptors. . . I mean, seriously? Comparing that sad little boy to a can of Pringles? What kind of sick monsters are you?

If you were a dinosaur, no one would mind that you sometimes start your sentences with “and” or “but.” But you are not a dinosaur, and you cannot write a proper essay. Your teacher has told you as much, though not with words. She smiles whenever she calls you up to her desk to talk about your writing. You once showed her the story you wrote about a homesick iguana that had never seen a rainforest. She told you she liked your story, but she said this only because she is paid to tell you that you are a good person. It is the new way of teaching, and your mother has said that this self-esteem stuff is just another way that people are giving up on the real work of raising children. “We are raising you to work,” she tells you the night you wrote your story. Your dad agrees with this. “I don’t think you realize just how good you have it,” he says. This is why they are so pissed when they discover that you have written a story about a homesick iguana named Bob who has a pet goldfish named Sally.

Fiction may start with voice and detail, but it’s plot that keeps the story going. And plot depends on conflict. Like this current dispute between myself and the Velociraptors. We have competing interpretations of the boy’s story, which adds interest to an otherwise boring article.

In writing fiction, it helps to figure out where the conflict lies. Here, a little boy is struggling to overcome the emotional distress of a dysfunctional home. In response to these challenges, characters can “take a stand,” so-to-speak. Here, though, the boy is severely limited by his age and social status; since he can’t really “fight back,” he writes.

All good fiction is built on such hurdles. Protagonists must mature with time if they are to successfully navigate the story.

When you wrote your story, you were supposed to be cleaning the bathroom, but you didn’t think Mom would get home before six, and you thought you could write your story really fast and then go upstairs to clean their bathroom before they got home. Instead you wrote about how Bob turned his basement into a swimming pool for Sally, and then they turned

It is a well-known fact that we Velociraptors have never followed the traditional written conventions of academic discourse. Prominent researchers in occupational ergonomics attribute this to the fact that it is very difficult to hold a pen when one is burdened with the responsibility of a six-inch knurled claw. Behavioral psychologists, however, believe that Velociraptors suffer from ADHD and that the distraction of the hunt makes it difficult for us to concentrate on the placement of commas, contractions, and prepositional phrases. We would form a coherent argument to dispute such baseless accusations, but that little boy just looks so yummy. Even better than Pringles, actually.

The meta-commentator is apparently paid to give heart-warming descriptions of “writing with love.” We wholeheartedly endorse these naïve notions of story. As long as you give us pork chops, we’ll endorse anything.

We’re surprised the “authoritative voice” in the margins didn’t point this out to you. As Velociraptors, we are painfully aware of the social injustices afflicting Western civilization. People assume that we don’t exist simply because they’ve only seen us in movies and on the occasional Internet meme. I mean, how would you like to be left off the invite lists for weddings, funerals, and other examples of fine dining simply because people refuse to accept you for who you are? And can we help it that we are distracted by the promise of a tasty morsel? The more we read about this little boy, the harder it is to avoid a trip to the fridge. (And you know that big tub of ketchup on the third shelf? It isn’t ketchup.)

Dad was even more angry. He made the little boy throw out his story. So we helped the little morsel fish his story out of the trash bin later that night, after his parents had gone to bed. So what if the neighbors looked at us funny for hopping up on the garbage cans and swinging our tails for balance as we fished through discarded newspapers and a pair of old slippers? We were just glad this argument happened after dinner. If it had happened before dinner, those pages of Bob and Sally would have been buried under a half-eaten mass of taco meat and sour cream. And do you have any idea how hard it is to focus on literature when you're staring at taco meat? With sour cream?

on the bathroom faucet upstairs so that the staircase in the back would become a waterfall. Sally would flop up the stairs with her tail, and then Bob would roll down the stairs while his eyes bounced around from side to side.

Mom was angry when she saw your story about Iguana Bob. "This is what you've been doing all day?" She was so sad that you wasted so much time that she was crying when she slapped your papers against your desk. "You don't do your homework and you don't do what we ask you. How would you like it if I didn't feel like making dinner?" You tell your mom you are sorry, and then you start crying because she doesn't believe how sorry you are, and then you beg and plead for her to let you clean the bathroom. You promise that it will be fast.

"You had your chance," Mom says. "You blew it."

* * *

I really have to apologize for the dinosaurs' taco imagery. Some of our readers might be vegetarian, vegan, or lactose intolerant, and I want to assure you that this story respects your personal perspectives on food.

Strangely, a work of fiction can respect the personal beliefs of the reader while still presenting material which would be insulting to the same reader. In this case, the irreverence of the carnivore imagery is offset by the fact that this imagery is manufactured by disgusting beasts constrained to the marginal space of call-out boxes. This signals to you that the author wishes to portray a balanced yet complete view of reality.

At school the next day, you don't want your teacher to see the story about Bob. But she catches you smoothing the pages when you are supposed to be doing long division. The pages—there are four—are smudged and wrinkled, and you want to make them look better. The outside edge of your writing hand is still gray from the pencil lead because of how hard you were writing last night, and your words on the page are crooked and dirty. But you still want to write about how Bob's parents come home early from work, and that they are iguanas, too, and that they turn their roly-polly eyes on the waterfall coming down the stairs. Bob says that it's okay, that he'll clean it up before dinner. So Bob and Sally turn off the water, and then they dry the floor with a mop, and then Sally moves to the bathtub so they can drain the water from the basement. And then Bob goes back to the main floor for dinner, and his mom and his dad talk about how he did a good job cleaning up the steps and

the basement, and they say he can have some ice cream after dinner while they all go upstairs to the TV room to watch a movie.

* * *

When your teacher catches you erasing the smudges from around the words about Bob, you know that you're in trouble. She takes the pages to her desk, and she asks to see you after class, and you don't even finish your long division before the bell rings. You know that Mrs. R. will give you another note to take home, and that she'll staple it closed because you're not supposed to read it before Mom does, and Mom will leave the note with the mail and keep drinking her coffee and tell you to leave her alone because she's had a bad day at work.

Oh, meta-commentator, don't you realize that we are mere pawns under our author's oppressive keystroke? He is using external details to reveal the disconnect between internal feelings and "objective" reality. We are disappointed but hardly surprised by your lack of perception. We suspect that you are about as smart as a slab of uncured salami. With a side of pickles. But no Pringles.

Go ahead, you stupid lizards—compare me to food. I, meanwhile, will explain that fiction is built on the conflicts which arise from personal relationships. Notice that the boy has issues with his parents—the relationship with his teacher reveals that the problem isn't just him, but rather the abusive nature of a difficult family life.

Now, if this was a longer story, we would nuance these relationships still further. We'd show that the parents themselves are the victims of their own relationships, and that the teacher does not have the time to spend hours and hours with one of her dozens of students. The imbalances in these relationships force our protagonist to overcome a difficult home life without becoming dependent on underpaid civil servants for his long-term emotional support.

Mrs. R. doesn't give you a note to take home. But you know she doesn't like your story. She just wants you to feel good. But when Mom and Dad were kids, teachers taught. They made you write, and they made you read, and they made you do your long division. Mom calls it a travesty the way people don't know how to add up the change from when you buy something, and you asked her what a traffesty was, and she told you that you have a dictionary, so go look it up. You tried to look it up, but you don't know how to spell trastyty, so you couldn't find it.

Dinosaurs have no use for words they can't spell. Any word that doesn't have the decency to spell itself correctly should go extinct.

* * *

Through writing, we can connect with others in ways that are often impossible through speech. Stephen King presents writing as a form of "telepathy" (103), as a forum for "a meeting of the minds" (106). Or, as Tim O'Brien puts it, "What stories

can do...is make things present" (204) for others, for those who weren't there. The best way to accomplish this is through detail. Here, we see the cleaning of the bathroom. We go deep into the protagonist's emotions, into how much he hates cleaning bathrooms. And this reveals how his home life has warped his perceptions—because no sixth grader should be this intimately familiar with the smell of household cleansers.

Velociraptors disdain the use of toilets for this very reason. We prefer to use the sides of old trees. Also, we are intimately familiar with the importance of social relationships. We are pack hunters, after all. This is why we cannot write in the first-person singular—it just wouldn't feel right. And the voice should always match the narrators. Because when you are ordering hot wings over the phone, delivery is always faster when they hear that there are eight or nine or twenty of us growling for more. I mean, assuming they've found a new delivery guy after that last time.

It is another night. You have to clean the bathroom on the main floor before Mom gets home. You are wiping off the toilet. You have a system for cleaning it so that the dirty parts of the toilet will not contaminate the clean parts. You start with the handle, because it is silver and people have to touch it with their fingers. And then you go to the lid over the tank because no one ever touches that, and it only has dust. Then you clean the lid over the bowl because sometimes people sit on it, but they are still wearing pants when they do. Then you clean the seat, because it touches your buns, and you don't want the bun germs to touch the other parts of the toilet. Then you clean the really gross part behind the lid because sometimes there's yellow pee dried to the toilet back there, and your dad will yell at you if that part isn't clean, and then you clean the rim under the seat, because it's also gross, but sometimes not as gross.

I don't like hot wings. Maybe our author does. Or maybe he's hungry again. Either way, he thinks these distractions of life add "flavor" to the story. I disagree. A story should move forward. Each detail should directly contribute to the plot or characterization.

Now, in this next part, you'll see a transition. Our protagonist has made a realization about life: he sees that the "happy" stories simply aren't interesting enough. Now, this may be subjective, or it could come through the result of painstaking market analysis of publication standards as stated by Wikipedia. Either way, I want you to note that the increasing darkness of his fiction corresponds with the growing sense of futility in his life.

* * *

You decide that you should have never written about iguanas—especially not an iguana named Bob. It is, perhaps, one of the dumbest stories you've ever read. It's more like a cartoon than a book, the kind of slapstick-with-lizard-and-pet-fish which would never sell at Barnes and Noble.

You're looking for success. You want to do well as a writer. You want to express a story worth reading. Clearly, it is time to write about dinosaurs.

* * *

Unfortunately, you don't need a story about dinosaurs. Tonight you need an essay about whether or not students should wear uniforms to school. It should be five paragraphs—one paragraph of introduction, three paragraphs of information, and then a conclusion. You are supposed to convince people one way or the other. Mrs. R. has recommended writing about why uniforms are good because it is easier to write that essay—you can say that uniforms promote social equality by forcing everyone to dress the same way, or you can say that they are cheaper than purchasing designer clothes at the mall. But you don't like uniforms. You like wearing jeans to school. And you think other students should have the freedom to wear jeans if they want to.

It is easier to write about dinosaurs. You can write about Tyrannosaurs and their continual quest for justice. They are, after all, strong enough to be brave. If they wore uniforms, they would wear army pants. Their little arms would claw at the air, pointing out which parts of the toilet are still dirty, and they would point their Volkswagen snouts at the toilet to smell for grossness. "That's not a clean toilet," one might say, its strong voice coming out like Barbara Streisand with a mouth full of rocks. The other one—the father dinosaur—would point out the obvious: "I can smell your laziness from here." You don't know how to write your essay for school and you shouldn't write about dinosaurs. So instead you make paper airplanes.

In writing fiction, we are often asked "how much of this is real?" This is a difficult question to answer. As Sue Miller asks, "Is it true that we have no choice but to echo what's happened to us and to those we know?" (158). "Fiction" does not mean "false"—it simply means that you've taken artistic license with the details and events in order to express some truth about life. As Miller relates, some authors simply retell their own lives in very precise detail; others, however, create worlds vastly different from their own. Either way, the honesty of your search for meaning is more important than the "facts" you choose to share. "It is the struggle for meaning that lets the writer escape the tyranny of what really happened and begin to dream his fictional dream" (Miller 159).

By the time your parents get home, your failure as a person is clear. You don't hear your father as he comes in and walks up to your room. He stands

Fact: It is always time to write about dinosaurs. And as a side note, our meta-commentator has neglected his own ideals. How, we ask, can you possibly say that "detail is everything" if you insist on limiting your descriptions to those which directly impact the plot? How can you hope to represent the truly disjointed experience of life without acknowledging the somewhat arbitrary nature of details? If a detail feels right, we recommend adding it to the story. You can always delete it later if you need to.

in your doorway, still in his trench coat, the shoulders damp from the drizzle outside. You feel the rage before he speaks. You cannot bear to look, his gaze is so sharp. He tells you that those airplanes better be gone by dinner.

* * *

Years later, you are faced with the task of writing an article. It is meant to be brief yet informative. You want others to see an approach to fiction—not necessarily your own approach, but something they can apply to their own writing. And after the first draft, the reviewers recommend revising the ending. How, they wonder, will the image of a little boy guarding his airplanes and manuscripts help others take up the pen? Is the story only meant to show us that sad people can use writing to cope with their sadness?

You want to say that there is something deeper to writing, that sadness alone is not enough. This is, after all, what past professors have told you. And you don't want to give the impression that writing is only possible for those who suffer—that isn't the case at all.

A true story about Velociraptors would taste faintly of pork chops. Fortunately, this is a work of fiction.

And so you pick up your pen. You decide—because this is your fixation at the moment—that the story must be about dinosaurs. And the dinosaurs, because they are brave, will say all the things about fiction that you yourself are afraid to write.

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Ryan Edel is a Ph.D. student in English Studies at Illinois State. He has an MFA in creative writing from Johns Hopkins University. As a U.S. Army veteran, he has previously served with the 82nd Airborne in Afghanistan. Ryan is very concerned by today's lack of Velociraptor awareness. His friends and colleagues have repeatedly assured him that dinosaurs do not currently exist, but the only "proof" they offer is the fact that no one alive has ever seen one. And that's kind of the point. If you saw one, do you really think you'd still be around to talk about it? No. You'd be halfway digested. Ryan currently resides in a sealed concrete bunker at an undisclosed location. You can find his writing website at [Facebook.com/12Writing](https://www.facebook.com/12Writing).

Dissecting Butterflies: An Analysis of Realistic Fictional Narrative Writing

Christian Zwick

This article focuses on instructions to writing realistic fictional narrative using examples from Christian's own work as well as examples from the book *Lolita* by *Vladimir Nabokov*. Although some consider narrative an easy genre to write, Christian argues that it is one of the hardest and requires a plethora of important things. He goes into detail about the various requirements of this genre using what he calls *aspects* as well as a hierarchal diagram showcasing how story, plot, events, significant details, characters, and insignificant/filler details relate to one another.

Writing serves a variety of purposes for humans today. Whether it's to share information, prove a point, or pass on knowledge, writing is one of the most important tools we have. That being said, each style of writing has its own rules and expectations that need to be followed. Narrative is different. Narrative is one of the only writing genres with which we can do basically anything we want, for the simple pleasure of doing it! We are literally free to create. The only issue with the freedom is that too much freedom can lead to a bad story, and a bad story is obviously not something we want. With that in mind, I'm going to give some advice on how to write a good realistic fictional narrative story with help from my own writing experience and one of my favorite novels, *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov.

Lolita is one of the greatest realistic narratives of all time, and it also has one of the most controversial issues in any book. The book is centered on a forty something-year-old scholarly foreigner that moves to America after a divorce, Humbert Humbert. Humbert is extremely infatuated with little girls because of the loss of his true love in his teens. He takes up room and board in the house of a widow named Charlotte Haze, and upon first sight falls deeply in love with her young daughter Dolores, also called Lolita, who

shares an uncanny resemblance to his lost love. Due to circumstances I'm not about to spoil, Humbert and Lolita end up living together and traveling across the country as "father and daughter." As you could most likely guess, the story is a tad bit more complicated than that, but it also isn't as deranged and pedophilic as you could imagine, either. I chose this book because along with being one of my favorite books, it has many of the important qualities required in a successful realistic narrative story. The twists and turns provide a constant source of entertainment, while the plot build up and character design provide enjoyable reading when the story isn't at its thrill points. Using critical analysis, I can dissect the book and pick out what parts I find to be the most important for all realistic narratives.

Realistic narrative is one of the least restrictive writing genres, but a good narrative needs many things in order to live up to its full potential. Since narrative writing has few limitations, it can also be the hardest to write. Why is that, though? A good narrative requires a plethora of important things, and a realistic one requires even more. I'm going to provide a concept map of the levels of a realistic fictional narrative story and then describe the aspects that are involved in the story. After that I'll go into detail about designing a story's plot and characters. So without further ado, let's dive in!

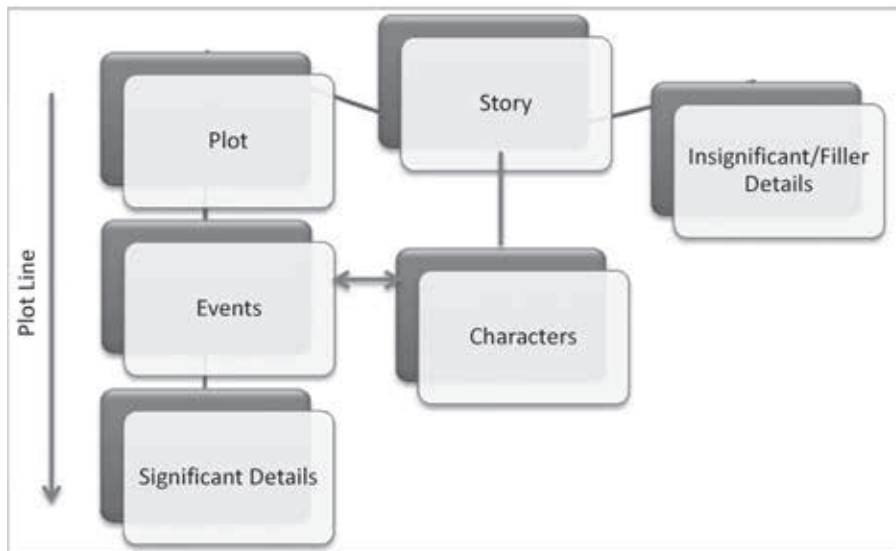


Figure 1: Hierarchical Diagram of Realistic Narrative Requirements

I've created this hierarchical diagram in Figure 1 so that you can get a better idea of what is going on in a story. The parts of a narrative include the story, which encompasses everything in the narrative, the plot, which provides a broad explanation of what happens in the narrative, the events, which are a more specific explanation of the plot, and the significant details, which

trigger or provide room for forward movement of the event. Others parts include the characters, which are the focus of the narrative and move the story forward, and lastly, the insignificant or filler details that provide the bulk reading material as well as maintain the readers' interest between the more interesting events. The way this works is that if something is above something else, then it is the broader part of the narrative. The connecting lines signify that the higher part of the diagram encompasses the lower part, so that the lower part has more specific information than the higher part. If a line connects something, it also means that alteration of a part of the story affects every other part connected by that line. An example of this would be if I were to change a significant detail, like Humbert's first view of Lolita. Say instead of becoming infatuated with her, he doesn't think she's that attractive. That would affect him living with Charlotte because he might move back to Europe and the overall plot wouldn't be centered on his love of Lolita. In addition, the plot line is time-related, as well as causal, which means that any changes in timing would also affect the overall narrative.

Another part of the narrative is what I call *aspects*, which influence every level of the plot line of the diagram and some of the character and insignificant detail parts. Our first aspect is originality, which is an idea, event, or sequence of events that has never been pursued before. This is followed by excitement, something providing a feeling of great shock or joy that's anticipated (the excitement in foreshadowing) or occurring. All of this must be provided using evidence, which is generally foreshadowing alone, and realism, the feeling of possible occurrence in real life. Deeper aspects include point aspects, an aspect that affects only one part of the narrative, and branch aspects, which influence two parts of the narrative that are capable or contorting each other. The only point aspect we will be focusing on is character design. As well as character design being the only point aspect, character to event is the only branch aspect we are going to deal with, and I denote them with a double-headed arrow line on the diagram. Now that you understand the requirements of a realistic narrative story, let's go into detail about the plot sequence.

Your Plot, Your Story, Your Everything

You are the master. You control the Earth and the sea. You control Heaven and Hell. You are God...at least from this story's viewpoint. A plot is a collection of every event that occurs in your story and how they relate to one another, while an event is a collection of significant details associated with the event. Basically your plot is the backbone of the story. It's easy to say that without a plot, a story wouldn't be a story at all. I'm not even sure what it

would be...just a bunch of words on paper with no direction or point I guess. So the plot is really, really important.

Think about this for a moment: an attractive European man, scholar, multilingual...with a twelve-year-old American girl. Have you honestly ever heard of another novel that dives into pedophilia in such a romantic way—this plot is gold! Seriously though, other books don't have anything on this plot; it's exciting, nasty, romantic, thrilling, dastardly, suspenseful, and above all completely original! Without this plot, the story would be almost nothing. Plot in the story needs to provide the reader with a feeling of originality as well as excitement. Say Humbert was to come to America and fall in love with a woman his own age—nothing would be special about this novel. There must be countless novels about a foreign man coming to a different country and falling in love. Granted, this sort of book could provide excitement, but without originality, it's just a copy and paste version of any old book. *Lolita* has what many other books do not: *edge*.

When creating your plot, I recommend taking a sheet of paper and writing down potential ideas for the story. Maybe it takes place in a chocolate shop in Switzerland? Your character is a young girl who is part of a poor family when suddenly, out of nowhere, a handsome king swoops in and falls in love with her...wait wait wait. What happened? It was going so well but then you added a crazy situation and were blown completely off track. It's important to not allow something that seems too unrealistic to occur; start over. Your character this time is an Inuit girl named Ahnah who lives in Greenland during the 1900s. She lives a simple life with her younger sister and great-grandma who mean more to her than anything else in the world. Some foreign traders arrive at her igloo when a giant blizzard suddenly appears. She doesn't want them to die in the freezing cold, so she invites them in to stay with her family until it passes. The foreigners stay in her igloo through the storm, but after it's over, Ahnah's great-grandma seems extremely ill and is developing a serious rash on her neck. One of the foreigners says that he recognizes the rash as being extremely common from where he is from and that there is a cure for it in his hometown. She decides there's nothing she can do except go with them on their ship back to their hometown and receive the cure for her great-grandmother. Now that has some potential! It's important to provide details throughout the story that support the events that occur later on. The Switzerland example did not have supporting evidence earlier in the story showing that this is a realistic event. If we had provided some possible foreshadowing to the prince scenario, it could seem much more likely. Now that we have a good plot, let's look at some details to add in the story.

If the plot were the exoskeleton of a butterfly, then the details would be its muscles and blood. In the attempt to create something great, many

have fallen behind because of insignificant events in the plot. Anything that happens in the story is because of you. Even the most insignificant detail about a hair that is briefly mentioned in the story was put there by you, for a reason. That being said, do not let the story be boring enough to bring up an insignificant hair that is briefly mentioned for no good reason! Although you have complete control over your story, that alone doesn't mean that the story will be good.

A real life example could be shown in a classroom setting. Think back to a time when you were in math class, bored to no end, just wanting to get the material and get the heck out when someone in class raises their hand and asks a question about the morphology of a blue whale. Not only is this irrelevant to class, but your past experiences with blue whales are not the best, and your teacher for some reason loves this question and begins to go into intricate details about this majestic creature. This story is a good example of the “insignificant detail about a hair” scenario because it contributes nothing to the plot. If anything, it will provide the reader with something negative to take from the story. Second, it's just plain annoying and dull to read about and seems like filler information. Something I like to think about when I'm making up stories is the relevance each event has to the story as a whole. If a hair can properly be made significant to the story as a whole, then by all means leave it in there, but not at the price of dulling up the story.

Significant details, on the other hand, are very important to the entire story. As my diagram shows, significant details affect many things in the story such as events, plot, and the overall story. Creating these details can be tricky because they affect so many things! A strategy I use when creating significant details involves taking an event I have planned, let's say my character is a soloist at a choir concert, and writing down some possibilities that could occur. My character could mess up, leading to self-confidence issues in the future, or my character could do awesome and feel super confident for the next performance. Next, I try to write a few sentences for each of these significant details and think about which route I'd like to go the best. Something else I sometimes do is work backwards from a significant event I already have in mind. If I know exactly what I want to happen, then I can try and picture what would lead to this happening. Significant details take a lot of time to think up, but they are an important part of any narrative.

Filler details keep the reader interested and the story moving. Like I mentioned earlier, no one wants to hear about some insignificant hair; that gives the book nothing besides another paragraph to bore the reader. Let's look back at the Inuit example that I created. Think about what Ahnah is thinking throughout the journey. Has she ever even been on an ocean liner before? If she has, then she should be able to describe the things she knows

about the boat; if not, she should seem excited or scared about these things. “Oh my goodness, look at this circular thing with what seems to be small walrus tusks sticking out from them,” Ahnah excitingly thinks when she sees the ship’s wheel for the first time. I purposely made that exaggerated. The point is that the details of the ship (interesting ones) can keep the reader interested in the story.

Making a Creative Character: Not Really that Easy. . .

Make a character, right now, in your head. Is it a boy or a girl, or maybe an animal if you’re extra creative? Think about how it looks: height, hair color, eye color, and age. Is your character in school or graduated? Maybe it has a family with a husband or wife. Give yourself a minute to think about these things; write them down if it helps. Try to fit it in the environment you created. What did you come up with? Most likely something not too complicated. A male college student, 5’10” with brown hair, brown eyes, and a girlfriend. Most of the people doing this exercise will probably think of themselves in a different form, just a tad bit different. It’s hard to create a unique character. This is where Vlad soars.

Humbert is a perfect example of great character design. He’s classy, enthusiastic, and twisted in an intriguing way, but what makes him this character I have so come to adore? Simply put, it’s Lolita. Lolita is the kindling as well as the spark that gives Humbert his fire! Characters in a story need a “Lolita” to make them who they are or push them to become what they need to be for narrative success. Desire gives characters a reason to be in there and moves the story forward.

Nabokov is great at finding the best plot/character combination. Everything each character in the story does fits perfectly with what you would expect the character to do. In the story, Humbert marries Charlotte in order to be able to be around Lolita all of the time. Humbert describes Charlotte as an ugly cow in his journal entries and has absolutely no attraction to her. In his journals, he describes how infatuated he is with Lolita. Readers learn to understand that Charlotte is a self-centered person who dislikes her daughter very much. When Charlotte inevitably discovers Humbert’s journal, she disregards the fact that he is infatuated with Lolita and is a complete pedophile, but instead is concerned about reading, “The big bitch, the old cat, the obnoxious mamma...” about herself (95). She calls him a monster and criminal not because he’s a pedophile, but because he thinks she is disgusting. She finally says, “You’ll never, never see that miserable brat again” (96). But she’s not trying to protect her daughter—she’s jealous and wants to hurt him! Charlotte is thus created to be a distasteful,

horrible woman who is jealous and hateful towards her own daughter, and this turns out to be a great turn of events in the story's plot.

My point is that making a good character is difficult and requires a lot of thought and blending with the events. A good character must have an interlacing with the events of the story and behave as no other character would. This ties to originality because if the character isn't original enough, other characters could fit and the story would lose value. With originality comes realism. Charlotte is both realistic because of her hurt feelings and original in that she places those feelings above concern for her daughter. Now that we have an example of a good character, let's look at how to make someone like Charlotte Haze.

After I have thought up a character, I try to fit my character with the perfect balance of originality, realism, and excitement. If the balance is right, you can meld the story to make the event golden. I also identify what my character wants. Giving your character desire always creates an opposing force that fights against this desire (like yin and yang or anti-desire). The best way for me to get ideas about my characters is by going to my favorite characters in movies, books, comics, or real life. I draw out a map composed of what characteristics I like about them and what I don't. Once that is done, I have a better idea of what I can do with my new character. Another important thing I do is simply think about my character a lot. If I spend a lot of time writing down their possible characteristics and desires, I eventually discover what the best mix is and am able to properly fit the story and characters together as one.

And in the End...Sick 'em Boy!

There you have it. I have given you my analysis on realistic fictional narrative writing so that you can get started on writing the best possible story you can. I suggest you practice these skills over and over again to "sharpen the saw" if you will—I know I will! Being able to create something that no one else can is a great way to inspire the world, get a great grade in English class, or simply have fun! If in the future you forget these skills (which you won't), the fastest, most efficient way to dissect butterflies is right here in the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*.

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Christian Zwick was raised in Quincy, Illinois and is a chemistry major and honors student here at ISU. He spends a lot of his time studying as well as hanging out with his friends. Something he is proud of is his ability to spring back harder than before after experiencing defeat. "It's hard to keep me down," Christian says, "I often have a lot of funny scenarios playing through my head and I can never stay in a bad mood for too long." Christian's future goals include getting married and doing something beneficial for the human race in the science field.

The Importance of Understanding Genre . . . and Memos

Jessica Safran

In this article, Safran explores the reasons for researching and understanding a genre before creating it. Part of this process includes acknowledging the variances in expectations for various genres—they are not all formatted like essays! She conducts this exploration through a narration of her own experience learning the genre of the memo.

For my first-ever, and required, seminar in my master’s program at Central Michigan University, I was asked to write a research paper on a topic that had *something* to do with both my major (ethnic literature) and the field of rhetoric and composition. Well, I was comfortable with the genre of the research paper (a.k.a., an essay). I had to write MANY essays throughout my college career. So, I did not worry about that part of the final project. However, my professor then told us, “You must include a writer’s memo with your research paper.” I had NEVER constructed a memo before; therefore, I had no idea where to start, what to do, what it looked like, and so on. He went on to tell us that the point of the memo, for his class, was to explain to those reviewing our research papers what issues we wanted them to consider, such as any problems that we thought we had in our papers.

I had *heard* of the term “memo” before, but only on TV shows and movies. However, I never had to create, nor ever read, a memo. Yet, instead of asking for help or even looking up how to create a memo on the internet, I just put a “memo” together the way that I figured it should be put together. I did not know the type of diction and tone that I should use. I was unaware of the expected formatting and structure of the memo. I figured I knew who the

audience would be (those reviewing my paper) and I knew that the purpose was to explain any problems that I thought I had in my paper. With both the audience and purpose of my memo in mind, I assumed that I did it “right.” My assumptions were wrong.

After our review session, my professor came back and told me that the content in my memo was good, but it was “not a memo.” My content was good because a memo serves as a way for problems to be discussed or as an outlet for any new information that needs to be added. I had done that. I had talked about what issues I thought that I had in my paper, and I provided information to those reviewing my paper as to what I wanted them to look at. However, I had not provided the information in the *genre* of the memo. I had created my own genre of some type. I used long paragraphs, with indentations, and I double-spaced it as I would an essay. I was very wrong with my assumptions in the memo’s formatting conventions. Before I started my memo, all I had to do was Google some examples and see what the memo “looked like,” or rather, how it was laid out and formatted, and so on; yet, I did not do that. I just jumped in and created an “anti-memo.” After that, I decided that I wanted to learn what exactly the genre of the memo *should be*, for future reference.

So, because I wanted to learn for the next time, just in case I was asked again to create one, I Googled the term “memo.” I was confronted with site after site that explained what a memo is and why we use them. However, I finally came across Purdue University’s Online Writing Lab (OWL) website (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu>) and decided to look up their explanation of a memo. (Purdue’s OWL had helped me with citations and formatting for my research papers, so I figured I would give it a try.) This was the best thing that I could have done! I was provided with a plethora of information of what is included in the memo in terms of specific content, how it is formatted, what type of diction and tone to use, and who the typical audience is, as well as the purpose. It also provided me with examples to mimic in order to learn the genre. I learned that the memo’s purpose is to draw attention to problems or to help solve problems, similar to the goal for the writer’s memo I was asked to draw up for my class. They can also be used to convey additional information to their audience. The audience of the memo will be anyone that the information is to be sent to. For my assignment, it was to the professor of the course, as well as my classmates.

After perusing the site’s section on a memo, I learned that the information that goes on the top of the memo includes the following sections: to, from, date, and subject. The first three (to, from, and date) are pretty self-explanatory, but the “subject” section was difficult in that I had to understand what actually

went into the memo before I could give it a “subject.” However, before I could even start to include content in the memo, I had to understand what it looked like, or rather, how it was formatted.

I learned that the memo is composed of sections (or rather, segments). These segments are not indented, like paragraphs would be in an essay. They look like blocks of text. The first section of the memo is called the opening segment. This segment lets the reader know what exactly the purpose of the memo is, or why he/she is writing the memo. So for my assignment, I should have explained, in my first segment, why I was writing to my professor and classmates. I could have said something like: “I am writing to you today to ask for your help in revising my paper,” or something along those lines.

I then learned that the next section is called the context segment. This segment provides the context, or background, of the memo. What I should have included in my memo, had I understood what the genre called for, is some kind of overview of my paper: “Within my paper, I am discussing the ways in which multiethnic literature could function in the composition classroom. However, I am having problems with X, Y, and Z. Any feedback on these areas will be helpful.” I should have given my classmates an overview of my paper and the problems that I wanted to address, and why.

The next segment is called the Task segment and this is where I would have explained to my classmates what I already did, in my paper, to help with my issues, i.e., “I have already attempted to reorganize my essay to help it flow better, but I am still having issues with the organization.” Then, following this segment is an optional segment: the summary segment. This is optional only because some memos will be short, like the one that I was asked to write for my course, and others are longer—it depends on their specific purpose for said memo. For the longer ones, I learned that it is necessary to include a summary to reorient the audience as to why you are writing to them—basically, it is a recap of the main points of the memo. I did not have to include this segment in my memo because it was fairly short, so the audience did not need reminding of the main issues.

I then learned about the final two segments. The discussion segment is the longest of all the segments because it is where you describe the most information to the audience, i.e., what you have found to help with the issue that you are having and any recommendations, etc., for the issues at hand. For my issues within my paper, I could have explained to my classmates what other problems I was having with my paper and what I could do to help those, and then request feedback for my suggestions to improve my paper.

The last segment is called the closing segment. This section is where you thank the audience for reading and request an action from them. So, for my memo, I should have written something like: “Thank you for taking the time to read my essay. Please suggest ways that I can improve upon my organization, tone, and in-text citations.”

After I read through all of this information on memos and their formatting, I realized that the reason my memo was so “wrong” was because it looked more like an essay than a memo. I was using the information that I had about a previous genre to create the new genre, or rather, an antecedent genre. An antecedent genre is a genre that can be used to draw from in order to create a new genre. I was used to creating essays and I drew from my knowledge of the expectations of essays in order to create my memo. I had paragraphs as opposed to segments, because I indented them. I also made them all flow together, rather than as blocks of text. Lastly, I double-spaced the memo, when it should have been single-spaced. And of course, I did not include *any* of the segments that a memo calls for.

While learning how to write an essay is important, understanding the importance of genre is even greater. If I would have considered “thinking outside of the box” of the essay, I would have understood that I should research a genre in order to understand how to follow its expectations and guidelines, in terms of diction/tone, organization, structure, formatting, purpose, audience, and so on. Rather, while I could have drawn from my knowledge of the essay (an antecedent genre), I also needed to understand the memo as a new genre, with its own expectations and rules. Amy Devitt, Anis Bawarshi, and Mary Jo Reiff explain that our knowledge of a genre (for example, a memo), is dependent on our “mental framework [or understanding] for how to read [that genre]” (48). If I would have understood that I needed to “read” that genre in order to understand it before I created it, I would not have had to re-do my makeshift memo—I would have adhered to the expectations of the genre. Thus, understanding the concept of genre and how to analyze genres is important to know *before* attempting to produce any piece of writing or attempting to create any genre.

I was so excited once I learned how to create a memo that I decided to try to do one for my officemate, Sarah. I was tired of her always leaving our office a mess, so I decided to write her a light-hearted memo that requested she clean the office (she knew it was a joke, but I also think she took it seriously as well, because our office stayed clean after the memo!).

I made sure to follow the segments, as well as the formatting, that I learned about and this is what I came up with:

MEMO**TO:** Sarah Smith**FROM:** Jessica Safran**DATE:** October 27, 2011**SUBJECT:** Cleanliness of our office***[This was my opening segment]***

I am writing to you about the messiness of our office. It is difficult to open our office door without having to shove past piles of student papers, articles, and books. Also, I have been finding it difficult to sit at my desk because you always place your stuff (book bag, purse, articles, highlighters, white-out, etc., etc., etc.) on my desk and vice versa. Lastly, our floor looks like a paperclip tornado struck our office. As can be seen from the above-listed issues, we need to rectify the situation in some way, i.e., you (and me) need to be less messy.

[This was my context segment]

We have known each other for a little over a year now, and I have remained quiet as I endured the disaster-of-an-office that you have created. I have stepped over the piles and piles of reading material, dodged falling books from the bookshelf, kicked paperclips out of my way, and put the caps back onto the drying-out highlighters. I have supported your messiness by mimicking your disorganization, but I realize now that only added to our dire situation. We now need to sit down and figure out why you (I already know why I am, so we do not need to discuss that) are so messy and how we can clean our office.

[This was my task segment]

In order to help with our cleaning process, I have decided to become more organized. I bought files to organize my own articles and other readings. I have also bought a desk-organizer that allows me to place my writing utensils into it so that they are not rolling all over my desk. Lastly, I bought us an additional bookshelf so that we can place our books on that, instead of in front of our office door, like a barricade.

[This was my discussion segment]

There are many ways that we can go about beginning the cleaning process of our office. First, we can throw away, or recycle, any reading materials, cartons, Subway wrappers, water bottles, and plastic bags that we no longer need. Next, we can rearrange our office so that we have more room for the bookshelves, instead of stacking the books into open corners and in front of our door. We can also place the posters and calendars, as well as the clock that are thrown about on the floor, onto the walls, where they belong for our enjoyment and organization of time. Lastly, maybe we can sit down and have a conversation about the deeper reasons that we are so messy and disorganized.

[This was my closing]

Thank you for reading this memo. After reading this, I would like you to do the following: become less messy, clean the office of your messiness, and become more clean and organized in your mannerisms. I will be glad to discuss this with you in further detail, once I see you set this memo onto your desk and turn to look at me.

Sarah thought that this memo was hilarious; however, I shifted my tone and diction (word choice) to my audience, which was Sarah. I knew that I was writing a “funny” memo to my office mate and friend, so I could be less professional in my diction. However, in terms of the memo that I had to write for my course (when I did not follow the memo genre), I should have had a more professional (formal) tone and diction, as the purpose of that memo was to request help with my writing process and betterment of my paper. Within the genre of memos, there can be a lot of variation in terms of style, tone, formatting, and so on, depending on the audience, context, situation, setting, and so forth. This, too, needs to be considered before attempting any genre.

While Sarah and I had a cleaner office for the remaining time that we were in our master’s program together, from the memo that I learned to create and then re-created, I also learned that it is important to understand a genre before attempting to create it. My first memo was a mess because I did not take the time to Google it or go to the library, to see what it “looked” like. I also did not take the time to learn its formatting, structure, and expected tone and diction, or its function and purpose. Because I did not “teach” myself about the genre before I created it, or even give myself a chance to “read” it and understand the memo as a genre, it was a disaster. So, in addition to learning how to construct a memo, I also learned that understanding the importance of genres and their individual functions is necessary.

Work Cited

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Jessica Safran is a doctoral student in English Studies at Illinois State University. She is focusing on American literature with an emphasis in contemporary, ethnic literatures. While she still must create essays for her education and her career, she has been asked to create a memo two more times since the above story. She is an avid hockey fan and believes that the Detroit Red Wings will *always* beat the Chicago Blackhawks. Michigan is her home state.

Writing for Use: Intersections Between Genre and Usability

Rob Koehler

This article tackles usability—a very big idea—in a small amount of space. And, because I don't believe in doing things in a small way, this article also takes up the idea of how genre and usability, when thought about together, can help us write more effectively.

Let's start with a few scenarios: mentally put a check next to the situations that apply to you:

- ✓ Have you ever been looking for something in a store and not been sure where to go? For example, when you want a filter for a water pitcher, you can't really be sure where to go in Wal-Mart to find what you want. Sure, Wal-Mart has signs up that tell you where stuff is in the store, but they really aren't very specific, so it's difficult to know where to find one item in the store when it's all you need.
- ✓ Have you ever been so mad at a piece of technology that you thought about throwing it out the window? Maybe your phone won't connect to the internet no matter what you do. You've tried what they showed you at the phone store, but that isn't making anything happen. Now, you can't check the score for the game, and you don't know another option for fixing your problem.
- ✓ Have you ever had to fill out a tax form? Not only are you giving your hard earned money to the government because they've ordered you to, but you

also have to fill out this form with a whole bunch of stuff like Interest, Benefits, and other categories that don't apply to you. And even worse, because you don't receive money in many of the categories on the form, you don't really understand what most of the stuff on the form is even for.

- ✓ Have you ever been on a website looking for some specific information and been completely unable to find it? For example, you're on Amazon or eBay or Half, and you're searching for a product that you don't know the name of. You know that it slices, it dices, it does whatever, but you can't remember what the stupid thing is called. Amazon may have every product under the sun, but because they do, you better know the name of what you want if you want to find it in less than 20 minutes.

All of the situations I describe above are examples of breakdown in *usability*. To quote the experts, “[U]sability refers to how well users can learn and use a product to achieve their goals and how satisfied they are with that process.”¹ A product can be just about anything that a person creates, from a brick to a supercomputer. The examples of products I gave above were fairly diverse: a store, a phone, a form, and a website. But usability also applies to products like cars, soda machines, pencils, chairs, and just about any other stuff made by human beings. Usability is important because when products aren't usable, people have problems like those I described above.

WHAT ABOUT GOOGLE?

For a great example of a usability test, check out this video about when Google was first launching its site and asking people to come try it out.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4AH-Vd6uNUU>

Can you imagine a Google Homepage that wasn't just a plain white screen?

In fact, usability is so important that most corporations spend a significant amount of time doing usability testing before they release a product or publish a website. Usability testing sounds a bit scary, and it can be quite complicated, but the basics are simple. Usability engineers will bring people in to use the product; in usability lingo, that person is called a user. The engineers sometimes ask the user to do a set of tasks that can take anywhere from ten minutes to an entire day, or they may also just observe the user as he/she figures out the product and begins to use it. The usability engineers record the person's experience and then interview the person to discover how he/she felt about using the product. This process can go on for a few weeks or months as the usability engineers discover problems with the product as people use it. In general, what the usability engineers discover gets relayed to the other people developing and maintaining the product, who then try to fix the problems the usability engineers found.

At this point, you're probably wondering why I'm talking so much about this concept when I'm supposed to be talking about writing. Well, if you haven't guessed yet, this article is about applying usability ideas to writing. It may seem a bit strange right now, but usability is one way to help us write in new situations that can sometimes be very difficult. However, to make the connection between writing and usability clearer, we first need to discuss genre.

A genre is, to quote Carol Berkenkotter and Thomas Huckin, “a dynamic rhetorical [form] that develop[s] from responses to recurrent situations and serve[s] to stabilize experience and give it coherence and meaning.”² This definition is a bit heavy, but if we unpack it piece by piece, the connection between genre and usability becomes clearer. The first crucial word in the definition is form, used here in the same sense as you would use the term “the human form” to talk about the body. In essence, genres give a shape to information and ideas in the same way we say that the human body gives a shape to our minds. But where do genres come from; why do these shapes exist? The next part of the definition explains that genres “develop from responses to recurrent situations.” A recurring situation is one that happens over and over again. Thus, genres, as forms for information and ideas, develop as the same need for communication occurs over and over again. As the same situations occur over and over again, a genre develops and changes in response; for example, go to the website www.archive.org and use the Wayback Machine to check out the history of a particular website (I'd suggest the *New York Times* at nytimes.com). Observe how the layout of the page, the information shown, and the placement of menus and pictures stays the same or changes over time. What you are seeing is how the genre of the newspaper website changes as readers interact with the genre and give feedback about what they like and don't like. The website changes as readers demand change, but the website also retains a recognizable structure that ensures it remains somewhat familiar to readers. Thus, as the definition of genre above notes, the newspaper website genre “stabilize[s] experience and give[s] it meaning and coherence” as it changes, yet remains the same, according to the needs of the people reading and writing the genre.

Genres then are forms of organizing and stabilizing information for readers and writers that change as readers and writers *use* them. The key word in that sentence is *use* because it's at the point of *use* by both writers and readers that usability can be helpful in improving our writing.

So, what does it look like if you start thinking like a usability engineer when you write? Well, below I give some ideas for applying usability in writing with some examples of how I've used these ideas in my writing.

Usability Test	Example
<p>Think about the person who will ultimately make use of the genre. This seems obvious and basic, but often we forget about the user when we begin writing, whether in a new or familiar genre. The process of writing can be overwhelming, especially when working in a new genre, and we can get so caught up in our own concerns that we forget about the person who will ultimately be putting the writing to use.</p>	<p>I've spent quite a bit of time writing help documents for new software users. When I started writing instructions, I would write numbered lists of steps that the users needed to follow in order to complete the task. However, as I thought about users trying to follow my directions, I realized that I wasn't really helping them because I was giving them lists of steps without any other explanation or illustration. So, I started including brief explanations of what each help document was supposed to help users do and giving explanations of commonly used terms; I also started inserting screenshots that showed the different screens and where to click so that users could become familiar with the software more quickly. Because I started to think about how the user would <i>use</i> the writing I was doing, I was able to see problems and fix them. While I may not have solved every problem with my help documentation, I did catch some of the biggest ones before people started using my writing.</p>
<p>Take the writing to a person who reads, writes, or edits the genre regularly. No one knows more about what features make a specific genre usable than a person who's <i>using</i> that genre all of the time. Have the person read the text. When he/she is done reading, ask him/her whether the text matches up with the genre expectations that he/she has. The feedback from expert users will be beneficial because they know what makes that genre usable.</p>	<p>At my current job, I spend a lot of time sitting in on and taking notes for meetings. Before this job, I'd never had to take meeting notes before, and I was unsure whether the notes would be useful to the people participating in the meetings. To make sure they were useful, I went to one of my bosses and asked her to go over my notes with me. My boss has experience taking notes and referring back to notes taken by someone else after a meeting; thus, she's familiar with how meeting notes gets used. As we went through the notes, she was able to give me some helpful feedback about what I was and was not doing right.</p>

Usability Test	Example
<p>Analyze some excellent examples of the genre from a usability perspective. Pretend to be a user of the genre and note how the genre helps users understand the information quickly and efficiently.</p>	<p>I recently needed to write a Statement of Purpose, a genre that's new to me. Before I even started to write, I borrowed examples from several different people who had already successfully written in the genre. Looking at how they formatted the genre, what they chose to talk about, and how they framed their goals gave me a list of ideas I could borrow from them in order to make my own work in the genre more usable.</p>
<p>Do a persona test. A persona is an imaginary user that reads the writing. Creating a persona includes making a list of the persona's major characteristics, including age, gender, level of education, job, and family status and giving the persona a name so that he/she becomes someone unique. The test also includes writing a few lines that describe the persona's personality and goals in reading the text, whether those goals are to give a grade or learn something about molecular biology. Once all of that is finished, find a picture online and give a face to the persona. Imagine that person sitting down and picking up the text. Look at it as much as possible from his/her perspective, thinking about his/her concerns and priorities as a reader. This reading should provide at least a few ideas about tweaks and changes that are needed to improve the paper for that possible user.</p>	<p>I've done some web design work in the past. Because anyone with an internet connection can look at writing I put on a website, I had to think about audiences I might not consider otherwise when working in genres that are harder to access. One of the most useful personas I created was a middle-aged African teacher named Nathaniel. I created the Persona Text Example shown below and it showed me how a small amount of work on a persona could help me see where the writing I was doing wasn't very usable for a specific audience. Thinking about Nathaniel coming to a website I've made makes me check to see how much American slang I have written on that page and how many pop culture references I've made. Nathaniel not only wouldn't be interested in that material, but he also likely wouldn't understand it because he doesn't live in America. Nathaniel also forces me to consider whether I've been careful about how I've broken up the information on the page into easily scannable chunks. Both of these considerations help me reconsider whether my writing is usable for the widest possible audience.</p>

Persona Test Example			
<p>Basics about Nathaniel include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 45 years old • Veteran teacher • Married • Two sons • Lives in Ghana 	<p>Nathaniel's concerns include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I want to be able to find what I need quickly because I have lots I need to get done every day.” • “I prefer not to read on the computer because it makes my eyes tired.” 	<p>Other background information on Nathaniel includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching in the public school system for 20 years. He quickly judges if he likes what he's reading because he spends so much time reading student papers. • He tries to avoid reading anything that he can't scan quickly unless he's reading for his own enjoyment. • Because he doesn't have a lot of time, he isn't really interested in new technology and prefers to do what he knows works. 	<p>Nathaniel's typical web tasks include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Checking e-mail • Searching for information for teaching • Keeping in touch with family

Thinking about the readers who will pick up a genre and use it can help us stop thinking about writing as a solitary activity involving a person and a computer screen and help us start thinking about writing as an activity that will impact someone else in the world. When we consider how our writing will be used, we can clarify what our own purposes for writing are and consider whether we are meeting the needs of the users who might come in contact with our work. Thinking about usability may seem somewhat simplistic and obvious, but as in the examples I gave at the start of this paper, it's when designers and writers don't think about the obvious that they create frustration and anger for the people who are stuck using their problematic products. So, whenever we start working in a genre, it always helps to pause for a minute and think about who will be using the writing, how they will use it, and why. Time spent considering the user is never lost time.

Endnotes

1. “Usability Basics.” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <http://www.usability.gov/basics/index.html>.
2. Quoted in Bawarshi, A. S., & Reiff, M. J. (2011). *Genre: An introduction to history, theory, research, and pedagogy*. Fort Collins, CO: WAC Clearinghouse. Retrieved from http://wac.colostate.edu/books/bawarshi_reiff/ p. 79.



Rob Koehler is a Master's student at Illinois State University. He likes doing research, which takes up most of his time, and relaxing as much as possible, which doesn't seem to happen all that often due to his commitment to research. He'd really prefer if he could find a life choice that allowed both of these activities in equal parts, but he doesn't think it's going to happen.

Things That School Couldn't Teach Me: Writing a Kick-Ass Manga

Shane T. Lucas

Shane T. Lucas discusses his process for writing a Manga after finding out that his school writing has not prepared him to write one. After reading Manga, watching anime, and using his art background, Shane begins to discover what he needs to do to write his own.

Manga, the Japanese word for comic, is a form of writing that I became interested in when I was in 6th grade. Reading was really not my thing, and I couldn't seem to find anything I liked reading until a friend turned me on to Manga. I think I was drawn to these comics because of the artwork. I have been drawing and creating my own stories through pictures most of my life, and Manga gave me something to read that brought both artwork and story together in the same book, not to mention the fact that reading right to left rather than left to right is pretty cool. After tearing through Manga series after Manga series, I decided to attempt to create my own. I have drawn several Manga and Anime style characters in the past, creating life stories for each, but I had never attempted to write an entire book. I decided that trying to do this would be difficult. But I knew I would learn a lot if I did it, and it would help me with my future goal: attending art school in order to become a cartoon and Anime artist.

Before I could begin writing my own Manga, I sat down to think about everything I knew about them. My list was pretty long. I kept coming back to the idea of having pictures being the main focus of telling the story in a

Manga with the words playing a second role. In Manga, most of the story's action is told through the artwork. On some pages, it is possible to avoid words and still get the story being told. The pictures usually show a fight scene, which would not have as much talking. Or during a flashback, there might be one or two words, but the art goes into much more detail in order to show something dramatic like the death of someone important. The words seem to focus on dialogue between characters, the thoughts of a character or the sounds being created in the action, like the swishing sound of a sword. I knew that I would have to find some way to move the story forward using both the art and the words in a way that made sense. I felt confident about knowing what a Manga was about, but this could be difficult.

From my list about Manga I also knew that I would have to move the frames of art in such a way that they would move right to left across and down the page. The first time I tried to read *Naruto*, I opened it like a normal book. There was a page that said you are reading this the wrong way, and it showed you an example page with numbered frames so you knew how to read the book. If you begin reading a Manga and you don't follow the frames the right way, the story won't make sense. Although I would be writing in English and the sentences would be moving left to right, I had to place the dialogue bubbles moving right to left. This seems odd when you think about it: I would be writing left to right in the dialogue bubbles since I am writing in English, but placing the frames and movement of the story from right to left like a traditional Manga.

The last big thing from my first list was the fact that even though Manga takes away a bit of your own imagination as a reader since the story is shown in pictures, most Manga I have read still leave some things out and this lets you imagine some of the story on your own. This would probably be the hardest thing to create in my own Manga. For example, in *Deathnote*, when something important is going to happen, like one of the characters dying, the author will leave you hanging. You eventually find out what happens in the next volume through a flashback, but it is not always revealed all the way. What should I show and not show to the reader? If I show everything up front, then the series is pretty much screwed. No one would want to read the rest of the series. But if I don't foreshadow enough, then the series will be dull, and the reader would become bored as hell.

After I created my initial "what I know" list, I had to decide what type of Manga I wanted to write. Manga come in all sorts of themes. They can have romance stories, ninja-based stories, magic-based stories, vampire stories, etc. The choices seem almost endless. Although I read a lot of traditional Manga with science-fiction or fantasy storylines, I didn't really want to go this route. It would have been easier to do this though, since I have the Manga

series *Bleach*, *Naruto*, *Dragon Ball Z* and *Full Metal Alchemist* sitting on a shelf in my room—all traditional science fiction and fantasy Manga. These seemed pretty old school to me, and I wanted to aim for something different.

I had recently been watching Anime shows that were based on a more realistic storyline, with a bit of the impossible thrown in. These Manga seemed more like James Bond, spy, double agent, covert operation stories. This was the type of Manga I decided to write. I needed to read more Manga like this in order to make sure I was understanding the types of storylines they included. A trip to Borders in order to buy copies of *Gunslinger Girl* and *Golgo 13*—two great examples of covert operation stories—was a bust. They are both out of print according to the bookstore, so I decided to watch the Anime versions of both through an on-line Manga site for free Anime. I know that this is not the same kind of text as the written Manga, but at least it would give me a way of knowing the storylines, themes, problems and types of characters found in this type of Manga. However, the Anime version is often not written by the original author, so the story can change. There are also no frames in Anime, so the action is all one movement, but in the Manga, frames move the story and some actions are left out. For example, in a Manga, a character's arm movement would be shown with three arms drawn in one frame, and each arm gets lighter. This implies movement.

I spent four days watching episode after episode of both *Gunslinger Girl* and *Golgo 13* and taking notes. I noted the basic attitudes of the characters and how both stories opened. I also noted how characters acted in different situations.

I felt ready to begin my Manga, which is titled *Hitman*. Before I began the actual page layouts, artwork and writing, I sat down to create a theme and story for *Hitman*. I wanted this Manga to be centered on a teenage boy in high school from a family of CIA assassins. When the main character arrives home from school one day, he discovers his entire family has been murdered by four Mafia groups who have been the victims of CIA operations. I wanted *Hitman* to include a double life of problems for the main character, both his life as an assassin problems and his life as a teenager in high school problems.



Figure 1: Sample Manga

After I had a central theme, I began designing my main character. I wrote down the characteristics I wanted him to have—his attitude, personality, features. From this list, I drew my first draft and from this drawing, I created his name: Kaoru Yuki Cloud. I then began a list of other characters, their traits and names, and began rough drawings for each. This was a long process, but I felt that without themes, problems, characters, storylines and settings laid out, I wouldn't be able to begin the actual writing of *Hitman*. The work so far pretty much gives me the entire layout in a big picture, but not in great detail.



Figure 2: Kaoru Yuki Cloud Character Sketch

It was time to sit down with my sketchbook and pencils and lay out the first page. I had with me several other Manga, like *Bleach* and *Full Metal Alchemist*, to use as references for panel layouts, picture size, showing emotion, and text layout. This part was much more difficult than I thought it would be. Two problems kept occurring: trying to perfect my artwork and dealing with backstory for the characters and storyline.

The artwork issue is something that is not new for me. Because I want to be an artist, I obsess over my artwork and this often gets in the way of my drafting a piece of art. I want it perfect the first time. After struggling with the art aspect of the initial page, I decided to rough sketch the first few pages, sometimes using stick figures in order to get a feel for the art layout. I could then go back to a new page in the sketchbook and do proper drawings. Sketching the art

or the layout made me think about new ideas or new problems, which made me have to go back and change parts of the Manga.

I am still stuck on backstory and plot. I have never been taught how to construct a plot or deal with written storytelling. We talk about plot with short stories in school and we have to pick out the pieces from someone else's story, but writing one of your own is so different than recognizing one. When you are the author you have to think about what you want, what the reader wants and if what the reader wants can still go along with my thoughts. I don't consider myself a good story writer, but a good story teller. I am

Dyslexic, and physically composing is very difficult. Spelling, grammar and all that jazz are huge problems for me. If I could have talked out my entire *Hitman* Volume I and drawn it at the same time, this would have been so much easier. But how fast to move through the story, what to leave out, and how to make characters sound different when they talk to each other, are much harder than I thought.

At this point, I have two pages of my Manga laid out and written, but I'm not sure how to move ahead without the tools for writing a story. I know what it has to have, and I know where I want it to go, but I don't know how to get there. None of the writing I do in school has prepared me for writing *Hitman*. We write essays or we write endings to short stories. We never come up with entire stories of our own. I've never had to write more than five paragraphs in school, but I need to write anywhere from 130 to 140 pages to complete a Manga. I also need to find some way of teaching myself how to write effective plots, where to include backstory, and how to make the text and the art work together. I don't feel like I can move forward without this knowledge. I can read a million more Manga, but I don't think this will help. I asked my mom if there was a college class on writing plot I could take, but I don't think that is an option for a high school freshman.

I'm not going to give up, though. I might have to sit down and write the entire *Hitman* story as a regular short story first and then pull the pieces out to use in the Manga version. I don't know if this will work, but it's worth a shot.



Shane T. Lucas is a high school freshman who believes the only tests given in school should challenge students' knowledge of Bob Marley and Jimi Hendrix lyrics. In his spare time he creates art, researches Parkour, and hangs with his friends. He plans to attend the School of Visual Arts in New York City when he escapes high school.

In Search of SOL: Graffiti and the Formation of a Writing Identity

Evan Nave

Nave is confronted with the work of graffiti artist SOL and is compelled to relate the works he encounters with his own creative writing. As he does so, he asserts that writing is as much about establishing identity and existence as it is about executing craft and technique. In the end, he argues for a “graffiti consciousness” that enables all text producers to see themselves as writers, regardless of their scholarly or artistic credentials.



Figure 1: SOL Tag on a Trash Can Lid outside Hovey Hall

On the way to my Stevenson Hall office, SOL is everywhere. It smiles wide from the outside wall of the Bone Student Center hallway, its yellow spray-paint loops streaking in places where rain and wind have shown their strength. It peeks out from behind a radiator duct in the Milner library staircase, its small, self-conscious block letters contrasting against the outdated, rusted heat. It wraps itself around a light pole on the south side of the College Avenue crossing bridge. It posts up on an air conditioning unit outside Williams Hall. SOL, like the sunlight it translates to in Spanish, is everywhere. And SOL seems to follow me like sunlight, casting its own shadow on the multiple spaces it calls home. SOL is an illicit, spray-painted signature, a graffiti tag, playing tag with me, telling me I'm "It." Every time I see it, at each different location, in each different font and color and style, it tags my eyes and tells me it's my turn to write. SOL tells me my writing is a part of my identity.

Many would argue that graffiti has existed since the moment pre-historic human beings wrote on the walls of caves. But when it comes to modern day graffiti, most people think of the spray painted images (bubble-letter names, angular phrases, vast, multi-colored murals) they see tagged on building walls, subway tunnels, train cars, and any other public space where a person can write what's on their mind. Even this more specific idea of graffiti has a complicated history. Since graffiti is a highly personalized aesthetic form revolving around spreading one's art as widely as possible (and since graffiti has become a worldwide cultural phenomenon with millions of practicing disciples) everyone wants to claim their hometown, or region, or style, as the origin of all that graffiti has become. For our purposes, we'll focus on graffiti that comes out of the 1960's New York, pre-hip-hop tradition. This graffiti was largely name-based, that is, it was highly "author-centered," and consisted more of tagging one's name on a wall or mobile surface, and less about vast artistic portraiture (Chalfant and Cooper 14).

Before anyone can start a discussion of graffiti, it is important to confront its illegality. It goes without saying that graffiti has caught the majority of its flak from police officers and legal bodies trying to keep public space "clean." When used in this sense, "clean" means "in the same condition in which the space or building was constructed." The opposite of "clean" space is "dirty" space, that is, space that has been sullied by factors meant to diminish original beauty. But more important than the idea of beauty is the idea of order. A "clean" wall is assumed to be one that exists in the presence of an organized social order. A tagged wall is often seen as one that exists amidst chaos, in a world where no one is in charge and everyone can do anything they want (Lewisohn 127). Interestingly, as much as the Powers That Be try to keep graffiti from proliferating on public space, it seems to keep on living and, more dangerously in the eyes of the Law, keep replanting its addictive seeds. Graffiti is often considered a

battle of wills, where those with a passion for writing are in competition with those with a passion for erasing. But regardless of graffiti's social standing, it continues to present itself in the face of destruction (Chalfant and Cooper 99).

The beauty of graffiti lies in its ability to exist in and for itself. Regardless of the politics surrounding its legality, aesthetic qualities, or placement within the artistic community, it keeps popping up on abandoned walls, street signs, and any other high-traffic areas where bustling eyeballs linger for something to alight on. This nature of existence, this ability to produce and present texts in spite of vandalism laws and vats of gray primer-paint destined to cover up their work, demonstrates something crucial about the nature of the graffiti writer/artist. In the words of one Parisian graffiti writer featured in the street art documentary *Bomb It*, "I write, therefore I am." In the words of another writer, "I'm here world, I [expletive] exist." To these graffiti writers, graffiti is a signifier of being, of existing in a chaotic world intent on forgetting about them as individuals. These writers write to remind themselves, and anyone who sees their work,



Figure 2: SOL Tag on a Heater in the Milner Library Stairwell

that they were alive, had a story and history as a literate human being, if only for the few moments it took to spray paint their name on a wall.

The concept of "writing to exist" is one that's often overlooked by most academic and creative writers. We are usually so focused on the process of writing, or the product we are going to produce (or the grade or level of success that will be attached to the finished product), that we forget that our writing, regardless of its merits, is first and foremost an expression of our human existence. If we did not exist, we could not produce writing. Conversely, our written work proves that we are here, that we exist in a literate, writing community, that we had the courage and presence to put pen to paper (or finger to keyboard) and tell an ambiguous audience that what we have to communicate deserves the attention of space and time. This might seem like an obvious, simple realization, but it carries incredible consequences. Because if/when we write, we, like graffiti writers, are claiming a written identity that demands to be heard and recognized. We are asserting ourselves in a space that becomes uniquely our own and forcing those who may prefer for us to be silent to take notice of our presence and potential.

Essential to this idea of a writerly identity is what graffiti artists call a Name (capitalization mine): “The name is at the center of all graffiti. The writer usually drops his [sic] given name and adopts a new one—a new identity. He can make it up, inherit an established name from an old writer, [or] become part of a series” (Chalfant and Cooper 45). Graffiti writers might live their lives under a certain name, maybe the one found on their birth certificate, but when they write, they become someone new. This writerly identity has thoughts and concerns foreign to their everyday, non-writing, identity. The writerly identity is only interested in composing their work, making it a spectacle, and reaching/confronting an audience who probably would never know the writers existed if not for the written work.

Combined with the idea of a graffiti writer’s identity, or Name, is the collaboration of a single artist with other, like-minded writers. These graffiti collaboratives are called crews, and they serve several functions: “Crews are one of three things: a group of people down for each other, a group of people working together for the common goal of getting up, or a group of people unified through a certain style” (Powers 120). Regardless of the crew members’ connection, or the purpose they serve in the formation of each other’s art, it is obvious that graffiti is a social, rather than an individual, endeavor. While a viewer of graffiti may look at a tag and only see a single name, often multiple people had input in the tag’s placement, design, or style. It may be all about the Name, but many names, and the human beings attached to them, add to the creation and dissemination of the Name.



Figure 3: SOL on a Lamppost South of the College Avenue Bridge

So whether it is a single graffiti writer tagging their own Name or a crew of graffiti writers spreading their own individual and communal mixed messages, where do these writers see their work going? The answer is: lots of places. Part of graffiti's nature is its ability to be in many locations all at once. Originally, in the New York tradition of graffiti, tags were placed on subway or train cars so that a writer who couldn't get to the other side of the city could have her Name travel for her. In this way, even though she might not have the economic, political, or social means to be mobile, her Name could do her legwork for her (Chalfant and Cooper 20). But the text itself doesn't have to be on a mobile surface to go places. In the case of SOL, having a similar tag in multiple locations increases the chances that a viewer will feel like the tagger is following them. Similarly, if one sees multiple SOL texts throughout their day, they might be more inclined to tell someone about them, thus making graffiti a part of a mobile oral culture that cannot be underestimated.

When I'm surrounded by SOL, I recognize that writing (written, spray-painted, etched, typed, etc.) is writing, no matter who the author is. While texts vary in terms of authorship, rhetorical purposes, locations, genres, styles, and functions, when someone produces a text they exist, if only for a little while, as a writer. The implications of this writerly existence are huge. If people could understand that they are writers not when they publish their first article or short story, not when they get an A on a paper or pass a course in English, but when they actually begin to compose anything they imagine, how many more people would be encouraged to write? When the definition of becoming a writer is beginning to write (not excelling at writing as judged by an assessing body), how much liberty is given to the aspiring scribe? These liberated writers begin writing because they are alive, because not writing would be a type of literary death, because they are here now and want to leave words that could last forever.

I'm inspired by the idea that when I walk around the physical world I'm Evan Nave and people know me and interact with me and make me laugh and cry, and all of this is beautiful; but when I write, like the graffiti writer, I become someone else. My writerly identity has the same name as me, but he's much more intense. He's critical and clever, to-the-point but eloquent, sharp but sensitive, and wildly imaginative. He doesn't think about himself or his outside surroundings: only the text, only what the text can do and become and who it can reach and change. He cares about genre and genre conventions, but only in terms of how fulfilling them or breaking them can potentially move people to do big things with their thoughts and lives. Sometimes my writerly identity takes over even when I'm not writing, and then my everyday become hyper-critical, more artistic, and that's beautiful,

too. But what I like about a graffiti-eyed awareness of writing is that it places the focus on the text, whether it's a tag or a poem or a 25-page research paper. When what I'm writing becomes like a piece of graffiti (with the paper as the wall or subway train), it becomes a piece of my writing identity, and when the writing spreads to an audience, they're reading part of my identity, too.

I also like how taking on a graffiti consciousness can change our perception of authorship from singular, scholarly pursuit, to communal activity geared to inform the masses. When we think of graffiti crews, the support systems that help produce inventive, impassioned writing, they don't seem so far from the peer-review circle of college-level English classes. Sure, a paper might only have one name typed in the upper right hand corner, but we've already found out that there are always many people behind a single name. When our writing peers become people we care about, people we stand up for, people who we influence and whose styles influence us, we start holding our partners to much higher standards of work and revision. And higher standards always lead to higher quality work (if, at a time like this, we're even still worried about what constitutes concepts like "standards" and "quality" and "work"). What seems to be most important is that writers know other writers care about them, that they have support no matter what they choose to compose. We can save assessment for the Powers that assess. Assessment isn't the job of the writer or the crew member; their only job is motivation, production, and spreading the work and the Name as widely as possible.



Figure 4: SOL, in Sticker Form, on a Heating Unit outside Williams Hall

Which brings us to the final idea in graffiti: the mobility of the text. Writers rarely have the strength or endurance to write when they know their work isn't going anywhere they find important. But when the journeys of the texts are unknown and potentially filled with limitless possibilities, it tends to stir something in the author that motivates him or her to compose. When a writer understands that the trajectory of any given piece of writing is a mystery, that it could be seen by anyone, anywhere, at any time, the writer begins working on the powerful element of content that works to adapt to any audience. The writer starts to think about the text and the Name, but also where both of these can go and what they can be to other people. The individual, the composition, the revision, and the reviewers all combine to go where the text is needed most.

SOL is waiting for me when I get to Stevenson Hall. I knew it would be there; it's everywhere. What's changed is that now I know what to do with it. SOL calls me to write, to be a writer, to find a crew of like-minded writers, and to use my internal and community resources to produce texts that will go places and follow people. When I do this, no amount of primer-paint can cover my intentions. Nothing can erase my existence as a writer.

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Writing Lines: Blurring the Boundaries between Visual and Written Genres

Karoline Kniss

In this article, Kniss explores her process for creating political cartoons using a framework she developed through her experiences as an artist and student of genre studies. She focuses on a cartoon she created criticizing the No Child Left Behind Act and examines how the model she created for drawing cartoons is also useful for other kinds of creative activity.

Introduction

My formal training in political cartoons comes from high school art classes where my cartoons were carefully analyzed and critiqued by my instructor—over and over again. “Draw this smaller. Think of your colors. Design, design, design!” were all reinforced religiously. So, I drew and redrew, followed general and somewhat unspecific standards that were sometimes taught and sometimes learned through error, and used my creative skills to produce the best work I could. After four years of drafting and redrafting, I found that art was still my strong suit, my favorite past-time, and my personal release from the world, even if it meant I had a teacher yelling at me.

So, when I’m feeling antsy, bored, or somewhat controversial, I like to draw political cartoons. I consider it a stress reliever and a way to get my mind off things; it’s like exercise but with a little more thought and creativity. Practicing in my sketchbook has helped me develop and detail my own routine for creating cartoons, and I’ve recently learned the logistics of looking into a genre and finding what standards are needed to make an example of it. I developed a process while thoroughly examining a few genres that I now use

to help me work in all types of genres. Because of this work, I'm confident that I can use my creative skills produce to produce excellent work, and I want to share my experience with you.

I want to start by showing you my process for making my cartoons. The basics of this process are choosing and developing a form, finding an audience, picking a specific topic, and planning the purpose I want to accomplish in my work. Obviously, form (political cartoon) was easy for me to choose because I know the genre well. For audience, I chose my age group because I know how we think, act, and feel about most stuff. Topic was another easy choice for me because I have always felt very strongly about the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). My purpose was to show my feelings about NCLB as a creative release from built-up political and educational stress.

Form: Why a Cartoon?

The good thing about art is that there are lots of different types you can work in. Based on your particular taste, the message you're trying to convey, and how you want the piece to look, you can choose the medium that works for you. While I do consider myself an artist, I'm still not great in all areas. The material I struggle with most is watercolor. For some reason, I have a hard time getting my technique perfected. Watercolor begins with accurate drawing where your hand can't smudge the work, and since I was taught to write by a lefty, I always rest my right hand on the paper and drag it across my work. And once I finish the initial sketch, using watercolors is very demanding because I have to constantly change water, clean brushes, and keep puddles off of the paper to prevent muddy colors.

Unlike watercolor, cartooning lets me make use of my strengths; I can use my lack of precision to my advantage. Recognizing who a person is based on a few key features of their face, body, etc. is all that is required for a cartoon to work, and for the rest of the details, I can get away with less because cartoons are expected to be simple. The simplicity of this form makes it easier for me to jot down the image in my head without worrying about more difficult and time consuming technicalities that come with other forms of art. While some genres require you to make a mini-model of your work, cartooning is essentially just a sketch.

Audience: Who's Going to Care about This?

My age group was as easy audience for me to pick because I'm a part of it and I understand how we work. Also, I figured that since I didn't keep up with politics, there had to be a good portion of my audience that didn't either. Adults probably pay attention to the news and new legislation more than college students do, but it's still important that college students think about these things. Political cartoons are a good method for getting young adults to think about current news because summarizing the effects of an important piece of legislation into a hilarious cartoon is more appealing and comprehensible than the politics section of a CNN news broadcast.

Young adults are one of the age groups that politicians need the most support from. If we believe in them, politicians have the chance of capturing our votes for their entire careers. If not, well, they lose out on some critical votes as well as influence on the next generation. Yet a majority of us don't vote because we don't *believe in* what our country is doing, don't *understand* what our country is doing, and don't *feel* that our votes or participation in the government will influence a decision. Nevertheless, we are a powerful age group, and one of the main goals of my cartooning is helping young people understand their importance in politics. Young adults will become the new America, and we have the ability to learn from the mistakes of today and, hopefully, create a better tomorrow.

Topic and Purpose: Why NCLB?

The piece of legislation that I felt would fit my audience best is the No Child Left Behind Act. NCLB doesn't just affect schools and faculty, but students as well. For example, all students have to deal with long, boring, and often pointless preparation for standardized tests, the standardized tests themselves, and the effects that come from not reaching the mandated goals on those tests, whether it's their own fault or simply the poor education their school provides.

NCLB is one of the laws that has impacted me the most (a.k.a., frustrated me the most) so far in my life. It was designed and enacted under George W. Bush's presidency to get all children in America to 100% proficiency in reading and math by 2014. The problem with NCLB is that it has proven *impossible* to get every child proficient in reading and math in that time frame. Besides that problem, the bill also cuts funding to schools who don't meet Annual Yearly Progress (AYP), an improvement in standardized test scores each year. My school district had met AYP every year since the law was enacted, but

last year our ACT scores decreased slightly and my district lost funding as a result. My school district is not the only one having problems; many school districts across the nation are facing similar issues. When funding is decreased as a result of these test scores, schools are forced to give less money to or completely remove useful services, extracurricular programs such as art and music, and other educational resources for students.

Through my cartoon, I wanted to show how the NCLB Act has *not* improved our nation's schools and has *not* reached most of its goals, even under the Obama Administration. Only some improvements have been made on overall test scores, schools are losing funding, and 100% proficiency won't be attainable by 2014. So, why is this law still in effect?

Model: How Do I Know What a Good Cartoon Is?

After I had decided all of this, I had a pretty good idea for my cartoon, but I also did a bit of artistic research to help myself out. I've listed some of the URL's that I used as reference at the end of the article. I first looked at more recent examples of Barack Obama and NCLB to help me get a feel for representations of Obama and how other artists like to depict him. I also looked at older cartoons that were produced during the Bush administration which helped me understand how people thought of Bush and NCLB. Once I had the art references I needed, I sat down and drew it.

My cartoon is a pretty good example of the genre of political cartoons, but to prove to you I know my stuff, I've made a list of standards that are necessary to create a successful cartoon and then pointed them out in my finished cartoon.

1. *Choice of color or black and white:* Color allows more details to be shown and is more pleasing and noticeable for viewers but requires more technical skill. I chose black and white because it is less time consuming.
2. *Caricatures:* Caricatures exaggerate certain traits to make a joke or get a point across. This helped me create a bit of humor (cartoons are meant to be somewhat funny) as well as to emphasize the important points I was trying to make. My Obama caricature consists of a shining smile, happy attitude, and reassurance of well-being because of the thumbs up. This emphasizes that Obama doesn't seem too worried about the problem that NCLB is creating. George Bush is caricatured as a "dunce", someone who doesn't quite understand what's going on. His large ears, caricatured by many artists, suggest that he has a personality like "Dumbo", the elephant who has a reputation of being the odd man out or not fully aware. I drew him that way because I wanted to make the

point that Bush wasn't aware of the improvements (or lack thereof) that resulted from NCLB.

3. *Labeled images:* Labels clarify possibly confusing or unrecognizable visuals and set up the setting for the cartoon. I used the Obama Pin as a label to be sure my audience would know who the drawing was supposed to represent, and I put "No Child Left Behind" on the chalkboard to make sure my audience knew what Obama was discussing.
4. *Visual Design:* I am a big fan of visual irony in political cartoons because it adds to the hilarity of the cartoon and creates a shock that can help get your audience's attention. The words "spoken" by Obama were a quote of his I found (used out of context, but effective for my cartoon). The quote is ironic because NCLB is *not* making sense to everyone in the classroom (Finnegan 27). I chose the scrawling, almost illegible font because I wanted to show that, hey, even Obama is "left behind" by the government's educational legislation. Bush's dunce cap and raised hand emphasized that he wasn't exactly wise in some of his decisions, *ahem* NCLB. The children with their hands raised demonstrate my view that kids are confused about Obama's words, his actual opinion on the NCLB legislation, and his continuing support for a piece of legislation that isn't working. It could also point out that test scores aren't improving as dramatically as hoped under NCLB and that no one (parents, teachers, Congress) understands or sees progress from the NCLB legislation. Point being: why should we have children, faculty, and schools suffer from a law that hasn't been proved beneficial?
5. *Artist's Signature:* All political cartoon artists sign their work to show who deserves credit for the work and as a way to prove they did the work.
6. *Powerful Impact:* The purpose of a political cartoon is to emphasize an interesting view of a problem, the need for change in a law or other aspect of public policy, or the artist's opinion of some issue. I feel that my cartoon, through what I included and how I chose to draw it, does exactly that. With my opinion clearly shown through my art, the cartoon is easily understood, makes a stronger impression, and the image's details help me prove my point.
7. *Dialogue:* Dialogue generally explains what's happening in the cartoon. Real quotes are often used, sometimes out of context, to get a point across. Obama's quote was originally used in the New Yorker on May 31, 2004 in the article "The Candidate", which discussed the early part of Obama's race against Jack Ryan for one of the Illinois Senate Seats in Congress (Finnegan 25).

8. *Artistry*: Basic art concepts are needed to make a cartoon art (duh.). Some of the technical terms for what I used are depth (shading, differing thicknesses of lines), perception (shading and sizing of figures), and detail (added dots, lines, and shapes used to make an object look more realistic).

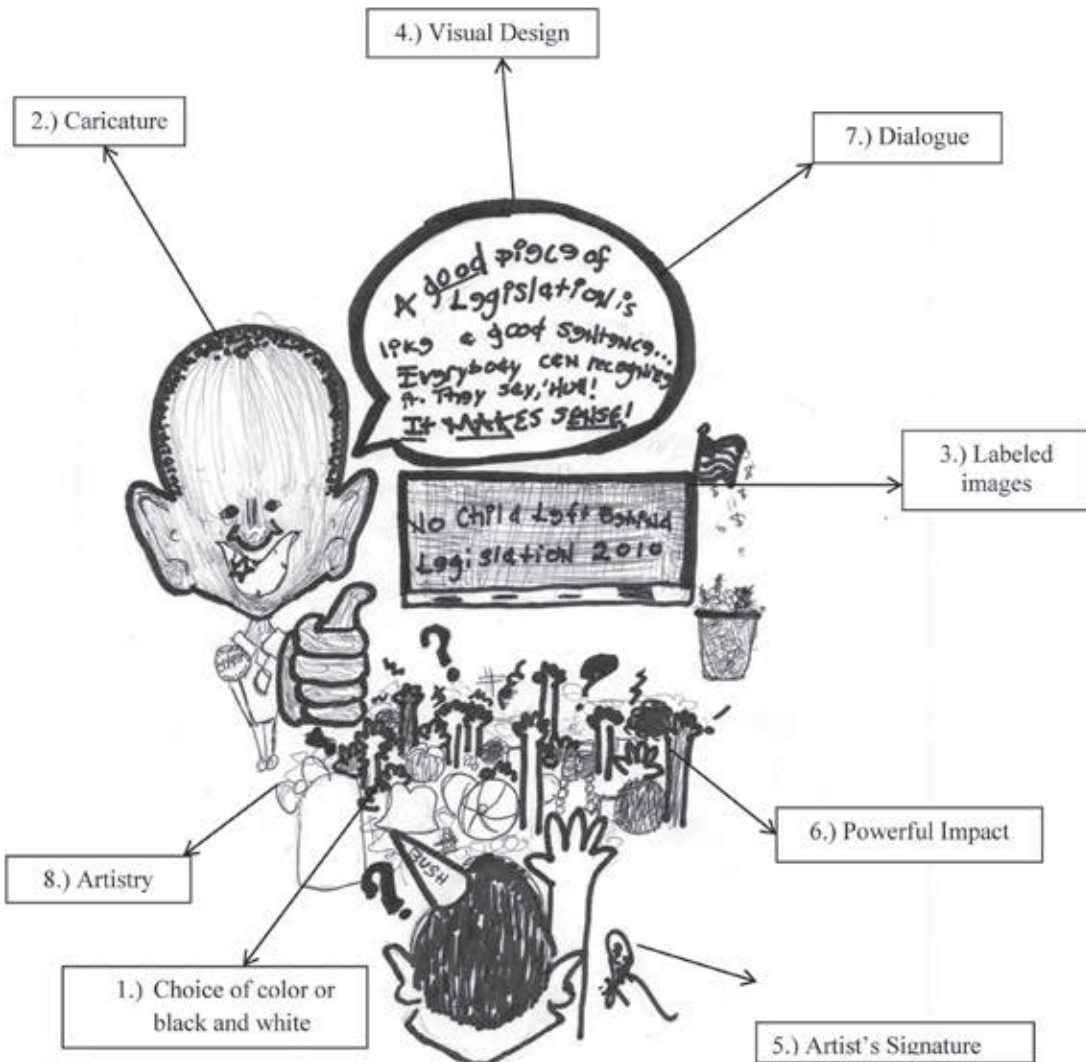


Figure 1: NCLB Political Cartoon

Reflection: What are the lines we are writing within?

What I hope I've shown through my creative process for political cartoons is that it makes use of some of the same processes as creating a text. While the genre you're working in may be quite different in some ways, the process that I outline here is an example that you can consider as you start your own work.

As Courtney Schoolmaster stated in her article from the 2010 *Writing Research Annual*, “Follow the Breadcrumbs: Adhering to the Conventions of a Genre”:

I know the steps. Well, they aren’t really steps, they’re conventions: loose guidelines that direct how the genre looks, sounds, acts and interacts using the elements of writing. The problem is that while most writing uses the same elements, thesis, introduction, conclusion, etc., the way in which they are used differs. (57)

Courtney’s point holds for my own work. Like the conventions for a paper, I’m following the set of conventions I listed above that govern political cartoons. Basically, although not necessarily paper, every genre has an audience, form, purpose, and topic, as well as conventions that establish how those features should work together effectively.

Writing jargon aside, it’s important that visual and written genres can do the same work in different ways. Visuals can work just as well or better than texts in many situations. For example, the comparison papers I did in high school could be summed up with a simple Venn diagram. There’s no need for the extraneous information (introduction, conclusion, transitions, etc.) found in a comparative essay when the important points being compared can be summarized in diagram form. While descriptive wording can create pictures in readers’ minds in a story, pictures can emphasize and make clear specific details in an analysis paper. Beyond papers and school stuff, advertising genres like fliers and posters need interesting visuals, like bright, contrasting colors, to grab a viewer’s attention.

Here’s a thought: if a routine like mine is useful for art and writing, is it possible to use it for both? In my opinion, yes. Visuals aren’t used as much as they should be. Visual learners like me find it harder to retain information in boring typed text because it’s just that—*boring*. With pictures, lists, charts, and diagrams, text can be broken up, which holds a reader’s attention *and* helps explain information. Sometimes visual texts just work better than written texts. Easy viewing/minimal reading genres like websites, posters, and fliers are used all of the time to display crucial information in a way that is fast and easy for the reader to understand. If this information was just typed out on the page, it would make reading inefficient and slow. Don’t get stuck turning everything into a paper; think about all of the options that you have available to you.

So, how can you use all these different ideas that I’ve talked about? Well, I started by working in something I like doing (cartooning). Through it, I practiced and learned and worked to create a process that I’ve found works for all kinds of creating. Try that out yourself. Look into a genre, understand what the importance of the genre is, and create standards to work by. Do some

research to help build a routine. This will not only help you with your current work; it will help you work in other genres in the future. It's funny to think my drawing experience helped me improve my writing skills, but nonetheless, I am a better artist in both visual and text genres. The skills I developed through personal exploration have improved all of my work. So, do what I did. Just find your genre, your anything, that drives you to understand how it works and build your own foundation for creating better work.

Websites for Cartoon Examples

<http://politicalhumor.about.com/od/politicalcartoons/ig/Education-Cartoons/No-Child-Left-Behind.htm>

<http://www.scriptedspontaneity.com/2008/01/teachers-new-years-resolutionspart-2/>

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Writing with Tattoo Ink: Composing that Gets Under the Skin

Lisa L. Phillips

Phillips describes the process of tattoo compositions as a collaborative writing process that occurs between an artist and a client. For the client, the composing process involves making decisions about what she wants her tattoo to communicate to other people about her. For the tattoo artist, the composing process involves making informed decisions about placement, effect, design, ink, and color based on the client's request. Ultimately, the process of composition, no matter the medium, involves learning about a new genre, making informed decisions, revising, and considering the trajectory, or path, of a text whether it's in the skin or on a page.

The things that we remember about the people we love compose indelible images in our imaginations and our memories. I'm going to share two stories with a base common to both: tattoos as an editable written process. The first story belongs to my grandpa and the second story belongs to my friend, Derek. Although neither story is directly mine, together they inform my understanding of the writing process and delineate changes in tattoo genres over time in interesting ways.

My grandpa was born a little more than a century ago—1908 to be exact. For much of his adult life, he was a coal miner in a deep mine operation in Southern Illinois. Long before I knew him, he was tough. After he retired, I spent many summer days sitting with him after “playing” at work in his garden. He'd roll up his sleeves and I would see a funny looking greenish-black eight-inch-long smudge on his inside left forearm. When I was seven, I remember repeatedly asking my grandpa what that smudge was. Little kids are persistent...they will keep asking until they either drive you nuts or get an acceptable answer. I was no exception. Grandpa told me that the smudge was “a mistake” he made in his youth and that was about it. My dad, not overly fond of my grandpa as it turned out, told me that grandpa had a tattoo of a

naked lady on his arm. It didn't look like one. My dad told me that later in his life my grandpa "got religious" and didn't want the tattoo anymore. There weren't any lasers back then to remove the lady in question, so he strapped a bar of lye soap—a very caustic substance—to his arm until the tattoo blurred and you could no longer identify its "taboo" features. In effect, he edited what he thought was "a mistake." Because he is dead, I can't ask my grandpa why he made the decision to write on his skin, why he wanted to remove it later, or what compelled him to try to do so anyway. However, since curiosity dies hard and my grandpa is no longer around to ask, I wanted to ask someone else about those decisions made throughout the tattoo process in order to see if it is similar to the writing process.

Without a doubt, Derek Casey has helped me understand how those decisions get made. Derek is a twenty-four-year-old college student who is a tattoo enthusiast, collaborator, and composer. Derek has a number of tattoos, and each one has a story affiliated with it. Unlike my grandpa, Derek likes to talk about his collection and how he worked with his artists to design and compose each one. Derek has a pineapple on his right hand to represent his place of birth, Hawaii, where there is a rich and long tradition of tattoo art. Above that on Derek's forearm he has an assortment of images that he

let his artist compose sight unseen on his skin. This reflects a trust built on earlier cooperation with his artist, Scott Kalina. Derek said, "Scott knows the importance of my identity as a half-Mexican American. And the tattoo of the skeleton with a sombrero shows this identity. When I saw the completed tattoo inked on my skin, I was really happy with the result because it reflected so many of our conversations and friendship." Fundamentally, Scott and Derek were functioning as team collaborators in a kind of blind-faith peer review. Unquestionably, many writing situations call for the same kind of brainstorming, partnership, and trust that Derek and Scott established over time.

My conversation with Derek about his tattoos made me reflect on my grandpa's feelings regarding the writing on his skin. He felt ashamed of something that didn't have anything to do with the content of his character. Nevertheless, his composition—a tattoo—had a kind of trajectory in his social circle that deeply upset



Figure 1: Derek Casey outside of the Lock 16 Café next to the I&M Canal in LaSalle, Illinois on October 9, 2011.

him. Trajectory, as I understand it, means the path followed by an object moving through space; it is the way that something travels beyond the original intent. As my grandpa moved through the space of his life, this object written just under the dermis of his skin changed its meaning. Grandpa revised the composition, but could not erase it entirely.

Before I talked to Derek, I did some initial research on a useful website.¹ In the not too distant past, many Americans associated tattoos with sideshows, sailors, bikers, and, in my grandpa's case, working class coalminers. Now, tattoos are more readily accepted and people who get them are as varied as the designs, styles, and reasons for getting tattoos. Writing in this genre is done by injecting ink just under the surface, or in the dermis, of the skin. Writing on the skin has history, trajectory, and it represents personal associations and partnerships with artists. Together the client and artist create a "written" composition that is kind of "life-writing." Derek said, "A meaningful tattoo reflects individual taste, style, artistry, and identity. What bothers me most is the commercial nature of some tattoo requests and shops. There is a perception that it is 'cool' to have a tattoo like everyone else's. That's not cool; that's conformity and commercialization of a unique art form." What Derek describes, and objects to, is the kind of composing that does not have any "below-the-surface" research, meaning, or trajectory.

First, Derek told me about the stories behind his tattoos. He also explained the collaborative writing process because he is learning how to create tattoos as an apprentice in a reputable tattoo studio. Ultimately, he explained why he decided to have words and images permanently written into his skin. The stories relate to his life and his experiences and shape who he is as a person. This helps him stay focused on his longer-term plans and goals. He said, "I had the words 'Hobo Life' written across my fingers because I wanted a permanent reminder of where I have been in the past to carry forward into my future. I want to be able to stay humble and appreciate where I have come from and how much my friends have meant to me when I have needed them. Basically, tattoos are an extension of who you are and how you represent yourself to the world."

Of course, there is more to Derek's story. A deliberate understanding of the tattoo process takes a long time to learn how to do well, if one takes it as a serious "written" art form, which Derek does. "There are people who learn how to make quick compositions, but they garner neither respect nor gather much skill because there is very little critical inquiry incorporated into their 'writing' process," Derek said. Derek indicated that most people getting a first tattoo take a long time to make a decision, and when they do they want their tattoo to look *exactly* like an existing image. They don't usually want much

feedback or collaboration from the artist, which, Derek insists, makes the best tattoos: “They end up with boring compositions that don’t show much expression or convey much meaning.”

When I thought about this as a writer and reader, I realized that those less familiar with tattoo genres are imitating an existing “real world” genre, but no depth or revision is incorporated into the decision-making process; hence, the final product may not hold one’s attention or imagination—in fact, to a writer, it is a *de facto* form of plagiarism. As a reader I juxtaposed Derek’s analogy with a bad pulp-fiction novel that one picks up for a dime at a yard sale versus reading a first-edition timeless work of art in a rare book room: the first is disposable; the second is enduring and leaves a lasting impression.

Next, Derek described how he is learning to “write” in a tattoo genre. He said, “Anyone can get a certificate that says they can tattoo, but they don’t really know what they are doing in the collaboration process, and they have no historical understanding of the different kinds of tattooing like ‘Old School Sailor Jerry Tattoos’ or ‘Native Hawaiian Tattoos,’ ‘The Japanese Tradition,’ and so on. It is a different kind of writing process and you have to experiment on different parts of the body to learn how to ‘write’ in that place and across that context. For example, the ink has to be injected differently on a boney surface as compared with a muscular or fleshier surface. You have to think about the color of the ink and the skin tone. The movement of the muscles under the skin can stretch the image and make it look odd. A careful, as you say, ‘writer’ pays attention to those details.”

The process that Derek describes is a lot like learning to write in different genres. Derek notes that the composition process involves multiple drafts and revisions. For tattoo compositions, storyboards and critical feedback on ideas are crucial steps along the path to the final product. Derek explained that the best examples of great tattoo “writing” are usually collaborative in nature. For example, Derek and his artists worked as a team on a large tattoo image that is being inked onto his back. He told his artists his initial ideas and overarching themes. Next, Scott Kalina and Adam Kamphaus, an ISU art school alumnus, collectively drew a large mock up. The mock up was hung on the wall at the back of the artists’ tattoo studio and was revised, redrawn, and reedited for months before one line of ink was ever placed on Derek’s back. This led me to consider tattoo production in greater detail, for I wondered how a tattoo artist learns to write on a human subject.

Derek explained how tattoo artists learn to write on people. He described that in the past, some tattoo artists “wrote” on a dead pig’s skin first. An iconic tattoo artist named Norman “Sailor Jerry” Collins (b. 1911–1973) used this method, and it is likely the method that my grandpa’s artist used. In

a documentary highlighting Norman's work, Norman said he learned how to do tattoo art on pigs before he worked on people. The skin of a Chester White—a kind of pig with light pinkish skin—worked well as a “practice” canvas. There is no need to call the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, however. Derek distinguished that that was what people used to do. Now, Derek said that there is a special kind of practice surface that one can purchase to try out different writing styles, gestures, methods, and tools before one writes on a person. Artists also compose on the surface of oranges, grapefruit, cantaloupes, and tangerines because the skin of these varieties of fruit is thick and works well as an inexpensive practice surface. Nevertheless, nothing is as good as the real thing—human skin—and many apprentices practice on each other before they tattoo a paying client. Derek has not earned the right to write on a person because he has been an apprentice for less than a year. At this point in his apprenticeship, he makes a series of thumb-nail sketches for the client, digitizes the best roughs, revises the drawings, experiments with color combinations, seeks expert advice and client input, and once approved, transfers the designs onto the client, but he does not do the inking yet.

Just as any writer needs time and practice to learn and master a new genre, the ideal way for tattoo artists to learn the genre is through a professional, long-term (1 to 5 year) apprenticeship with a master-artist. The artist shows the apprentice how the process works, how to keep the artist and client safe from infections, how to maintain and operate the equipment, how to run a business, and how to work together with the client and other artists to create the best product and artwork.

Finally, I come full circle and think about my grandpa's day, which overlapped with Norman Collins's. I learned from a website that the modern tattoo machine started with Thomas Edison's Engraving Machine back in the 1800s. I don't know how my grandpa's tattoo was created exactly, but I do know how he tried to “edit” it. Derek explained that the tools used depend entirely on the genre of the tattoo. For example, “prison tattoos” have a lot of meaning to the individual participants, with a lot of emotional, spiritual, and redemptive themes, but the technology is pretty crude. In a contemporary tattoo studio, the equipment is becoming much lighter, which eases wrist and back strain; there are more than 100 colors of inks, and new rotary guns have changed the potential for complex compositions and creative expression.

One thing that Derek and I did not discuss was the process of laser tattoo removal, so I researched it later. Early in our discussion, Derek said that he would not have any tattoos removed because they reminded him of his personal history and the community of which he is a part: one that means

so much to his identity and future career prospects. Another friend I talked with about tattoos said that she is having all of hers slowly removed with lasers. She had a partner's name tattooed on her arm when she was young. They fell out of love, so she had the tattoo edited with additional ink, but the name keeps bleeding through to the surface. Both the tattoo process and laser removal are painful, but having a tattoo removed is more expensive than having the original "writing" placed under the skin. Curiously, yellow and green are the most difficult colors to remove, and black and blue are the easiest to remove. Ultimately, no laser removal treatment is one-hundred-percent effective.² It seems that "life writing" like this requires forethought to be visualized over the long haul.

Once again, there are useful connections applicable to writers working within a new genre. If one is to write something for a trajectory outside of a classroom setting, like a letter to the editor, an online blog, a community action fundraiser, or a *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* article, one needs to consider the audience uptake—how readers might respond to the written work—in addition to the writing and research practices necessary for any genre's effective production. To get more to the point, I don't want to write something that will cause me great regret later. I don't believe that one can fully control this though: all one can really do is think, practice first and frequently, get some helpful feedback, edit the work, collaborate, and keep at it. One may not end up with a "perfect" composition, but one is more likely to have created something meaningful, or useful. For the writer, depending on the context, the composition can be edited, but once it's out there, it's out there, as both Derek's and my grandpa's stories demonstrate.

Thanks to Derek Casey, Scott Kalina, and Adam Kamphaus of *The Sunken Ship Tattoo* studio in LaSalle, Illinois for sharing their composing process with me.³

Endnotes

1. If you'd like to see how this stuff works and where I got some of my information, see Tracy V. Wilson's article on HowStuffWorks: <http://health.howstuffworks.com/skin-care/beauty/skin-and-lifestyle/tattoo.htm>.
2. The following website, HowStuffWorks, has more interesting facts regarding laser tattoo removal: <http://health.howstuffworks.com/skin-care/beauty/skin-and-lifestyle/tattoo-removal3.htm>.
3. If you want more information about the artists, see www.facebook.com/thesunkenship.



Lisa Phillips is a PhD student in English Studies at Illinois State. She does not have a tattoo because she does not like pain. She thinks designing one for someone else could be cool, though. Lisa can imagine her Grandpa Stan learning his A, B, Cs in a once new one-room school-house like the one she drew.

Publishing with the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*

GWRJ Editors

The *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* is published by the Illinois State University Writing Program, Joyce R Walker, Editor and Kristi McDuffie, Associate Editor.

Our Mission Statement

The *GWRJ* is dedicated to publishing work by writers and scholars whose work investigates the practices of people writing (and acting) in different writing situations and in a variety of different genres. We encourage both individuals and groups to submit work that studies and explores the different ways that writers learn how to write for different genres and in different settings, not just within the boundaries of academia, but in all kinds of settings where writing happens. Because we identify as “writing research” any type of composition that endeavors to uncover new information about how people work with writing or how writing works, 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. However, accepted articles will be informed by either primary research into writing behaviors and activities and/or by scholarship in the field of writing studies that addresses theories of how people learn to compose in different situations.

Submissions

Articles can be submitted to the *GWRJ* at any time, although we do have deadlines for responding to work and selecting articles for upcoming issues (see below). Contact the Associate Editor at grassrootswriting@gmail.com with queries about possible submissions and to submit your work.

Queries and Drafts

The *GWRJ* has a strong commitment to working with interested authors to help them to prepare for publication. So if you think you have what might be 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.

Deadlines

Although articles, queries, and drafts can be submitted at any time, these are suggested deadlines for the production of the 4.2 (Spring 2014) and 5.1 (Fall 2014) issues:

January 15, 2013	Submit articles by this date for priority consideration for Issue 4.2.
October 1, 2013	Submit articles by this date for priority consideration for Issue 5.1.

Citation

GWRJ articles should always provide citations for published works that are mentioned. However, in keeping with our flexible and open consideration of the term “scholarship,” we do not stipulate the use of a specific style of citation for articles. While some *GWRJ* articles will lend themselves to one of the common academic citation styles, like MLA or APA, other articles may use a more journalistic style of citation or endnotes for important citation information. However, all published texts (scholarship, works of art, etc.) referenced in any *GWRJ* article must be cited in some way that allows readers to refer to the cited work. Additionally, any primary research into the composing practices of individuals and groups must have appropriate permissions in order to be published. (Usually, this means having participants sign a consent form that we provide.)

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 some basic style criteria for authors to consider:

1. The readership of the *GWRJ* is **writers**. It is not “students,” or “ENG 101 students,” despite the fact that it is used as the “textbook” for English 101. *GWRJ* articles should attempt to provide valuable content to writers who are engaged in the activity of “learning how to learn about” genres. Our readers may be ISU students, staff, or faculty, but they might also be members of the wider Bloomington-Normal community or beyond.
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. However, many of our readers are both writers and students at ISU (in either ENG 145 or ENG 101). This means that articles that focus on learning that happens in school are considered appropriate (see the section on “School and Society” for more information).
4. Language and style that is overly formal or “academic” may be difficult or unappealing to our readers.
5. 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, where the focus is on the author’s learned expertise.) Authors need to be careful to remember that no one “learns” a genre completely or in completely simple way. So while writers (especially of first-person narratives) may write about successes, they need to complicate the genres with which they are working.
6. Tone or content that situates the reader as a certain kind of writer (whether as a master or novice), with certain kinds of shared experiences, can be problematic, because the readership of the journal constitutes a wide variety of writers with different writing abilities and experiences.
7. 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.
8. Articles are usually not strictly theoretical; while theoretical perspectives are useful, it’s important for authors to think about how to make the theories applicable (in practical ways) to our readers.

9. 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.

Subject Matter

Almost any type of situation where texts are being conceived, produced, and used could potentially be an appropriate topic for a *GWRJ* article. Examples of genres that could be studied can be found almost anywhere, and when authors consider the situations and activities in which genres are produced/distributed/used, the possible range of subjects and situations become almost infinitely variable. Focusing topics as narrowly as possible can be useful, and direct experience with (or observation of) certain kinds of writing situations tends to be a good way to narrow an article’s focus. Thus, Amy Hick’s article on playlists, “Scroll-Point-and-Click Composition?” (Volume 2.1, pages 25-30), is an excellent example of a fairly narrow genre that is nevertheless interesting and complex. Authors might also investigate a rhetorical effect or strategy or a particular textual practice that extends across genres. These can be fascinating articles, but keeping them *narrowly* defined can be more difficult.

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 in 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 <http://www.copyright.gov/fls/fl102.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 18 and people with mental disabilities, among others) are not acceptable for *GWRJ* articles unless the author has received approval from Illinois State University (or another institution) for Human Subjects research.

Honoraria

The *GWRJ* offers an honorarium of \$50.00 for each article published in a print issue of the *GWRJ*. [Note: The *GWRJ* may publish multimodal pieces that will be “introduced” in the print edition with a link to where the sites are housed on our server. These multimodal pieces would also be eligible for an honorarium.] In addition to the print edition, we are also beginning to publish an archive of “*GWRJ* writing research” articles, which may include articles in addition to those featured in our print issues. Authors may be invited to submit their work to this archive, which would still be considered a publication in the journal, but would not include an honorarium payment.

Research in School and Society

Many of the genres that are assigned in our classrooms at ISU might be interesting as the subject of study, keeping in mind that even among classrooms in the same department there might be wide variations among genre expectations and requirements. Other kinds of social communications that happen throughout university settings (like emails between instructors and students, or documents created by social groups on campus) might be interesting as well. The *GWRJ* is particularly interested in studies of “research genres” (genres that use primary or secondary research as a core component), partly because we want to challenge the notion that “research papers” are a coherent genre, and partly because we know that “researched writing” is a type of literate activity that is very important to the mission and goals of universities, including ISU. However, we are also interested in research studies related to many other kinds of genres that can be found at ISU. The same is true for genres outside of the university; almost any genre could potentially be interesting as the subject of study.

Personal Narrative (or Not?)

A review of our current and archived articles reveals that many of our existing articles are written in a personal tone, that is, they use first person (“I”) and include personal stories and experiences. Some of our articles are actually “personal narratives” (with a clear relationship to genres such as memoir or creative non-fiction). For example, Hilary Selznik’s article “Researching one in Six Million” (Volume 2.1, pages 83-88), is very similar to a creative non-fiction story in many ways. Although we do encourage a relatively informal register for all articles, and while we are happy to publish

personal narratives about writing experiences, we do want to stress that articles need not be written as first-person accounts, nor do they need to be written only about the author's experiences. Studies of the writing of others are equally as important as work that relates a single, personal perspective, and, in addition, the *GWRJ* would like to encourage writing research that looks beyond the personal.