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GWRJ Editors

From the Editors

Meghann Meeusen

As we draw our fifth year of publication to a close with this 5.2 issue of the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*, it seems extraordinary how far we have come in sharing distinctive works of writing research and studies in genre and cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT). These thirteen new articles give true testament to the talents of our writers and the robust research happening within the Illinois State University community and beyond, and we believe these fascinating studies also harken the remarkable development to come as we continue to expand the work of the *GWRJ*.

This issue, much like the 5.1 edition, begins with three articles showcasing the ways that cultural-historical activity theory can be explored in complex and creative genres. First, **R.L. Jones** shares his study into humorous t-shirts, examining his real life encounters and analyzing the goals and purpose of this unique genre. **Jayna Leipart Guttilla** similarly draws from her experiences to consider another common yet captivating genre, considering the historical context and cultural weight of recipes. The fluid nature of genres over time is further explored by **Delores Robinson**, who examines the notes young people pass to one another; she utilizes a multi-generational perspective, analyzing both her own and her daughter's notes.

Following these forays into examples of literate activity, two of our writers examine academic genres, but similarly interrogate the ways that texts in unique activity systems are often far more complicated than they seem. First, our 2014–2015 *Grassroots* Writing Research Scholarship recipient, **Kylie Wojciechowski**, offers a poignant examination of her experience as a writing tutor working with international students, questioning whether the separation between how "they" write and "we" write suggests a problematic paradigm. **Mike Shier** also looks closely at his own literate activities as both teacher and student to complicate a familiar genre—the syllabus—and he comes to find that its role in the classroom mediates relationships in fascinating ways.

Next, two of our authors play with genres related to music. While **Kayla Connett** studies her process of learning about a new choral piece by integrating CHAT into her ideas, **Lauren Gill** shares the ways writing research methods allowed her to play with a new musical genre, and she explains the ways an experiment with a new literate activity can open up a variety of noteworthy avenues of study.

In the subsequent articles, the *GWRJ* demonstrates just how important technology has become in our understanding of writing and activity systems, as four writers investigate the complexities of online writing spaces. **Shelby Ragan** begins this

section with an in-depth inquiry into the social media platform Tumblr, in which she discovers that writing research can provide reason and understanding to even the most curious genre features. Creating a personal blog or website also features in the next two articles, in which **Mary Cullen** describes the similarities of writing research to learning to ride a bike, and **Armaan Sanghera** chronicles the meaning she found in working toward the goal of showcasing the musical talents of her friends. Finally, **Frank Macarthy** also complicates Internet spaces by examining movie reviews and describing the unique role of anonymity in writing online.

Authors of our next two articles push the boundaries of writing research in ways we especially encourage at the *GWRJ*, and we hope to see more future submissions that feature linguistic approaches like those of **Erin O'Connor**, who considers phonetic spelling and dialect in relation to issues of culture in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. We are also interested in publishing future articles that showcase collaborative work, and **Thaddeus Stoklasa and Scott Pyrz** demonstrate this rich and fascinating process in their examination of their own efforts, successes, and challenges in writing for the *GWRJ* as a team.

The 5.2 issue concludes with our classic inclusion of "Publishing with the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*," as we continue to encourage new writers to share their writing research with us by submitting to the *GWRJ*. The *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* continues to evolve and grow, and as we look ahead, we hope to highlight the work of writers researching from an even greater diversity of perspectives, all with the goal of interrogating the fluid and intriguing nature of literate activity. Writing research, and in particular those studies that tease out distinctive genres and the culturally and historically bound spaces in which they are embedded, allow for a richer understanding of not only the words that we write, but also the world around us. We look forward to publishing work that expands this understanding, and we are excited to see what new heights our writers can aspire to as they continue these pursuits.

I'm with Stupid→: Considering the Genre of the Humorous T-Shirt

R. L. Jones

For better or worse, the humorous t-shirt has established a steady footing in everyday contemporary fashion. Ranging in tenor from subtle wit to bold vulgarity, these shirts offer an opportunity to analyze how a seemingly simple message on one's clothing presents a multitude of considerations for the student of genre studies. In "I'm with Stupid," R. L. Jones, an avid fan of the humorous tee, dons a couple of his favorite funny shirts in public settings to examine what they tell us about genre.

Sam was the first student to walk into my high school classroom the other day. He proudly sported a t-shirt of a giant hamster malevolently zapping a city with laser beam eyes (think Godzilla). Soon after followed Kylie, on whose t-shirt a much different drama was playing out. A little orange crying "Mommy, NO!" mournfully gazed upon a tall glass of orange juice. Over the past few years, I've noticed an increasing prevalence of these humorous fashion statements. I see them not only in my classroom, but in the market, at the mall, in the coffee shops . . . and on me. I've assembled a collection of ridiculous t-shirts over time, from the just plain silly, like my brown tee displaying an artfully drawn Bigfoot tackling a thrashing unicorn, to the inexplicably odd, like my t-shirt featuring a creepy, mustachioed man in a blonde perm proclaiming "You had me at hola." It occurred to me that the funny t-shirt operates as a genre in itself, with its own rules and considerations. Whatever the joke behind the t-shirt—whether it is ironic, sarcastic, satirical, absurd, a play on words, or an allusion to a funny movie line—when one wears a humorous tee, he or she makes a statement. What are the communicative processes that govern this statement? To further examine the genre of the humorous tee, I decided to put on a funny tee, wander around

in a public setting, and gather some field notes. Eventually this led to further exploration, with the assistance of my twin sister Peg, a fellow humorous t-shirt connoisseur, by way of a trip to the mall. What we found was that the genre of the humorous tee can be quite tricky to navigate.

The *Golden Girls* Go to Walmart

One of my favorite humorous tees features the cast of the *Golden Girls*—Dorothy, Blanche, Rose, and Sophia. The smiling girls are sketched in dark green on a golden yellow t-shirt. Beneath the image, it reads "Stay Golden." One Saturday afternoon, I took these gorgeous ladies on a trip to the local Walmart, that bastion of low prices that draws people of all backgrounds like moths to a flame, to find out if, in fact, my shirt was funny.

Once inside, I unassumingly strolled from aisle to aisle seeking an unsolicited reaction to my tee. It took a half hour before I finally noticed a glance and a smirk from a fifty-something-year-old man in a polo. No one seemed to be interested in my shirt, but I was interested in theirs. I observed shirts with messages of all kinds—shirts featuring brand names, names of retailers, colleges, local school districts, sports teams . . . there were shirts promoting the Marines, the 2nd Amendment, Harley Davidson, Angry Birds, Pepsi, a crocheting club, local festivals, vacation destinations, television shows, musicians, zombies, and charity events. There were shirts depicting animals, nature scenes, and the American flag. T-shirts with messages outnumbered plain t-shirts by an approximate margin of 2:1. Seeing all of these different messages and images on t-shirts inside of an hour made me realize something. Apparently, we're a society of people who want each other to know who we are. We want complete strangers to know what products we like, what schools we support, what entertainment we prefer, what stores we shop at, what products we're fans of, where we went on vacation, and what our political beliefs are. Forget Facebook. Forget actual conversation. If you want to know who I am, just read my t-shirt, buddy! Look at me! I'm a Bears fan! I went to Fort Myers! I watch *Duck Dynasty*! I support St. Jude! Or, I suppose one could argue that in our quest to tell the world about ourselves through our t-shirts, we've unwittingly morphed into billboards for everything under the sun.

Since my t-shirt didn't seem to be garnering much appreciation, I decided to inform others wearing funny tees that I appreciated their shirts. I counted eight other t-shirts I deemed as intending to be humorous. There was a scruffy-looking twenty-something-year-old man looking at yogurt wearing a hot pink t-shirt which read, "Don't laugh. It's your girlfriend's t-shirt." He appeared to be standing with a female companion (the woman from whom

he took the shirt?). I skipped him. A forty-something-year-old man passed me sporting a black t-shirt which read "Y_U AR_ AN IDI_T" in *Wheel of Fortune* style tiles. Underneath this it asked, "Would you like to buy a vowel?" No thanks. Next, I spotted a young woman wearing a shirt that said something about recycling for Jesus. "Pardon me," I said as she browsed through CDs. "I just wanted to let you know that I like your funny shirt."

She turned with a glowering stare and replied, "This isn't supposed to be funny." Whoops!

My favorite funny tee adorned a forty-something-year-old man rifling through a rack of message t-shirts. It read "How to Pick Up Chicks" and showed a picture of a man picking up an actual baby chicken. "Excuse me," I said as I approached him. "I'm conducting research for a grad class project on funny t-shirts. Do you think my t-shirt is funny?" He chuckled. After an hour of being ignored by nearly everyone in the store, I got a chuckle. We talked for a few short minutes. He bought his shirt at Kohl's, and it's just one of many humorous t-shirts he owns. Even if he has to wear a shirt and tie, he informed me, he'll still wear a funny tee underneath. Well, a man after my own heart.

I asked four other people at Walmart if they thought my shirt was funny. When I asked a twenty-something male, he looked at me confusedly and commented, "Well, the only thing that's funny is that it's out of date." Another man who looked to be in his twenties replied sheepishly, "Um . . . I guess I get it." A thirty-something-year-old woman near the chips told me, trying to be kind, "Well . . . I'd say it's more nostalgic."

At this point, I decided I might have better luck with someone who may have watched the show. An older woman looking at yarn laughed out loud when I presented my t-shirt to her. "What's funny about the shirt to you?" I asked. She responded that she thought the show was funny, and even more, it was hilarious that a man my age would be wearing it. Exactly!

Who's Wearing It, Who Sees It, and Where It's Worn: The Bakhtinian Dialogism Behind Funny T-Shirts

My interactions at Walmart merit some analysis from a genre studies perspective. First of all, the humor of my *Golden Girls* t-shirt is greatly dependent on that fact that I, a guy in my mid-thirties, am wearing it. If an elderly woman was wearing it, what would be the impression? I'd guess that the woman was a fan of the show—not really that funny. In fact, if anyone was wearing it, it should be an older woman, right? So, the level of the shirt's

humor is dependent on the wearer. Consider the following shirt advertised on badideatshirts.com (Figure 1). The words are the same, but how could their messages be interpreted differently based on who's wearing the shirt?

Figure 1: The message differs according to who is wearing it.

I get the feeling the large man is poking fun at his own size, which to me is somewhat humorous. When the thin woman sports the shirt, I don't know how to interpret the message. Did she really have anorexia at one time? On the woman, the joke loses its steam.

Here's another example: "Yes, These Are My Real Breasts." I considered making a t-shirt with this message for my research. I think this would be hilarious for a man to wear. I see the idea as a play on gender, a self-effacing joke about guys' tendency to stare and wonder about passing girls, and it's funny because the question of whether or not a guy would augment that area of his anatomy wouldn't seem to be a legitimate consideration. Although, people do have sex changes. Now if a guy who had a sex change was wearing the t-shirt, that'd drastically alter the shirt's message. Then "Yes, These Are My Real Breasts" becomes a profound statement of gender identity. What if a large man with "moobs," or man boobs, were wearing the shirt? Then it becomes a self-effacing joke. If a woman were wearing the shirt, how would that change the message? "Only a really slutty woman would wear this," my sister Peg replied when I pitched her the idea. She hadn't understood I intended for a guy to wear it.

Speaking of t-shirts about boobs, consider the example of Meredith. I had Meredith as a student in my class two years ago. She was a rebel back then, but I had no idea how much of a rebel until I recently saw her strolling through the annual hometown festival wearing a tank top that read, in bright neon letters, "Show Me Your Tits." I'm guessing this was not a shirt made for someone like Meredith, a female high school junior, but rather a dirty, dirty old man or perhaps a beach-bound college male on spring break or a spectator at a Mardi Gras parade in the French Quarter. When sported by these possible intended wearers, the shirt's message is "I'm a perv and I'm here to party."

When worn by Meredith, in front of her entire hometown, in front of parents and their children riding the Ferris Wheel, in front of the Methodist Church members grilling for the pork chop benefit, I'm not sure what the message is. Was her shirt a subversive middle finger to the community? Could it have been a cry for help? Was it some sort of message about sexuality? I thought to stop her and ask, but I was actually a bit intimidated. You don't mess with people that outrageous. Maybe that was the message—"Buzz off!"

Interestingly, although the words on a t-shirt remain the same, the message changes greatly depending on who's wearing it, where they're wearing it, and who's seeing it. This brings to mind Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of "dialogism." Bakhtin wrote in the 1920s that the "utterance" (Bakhtin's term for a unit of speech) is not static, but highly variable, or "dialogic." A message or utterance can't be understood based solely on the speaker's intentions, but is only graspable when other factors are taken into account, specifically the audience's interpretation, the history behind how the utterance has been used, and the immediate context of the utterance (which would include factors like social setting and mood) (Vice 45). So, there is a lot at play when one wears a jokey t-shirt. The humorous t-shirt I eventually did create for my research reads "Don't Sext and Drive: It Can Wait!" Consider how this shirt's message, or the effectiveness of its joke, might change given any combination of the following variables:

Worn By:	Seen By:	Seen At:
A 70-year-old	A security guard	The mall
A 10-year-old	A six-year-old girl	Your college classroom
A college student	A protective father with his six-year-old daughter at his side	A church
A large man wearing an extra small shirt	Someone who's actually sexted while driving	A bar
Someone who hasn't bathed in two weeks	Someone who's received a harassing sext	A fancy restaurant
Your teacher	Someone who's lost a loved one in a text-and-drive accident	Chuck E. Cheese
Your father	Someone on their way to a funny movie	6:00am
Anthony Weiner	Someone on their way to a funeral	10:00pm
Someone looking to manage your investments	A primitive Amazonian tribesman	A nursing home
Will Ferrell	Your mother	The Oval Office

The variables that could affect the shirt's overall message are innumerable. Of course, this isn't just true for humorous t-shirts. I suppose it's true for any utterance. Thinking in terms of cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), issues of "reception" especially come to mind. To return to the "I Beat Anorexia" shirt example, one person could use the shirt to announce, "I'm fat and proud of it." Another person could re-purpose the shirt as proclamation of empowerment at having overcome a life-threatening illness. How these two people take up and use the text (their reception) couldn't be more different.

The World's Okayest Mom Sexts While Driving

I had more to learn about the humorous tee, so I decided to enlist the help of my twin sister Peg. For the past five years, Peg and I have been embroiled in a "T-shirt War." We gift each other ridiculous tees for our birthday. For our most recent birthday, she gave me a t-shirt with a giant name tag that reads, "My Name is Terry" in shaking handwriting. I don't know where she got it or what the shirt's point is, but it strikes me as hysterical. The day I did wear it out and about really sucked. At least a dozen people came up to me and asked, "Is your name really Terry?" By the end of the day, I'd given up explaining and just said "yes." I gave her a stupid t-shirt that pictured a ballerina doing the splits and farting. It reads, "Smells good, don't it?" She can't wear that one anywhere, however, due to the possible social implications. I failed by going too vulgar, so I suppose she won that round.

My research plan was for us to locate or create a couple goofy tees and wear them around the mall for an hour. We'd gauge other's reactions and try to uncover more about the genre we were participating in. Peg and I pitched each other ideas back and forth over e-mail. I was determined to go the Custom Ink route (www.customink.com is a site where you can create your own message t-shirts). Peg was feeling less inventive and decided instead to surf the scores of funny t-shirts sites on the web for an item to wear on our stupid t-shirt outing. She discovered a shirt that fit her frame of mind these days, as a mom of a seven-year-old boy, a six-year-old boy, and three-year-old girl, which read "World's Okayest Mom." I originally designed and ordered a "Corey Feldman—2016" presidential campaign tee after finding some clip art on Custom Ink that was a dead ringer for the '80s child star. A customer service rep e-mailed me to report they couldn't make the tee, however, because of trademark issues with the name "Corey Feldman." I tried to e-mail Corey to get his permission, but he never responded, and I had to go with my backup idea, "Don't Sext and Drive—It Can Wait!" After having so few unsolicited reads of my *Golden Girls* tee, I wanted to make sure people read this baby. So I ordered it in sunshine yellow with giant red

lettering. The shirt also features clip art of a man in a suit and tie with one hand on a steering wheel. He's looking up and lines surround his head as if he's just had a "Eureka!" moment (Figure 2).

I fancied my shirt's message to be a mildly clever play on the recent, widespread public service announcements about the dangers of texting while at the wheel. The message also has some additional currency with recent high profile sexting scandals (a politician named Anthony *Weiner* sending women photos of his junk? It's just too perfect). Just the notion of some idiot trying to sext while driving is humorous to me. I suppose there are morons out there who have attempted it, and I can't imagine it's very easy to keep one hand on the wheel while keeping your camera phone steady, and . . . well, you get the idea. So, this shirt would also function as a public service, helping prevent imbeciles from driving into oncoming traffic while Snapchatting pics of their unmentionables.

Figure 2: Will these undies be sexting friendly?

I was apprehensive about the shirt being too edgy. After all, who at the mall might see me in this shirt? My students? Their parents? Members of my church? I could potentially land myself in some hot water over this. When I arrived at Peg's on a Saturday afternoon to pick her up for our humorous t-shirt research, her husband Greg and their boys were at the kitchen table playing Go Fish. "Dah, don't, sss, sss, sext, don't sext and drive," her seven-year-old carefully read. "Dad, what's 'sext' mean?" Oh yeah, I forgot. Young children could be reading this shirt. A peeved look from Greg sent me back out to the driveway to wait for Peg. Now I was feeling really nervous about wearing this shirt in public. "Everyone's going to see me in this thing," I worried, becoming a bit paranoid. To borrow a CHAT concept, "distribution," or who a text is presented to, suddenly became my primary concern. I had second thoughts about wearing this shirt to the mall in front of everyone and anyone. A divey bar at midnight would have been a safer point of distribution. However, I needed a broad population for conducting t-shirt response testing.

As we entered the mall, I caught myself covering my shirt with the legal pad I was using to take notes each time we passed younger children. The looks began to pile up quickly. Peg's shirt didn't get as many glances, because it didn't immediately appear to be out of the ordinary. It was a maroon v-neck with the lettering in a sort of faded block font. "Mommy, that looks like a football shirt. You should wear that to a football game," I heard Peg's six-year-old comment as we were leaving her home. She did get several smiles throughout our hour at the mall from ladies who appeared to be fellow moms. They got it. Meanwhile, I recorded a number of glances from moms I'd classify as irritated.

We stopped to talk to an Asian man with a thick accent selling t-shirts at a kiosk. He chuckled at my shirt, but Peg's took some explaining. "People of all ages buy these shirts," he replied as Peg asked him a few questions about his kiosk. "My most popular shirt is the one with the minion," he informed us, pointing to a yellow shirt featuring the bobbling character from the *Despicable Me* movies.

Then we strode into Spencer's, where we were met by a barrage of sexually explicit t-shirts. "This might be the only place in the mall where you won't have to worry about offending anyone," Peg quipped. The salesperson there laughed at my shirt. "Yeah, the t-shirts are one of our biggest sellers. Eighteen to 24-year-olds are our target buyers," he told me.

At the food court, I received my most emphatic response of the afternoon. "Did you see that guy's shirt?" a twenty-something woman guffawed to her male companion. Peg and I approached a woman working behind the smoothie counter who looked to be in her thirties. She didn't find Peg's shirt especially funny, but snickered at mine. "It's like a public service announcement about texting," she commented.

As we made our way to one final department store, Peg lamented, "Humor is tricky. It's so specific in terms of what one person will think is funny and another person won't."

"I know what you mean," I replied as I quickly dodged behind a kiosk to avoid eye contact with the wife of my church's pastor.

Peg needed to get back home to her kids, so we began rapidly asking people their thoughts on our shirts. A forty-something man looking at flannels told us he didn't find our shirts particularly humorous, but that he was not offended by my sexting t-shirt. Next, we questioned a twenty-something sales associate with a nose ring in women's accessories who told us flatly that she didn't find either of our t-shirts particularly funny. She wasn't offended by my shirt because, as she explained, "It takes a lot to shock me." Two other female twenty-something sales associates in the men's jeans section both thought our shirts were hilarious. An older female customer nearby overheard Peg and me explaining our research to the sales associates and came to look at our shirts. She agreed they were funny. Last, we ran into a classmate from my college class who knew a little about my project. This thirty-something mom laughed at our shirts and read mine aloud, "*I can't wait to have sex*—oh, that's not what it says. Whoops, I guess that was a Freudian slip."

Bluto and Booger: Delivery Matters

Peg and I wore our humorous t-shirts with some success and some un-success. In reflecting on my experiences at Walmart and the mall, I'm taken

back to Peg's earlier comment about humor being tricky. Like any joke, the humorous tee has the potential to bomb. In fact, there are a number of sites online featuring "t-shirt fails," or pictures of folks wearing humorous t-shirts where clearly the joke is on them. My favorite is mandatory.com's "Unfortunate T-shirt for Mug Shots," featuring mug shots of individuals wearing shirts such as "I can't get away with anything" and "I'm probably lying." One might liken wearing a funny t-shirt to a stand-up comic relating a joke to an audience, but with the t-shirt, the joke is not just related to people who paid to come see the comic. The t-shirt's joke is made to everyone, whether they're in the laughing mood or not. When people leave their house for the day wearing a funny t-shirt, chances are they will "bomb" with some of their audience, but that's a nervy risk the humorous t-shirt wearer must boldly accept. Hadley Freeman, fashion columnist for *The Guardian*, recently lambasted the funny t-shirt:

> I have never understood the point of the joke T-shirt . . . simply because wearing a joke on your chest is like walking around all day and telling the same gag over and over, like a musical doll that has been jammed . . . Slogan T-shirts are obviously, utterly wrong in that they SHOUT AT PEOPLE AT FULL VOLUME REPEATING THE SAME PHRASE OVER AND OVER . . . There is really no excuse, unless you have lost the use of your vocal chords.

When donning a humorous tee, the wearer must take into account they are going to irritate the Hadley Freemans of the world. But, they must do so with confidence and panache. After all, there's delivery to consider.

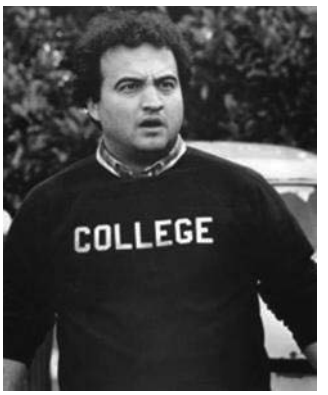

Figure 3: John "Bluto" Blutarsky

Just as a hilarious joke can be spoiled by a poor delivery, a humorous t-shirt can be foiled by an inept wearer. To rock a funny t-shirt, one must display a certain degree of audacity and ambivalence. These qualities are proudly exhibited by two heroes of the humorous tee from film, John "Bluto" Blutarsky of *Animal House* (Figure 3) and Dudley "Booger" Dawson from the *Revenge of the Nerds* films (Figure 4) These film images can be found at the following websites: Figure 3 http://savagebrothers.blogspot.com/2011/03/shirts-of-booger-philosophy.html and Figure 4 can be found at http://www.imdb.com/media/rm3582367488/nm0000004?ref_=nmmi_mi_all_sf.

Figure 4: Dudley "Booger" Dawson

Bluto ironically sports his nondescript "COLLEGE" t-shirt in the above picture, as if to sardonically say it doesn't matter what college he attends. He could be attending Faber College (as in the film) or any college—who cares? He's in college, so he's wearing a stupid shirt that says so.

Customink.com tabbed the shirt as #3 in its list of the 100 most iconic t-shirts of all time. The shirt is made funnier by the fact that college is a place Bluto, a derelict character in his seventh year at Faber with a GPA of 0.0, clearly doesn't belong. He's the last person who should be the face of "college." Booger, a student at Adams College and one of the "nerds" of the Alpha Beta fraternity, is stylishly adorned in a ripped "WHO FARTED?" t-shirt. The shirt is one of several humorous tees Booger wears throughout *Revenge of the Nerds* and *Revenge of the Nerds II: Nerds in Paradise*.

Bluto and Booger are successful humorous t-shirt wearers for two reasons: 1) They don't care if someone doesn't like or understand their shirt, and 2) They never acknowledge that their shirts could be funny. Bluto's shirt appears in only one short scene, in which he chugs a bottle of Jack Daniels in panicked response to his fraternity being shut down. He's clearly not in a mood to care whether others find his shirt humorous. Neither he nor his surrounding fraternity brothers make mention of his shirt. Essentially, the shirt becomes a sight gag, "a joke which achieves its effect visually" rather than through speech *(Oxford English Dictionary)*. Were Bluto to draw attention to his shirt or were he to ask if others found his shirt funny, the humor would be lost. It'd be like a stand-up comic concluding a joke by insecurely asking, "Did you get it? Was that one funny?" The first rule of funny t-shirt wearing is "Don't talk about your funny t-shirt." Not far behind this is "Don't care what others think." Booger follows these rules to a "tee," wearing his humorous shirts nonchalantly, and in any setting, never pointing to his shirts or making direct jokes about them. If one of the other less comically-inclined nerd characters from *Revenge of the Nerds* had worn the "Who Farted?" shirt, the joke would be ruined because they would have hee-hawed and snorted at their own shirt. Bluto and Booger demonstrate that the best funny shirt wearers don their attire without acknowledging or caring that they're wearing something out of the ordinary. Incidentally, my research method of walking around trying to draw attention to my funny t-shirts and asking what others thought of them violated both of the cardinal rules.

The humorous t-shirt is a genre in which the participant must be aware of a multitude of factors that impact a shirt's message. Who's wearing it, who's seeing it, where it's worn, and the shirt wearer's delivery of the joke are all factors that should be considered. But, they're only a few of many. This article has barely touched upon issues of shirt design—font, graphics, colors, and shirt style. Also worthy of examination is the psychology of the shirt wearer. Psychologist Dr. Jennifer Baumgartner explains, "Our closets are windows into our internal selves. Every one of us attempts to say or hide something in the way we wear our clothes. But few of us can articulate what we're trying to express or locate the root of the pattern, the pathos (x)." What is the pathos of

the funny t-shirt wearer? Finally, the history of the genre of the humorous tee, with the t-shirt recently celebrating its 100th birthday (forbes.com), is another area ripe for investigation. These are topics I welcome another researcher to explore. In the meantime, when it comes down to choosing between a humorous t-shirt or a plain t-shirt, as customink.com's 28th most iconic t-shirt of all-time reads, "I'm with Stupid→."

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R. L. Jones is a Master's student specializing in the teaching of writing. He has taught English at the junior high and high school level for ten years. He breaks up the monotony of grading countless essays by looking for and creating ridiculous t-shirts. "Shake Your Djibouti" is one of over two dozen humorous t-shirts he owns.

Recipes: A Socio-Historical Tour of the Palate Genre

Jayna Leipart Guttilla

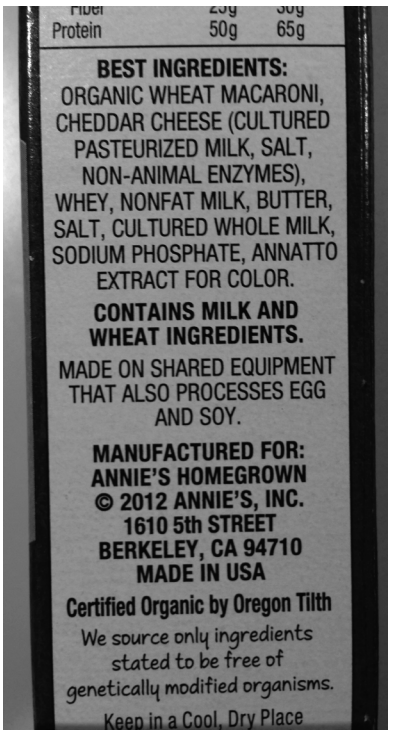
In this article, Leipart Guttilla explores the genre of recipes using cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) to find connections between her own cooking methodologies and those in other cultures and historical periods. She explores the connections between food and family, considering not just how people approach their daily meals, but more importantly how they approach one another.

Here I am once again, faced with the ever present, thrice daily question: what should I eat? In the past, this question could be easily solved by dialing up the local pizzeria and ordering a medium-to-large thin crust pizza, please, with sausages, mushrooms, and, if I am feeling fancy, diced tomatoes. Ordering in or dining out presents a problem, however, when small children are thrown into the culinary equation. Presently speaking, I now have to account for not only my own nutritional needs, but also my five-year-old's perpetually evolving (but most often devolving) appetite, my 16-month-old's now expanding dietary needs and my partner's unfaltering "let's-make-whatever-is-easiest" mentality. As a graduate of Le Cordon Bleu's College of Culinary Arts, I should be the expert chef-in-residence. Yet, day after day and night after night, I am confounded and intimidated by the seemingly simple question of "What should we eat?"

It is not as if I am bereft of recipes. I have, at the current count, 87 cookbooks on my kitchen bookshelf, and this is not including the wooden box of recipes that was given to my husband and myself by my Grandmother (Queen of the Crock Pot chicken recipes), the too-many-to-count Word document recipes that fill up my hard drive, and the folder labeled "Food"

in my Firefox web browser, many of which have been printed and stored in said kitchen bookshelf. Perhaps my inertia is rooted in the sheer amount of recipes available to me, or more likely, perhaps I am simply bored by the recipes that are most familiar to me and need a proverbial kick-in-the-butt to get motivated.

Most recently I have fallen into the trap of making blue box Mac and Cheese with chicken nuggets and ketchup (and *of course* a vitamin to ensure that my family is taking in the necessary amounts of nutrients) with a side of milk. It was during one of these blue box fails, as I happened to be stirring together the florescent colored powered cheese with the mushy macaroni noodles, that I suddenly wondered "Who came up with this horrendous and yet brilliantly simple recipe?" Clearly, the magic of the recipe was embedded in the powdered cheese mixture, because in the recipe for macaroni and cheese that I make from scratch (courtesy of Alton Brown & Martha Stewart), the powdered cheese mixture is replaced by butter, flour, powdered mustard, and cheddar cheese, all things wondrous and beautiful. Looking at the box itself revealed a not unholy combination of ingredients (ahem, I do use the organic blue box after all) which included cheddar cheese, non-animal enzymes, sodium phosphate—which according to *livestrong.com* is a "generic term that may refer to any sodium salt of phosphoric acid" and can be used as a texturizer, emulsifier, leavening agent, neutralizing agent or for added nutrition—and "annatto extract for color." Anyone who has made from-the-box mac and cheese reads the box to decipher or decode the instructional content. The preparation of the recipe on my box is quite simple; so simple in fact, that my five-year-old insists on "doing it all by myself," and indeed, with my assistance, she is quite capable of combining the necessary ingredients to form the final cooked product.


Protein 50g 65g

BEST INGREDIENTS:
ORGANIC WHEAT MACARONI, CHEDDAR CHEESE (CULTURED PASTEURIZED MILK, SALT, NON-ANIMAL ENZYMES), WHEY, NONFAT MILK, BUTTER, SALT, CULTURED WHOLE MILK, SODIUM PHOSPHATE, ANNATTO EXTRACT FOR COLOR.

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Figure 1: Macaroni and Cheese Ingredient List

The construction itself is brilliantly designed with numerical steps and emboldened titles, it reads simply: **BOIL**, **STIR IN**, **DRAIN PASTA**, **ADD**, **SPRINKLE**, and finally, **ADD**.

After partaking in this gloriously prepared meal of mushy cheesiness and sodium phosphate, I continued to meditate on the genre of the recipe. How did its present form of numerical instruction (or rather, the step-by-step process) become the stable identifier of "recipe" that we all know and use

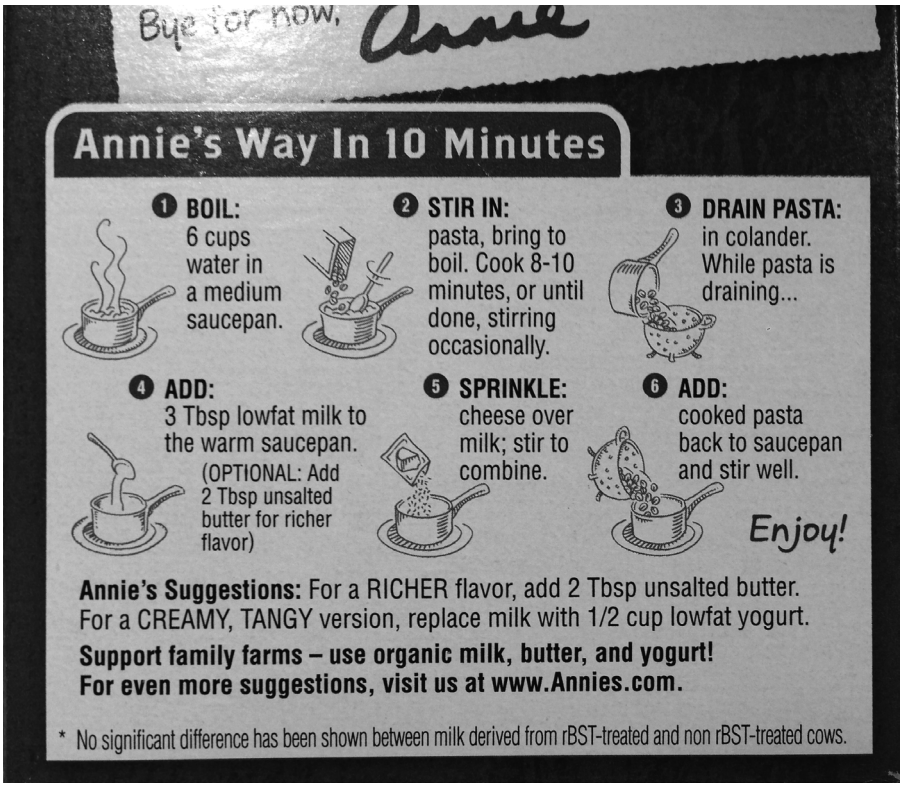


Figure 2: Macaroni and Cheese Cooking Directions

today? As a graduate of culinary school, reading, deciphering, and utilizing recipes has become a naturalized and somewhat instinctive activity for me; however, the simplicity of the text itself guarantees that anyone who is able to read can decipher its message—and this construction can be displaced when one thinks of pictorial/imagistic recipes. The genre of the recipe was designed to be an accessible, comprehensible document that would help the survival of the human species by diversifying and then propagating conversations about food. Talk about a whopper of a genre. Its utilitarian functionality is ingenious and yet where and how did it originate? How did the present day ubiquitous recipe become a genre in and of itself?

In thinking about genre and before we go further with the historical roots of the recipe, it might be pertinent to discuss cultural-historical activity theory, otherwise known as CHAT. Joyce Walker, in her article "Just CHATting," writes that CHAT is a useful tool to use when we encounter new or unfamiliar genres:

> Now, breaking down a particular genre into its component parts to discover its boundaries and key features is a great idea . . . The problem really comes in when we don't spend enough time and effort to really understand the genre we're working in. We just

> try to follow the "rules" we're given, making assumptions about how we can use what we already know about writing (or about the genre). This isn't always very successful. (2)

In other words, Walker is making the case for a doubling-down of sorts and really getting into the details of a genre that you are interested in exploring. For my part, recipes encapsulate the perfect way to explore CHAT and genre theory because they provide insight into worldwide cultures as well as providing a window into how people not only approach their daily meals, but more importantly how they approach one another. One could explore the trajectory of a particular recipe and the implications of its place in society at the moment that one is encountering it. If we were to apply CHAT to macaroni and cheese, we would first have to ask which macaroni and cheese recipe are we investigating? And then ask ourselves how do we trace the trajectory of what it once was and what it now has become.

Before I became a parent and a grad student and started using blue box macaroni and cheese, my recipe of "Mac and Cheese" was actually an amalgamation of two recipes: one from Martha Stewart and the other from Alton Brown. How did I know to combine two recipes into one and what to leave in and what to leave out? Moreover, how did I know that it would work? I couldn't really ask my Mother these questions as her macaroni and cheese recipe is literally opening up the blue box and following the labeled instructions. Likewise, my husband certainly would never be able to perform that seemingly simple task as he views the recipe as an already structured document, one that cannot be tampered with, as if it were a divine message sent down from the firmament. I think, in his case, this block arises from his unfamiliarity with the recipe genre as a whole rather than anything to do with recipes as a gendered knowledge form, and this unfamiliarity with the genre can also extend to my Mother. Leave it to CHAT to provide a framework for me.

In thinking about the history of recipes that are delivered via media sources like television or the Internet, one certainly has to be aware of the very public, and therefore transient, nature that they inhabit. These sources have become like outsourced familial resources that one can utilize when one does not have access to a family recipe box. In a sense, these new forms of recipes, especially recipes that allow for public comment, are engaging in conversations with the private participants and thus allow for marginalia to appear. In other words, I understood that I could take a little piece of the Martha Stewart recipe and a little of the Alton Brown recipe and "make it new" in a way that was uniquely my own and yet still actively a part of and engaged with the content received publicly. In working within the digital sphere, where anonymity rather than familial engagement is the norm, the cook can create a space where they carve out their own recipe boxes that are

curated from their own experiences. Moreover, I recognize that both Stewart and Brown received these recipes from sources that existed prior to themselves and that they then reshaped and outfitted the recipes to fit with their social identities. In short, when we are attempting to work with a particular genre, recipes or otherwise, CHAT is such a powerful tool to utilize because it allows the investigator to at once take a step back to see the "bigger picture" and also look closer to find how the nuances of the particular genre were formed and why this should matter to our cultural selves.

Returning to the aforementioned history of the recipe, we need to look way back to the beginnings of agricultural human history, as it so happens, to begin the story of the recipe. As CHAT helped us situate how we formulate and distribute our known recipes, the history of the recipe itself importantly reveals how little our interaction with food has changed since humans began domesticating wild foods into stable crops. William Sitwell writes in his book *A History of Food in 100 Recipes* that discovered within the funerary tombs of Ancient Luxor in Egypt were "images of hunting, plowing and sowing [as well as . . .] depictions of bread-making." This early recipe was thankfully translated for our enjoyment and is as follows:

> Crush the grain with sticks in a wooden container. Pass the crushed grain through a sieve to remove the husks. Using a grindstone, crush the grain still finer until you have a heap of white flour. Mix the flour with enough water to form a soft dough. Knead the dough in large jars, either by hand or by treading on it gently. Tear off pieces of the kneaded dough and shape into rounds. Either cook directly on a bed of hot ashes or place in moulds and set on a copper griddle over the hearth. Be attentive while cooking: once the bottom of the bread starts to brown, turn over and cook the other side. (Sitwell 9)

I can follow that recipe! I can follow a recipe that was created over 4,000 years ago and somehow it still resembles our present-day conception of what a recipe should look like. Yes, today we have the convenience of buying already processed wheat flour, but as anyone who owns a KitchenAid stand mixer knows—this is not a requirement to participate in this conversation, so please stay with me here—there is a grain mill attachment available to purchase that will grind oats, grains, and so forth, thus I could in theory follow this recipe step-by-step and come out with something that approximates pita bread, which is the same product the Ancient Egyptians created.

Moving forward from ancient Egypt to Medieval Europe, the modern researcher can see that the recipes a cook would encounter then, much like the Egyptian recipe, do not sound the least bit unpalatable to today's gourmand, save for the descriptions that include how to butcher and de-feather the fowl

one is preparing. This murderous inclusion may seem unsavory to today's recipe preparer; however it is not as if the chef could run down to the local Jewel to purchase an already slaughtered, de-feathered and packaged chicken. In a recipe for Roast Goose or gosling, the passage reads:

> Cut the gosling's or goose's throat; pluck it thoroughly and singe it; cut off the feet, remove the innards, and wash it well: then take the verjuice and garlic, or if you have none, take aromatic herbs soaked in vinegar, and sew up the cavity and put it on a spit, and roast it; and if it is not fat put some pork fat inside. Then put a little water in a dish and catch the fat that comes from within. And when it is properly cooked, take it off the fire and serve it with the juice of oranges, lemons, or sweet limes. (Redon 113-4)

Again, my first reaction to reading this recipe is shock in how similar it is to a recipe one would find today. The effort and time that it would take to prepare the dish, however is most frightful in that clearly the person preparing the dish would have other household chores to accomplish as well as prepare the meal, unless the person in question is the cook in a Manor House and "cook" was their sole position. This being said, I can hardly believe that a meat course would be an everyday occasion for the average person in Medieval Europe, so one would have to assume that this recipe was intended for a splendid table or at the very least a very special occasion indeed.

This brings to mind the division of labor within a household, especially if the household was that of plebeian, or lower to middle class stock. These households could not afford to engage in such extravagant preparation as indeed they would take away from other, more pertinent household duties, such as tending to one's crops, walking to market, or simply daily housekeeping. The modern reader has to suspend their knowledge of household management in order to catch a glimpse of what it would be like to engage in a household economy during this time. There was no immediate access to hot water, so one could not simply turn on the faucet to soak their dishes or clean their soiled laundry. One important facet here that modern readers may not fully comprehend is the notion of time. Can you imagine how long it takes to boil a pot of water? You would have to first consider how much water you would need, and then you would have to actually go out and obtain the water, as you would not have water pipes running directly into your house. Moreover, you would have to think about how much water you would be able to carry. (Can you imagine carrying a cast iron pot full of water from your front yard to your back yard?) Now once you have the water, you have to consider just how long it takes for a pot of water to boil. According to my own personal estimations, I would say that a full five quarts of water, with the lid on, would take about 15 minutes to come to a rolling boil.

So, this is an enormous amount of effort just to obtain hot water and, if you remember, the above recipe did not even call for hot water, which means that the cook/housekeeper could spend a good portion of their day simply engaging in menial tasks like the fetching and boiling of water and laundering their clothes even before they begin cooking, something that needed to be done multiple times during the day. We can return to CHAT again, as it can be a useful theory to help us understand that recipes like Roast Goose above are never simply recipes that one acquires and uses. The recipe encodes socio-political, economic, and gendered meanings that determine seemingly simple things like access to water (water which may not even be clean), food and land. The Roast Goose recipe for a lower to middle class household might signify all of the items that members of this household do not have access to; in contrast, an upper middle or higher class household might receive the recipe as simply Sunday dinner.

As I write this, I cannot help but begin to reflect upon the personal economy that surrounds the gathering, purchasing, preparing, and finally consuming of the daily meal. Domesticity has been normalized in Western societies as the purview of women; indeed it was perceived as a highly feminized activity, but certainly this is not to suggest that men were never allowed to participate in kitchen affairs. It was not uncommon to find males working in the kitchens of large estates and many of them ran entire kitchens like one would operate in a restaurant today.

When one considers how limiting a women's life was in medieval and early modern Europe, it is momentous that the recipe—a small, seemingly innocuous domestic document—could authorize a woman's power in a sphere where men were largely excluded. Indeed, as Sara Pennell argues, ". . . the recipe [is] a gendered knowledge form, one which carried particular resonances for the woman who gathered . . . [and] shaped recipes . . . who were identified as authors of published culinary works" (237). Pennell continues by noting that:

> The diversification of domestic literature out from the socially circumscribed precious 'closet open'd' genre of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries meant that the rhetoric of this particular seam of femaleness was increasingly preached inclusively (albeit with subtle socio-economic shadings). The 'compleat housewife' emerged not only as a household ideal, but as a national exemplar by the early eighteenth century. (239)

The paradox of female autonomy rested within the paradigm of gendered domesticity: women were powerful but only within the parameters of their personal kitchens. More problematic was the usurpation of this new feminine power structure by the society at large. Women's newfound authority was in a sense de-authorized when culinary knowledge was taken

up and re-packaged [re-formatted] as properties of a consummate and thus marketable housewife. It is very disheartening, as a woman, a mother, and a chef, that women have been sequestered and monopolized as "rulers of the domestic"—or readers are perhaps more familiar with the phrase "domestic goddess"—gaining a smidge of autonomy only to have it taken away again by the weight of the household economy. Once again, CHAT helps us remove our cultural blinders to see and then consider how seemingly simple documents like recipes are encoded with such rich socio-political and gendered meanings.

From my own experience, I can wholeheartedly declare that any epicurean notions of grandeur that one harbors is at once displaced when there is a child tugging at your knee wanting you to help build "the most biggest LEGOs castle ever" and an infant needing to be fed. Did I mention that your child also is out of clean underwear and there is a pile of dirty bath towels lying on the floor? But once you go down to the basement to engage with said dirty laundry, another dirty laundry of sorts assaults your olfactory system: the two litter boxes which your three unruly cats use more than should ever be necessary. When you throw your homework assignments into the mix, you most definitely say au revoir to any epicurean expectations that you once harbored. It is no wonder then that I turn so often to the blue box of processed pasta and chemically altered powdered cheese, but thank goodness I have a hot water knob on my kitchen sink.

These activities that I am engaging in are directly related to CHAT in that the use of the genre of the recipe is an activity, just as is boiling water or doing one's laundry. My example of recipes is like any other genre that one might encounter in that it is a complex contextual system filled with activities that are encoded with culturally historical information that I have myself decoded meaning from. Understanding the genre is ultimately about understanding all of these elements (the boiling of water, the slicing of a goslings' throat, and even soiled underwear) past and present, and how they affect the "doing" of using the genre of the recipe.

Recipes are doubly, if not triply encoded with the socio-political and gendered meanings of their authors and thus have explicit and very significant meanings to all parties who encounter them. For instance, if my husband came from a household where cooking was something that held special meaning for his Mother, perhaps he would then be more resistant to cooking a meal for our family and instead consider it a gendered activity. Gendering the act of cooking and framing it under the domestic and thus feminine realm of household management turns culinary exploration into just another chore that must be accomplished before the end of the day. With days like these in mind, it is not difficult to imagine why women then banded together to form

cooking clubs and authorize the stability of the matrilineal line by passing down recipes from one generation to the next. Returning to early modern England, but certainly not unlike today, Pennell illustrates this point by highlighting that within the domestic literature that was promulgated during this time, it was very common for women to receive whole manuscripts of recipes from aunts, grandmothers, mothers, and cousins. She also points to an obvious downside to the oversaturation of recipe manuscripts: "Of course, donation of recipes, and indeed of whole manuscripts . . . was no guarantee of practice. The inside front cover of the Granville/Dewes manuscript is pointedly inscribed 'Mrs. Ann Granville's book, which I hope she will make a better use of than her mother' and signed by the disinclined mother in question" (243).

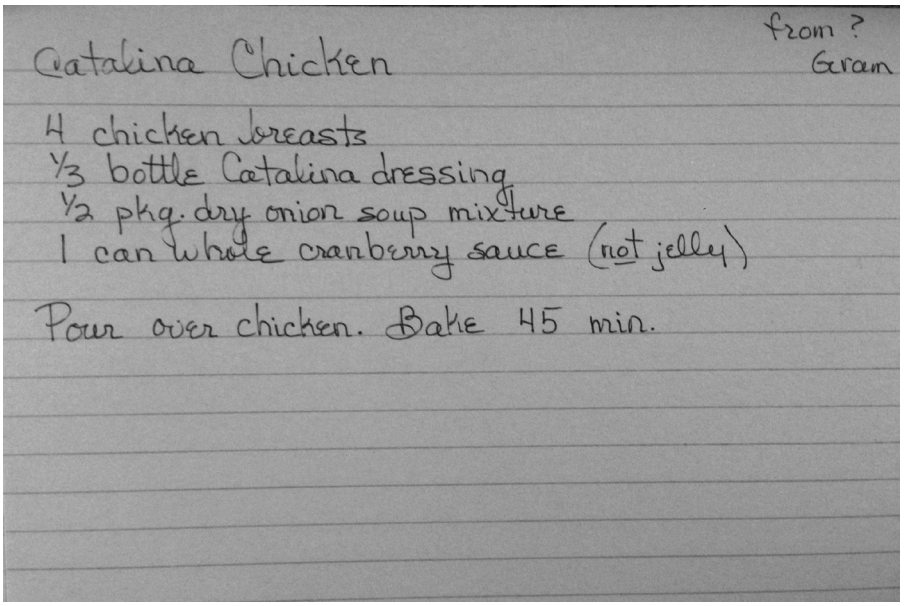


Figure 3: Gram Nancy's Catalina Chicken Recipe

Despite the previous line being written during the late seventeenth century, it seems eerily modern. So modern in fact, that it was essentially the same message that my own Grandmother (Queen of the Crock Pot) wrote when she gifted her box of family recipes to my husband and myself. Indeed, Figure 3 shows just how adventurous she was in the kitchen. Putting her culinary ability aside for a moment, I think that it is important to note the story that she tells in these recipe cards. First, the cards were gifted to me in a magnetic wooden recipe box with a handwritten inscription noting the occasion (my wedding day) and a personal message. What is so powerful about her gift is that, despite her distaste for cooking for a family of eight every day—every day for 30 years, that is—she is giving me the gift of memory, love, and family. She is passing on a tradition, however bland some of the dishes were, that ultimately is embedded

with warm memories of home and family. Second, on every card that she hand wrote and placed inside of the box, she also included a message that indicated where and from whom the recipe originated. Without having any knowledge of CHAT, my Grandmother was engaging in the very important element of trajectory, which one uses to help illustrate how genres progress throughout time. This can be seen in her recipe for the Club 21' Margarita, in which she lists the trajectory of the recipe as originating at Club 21, progressing to her and then finally being passed on to myself.

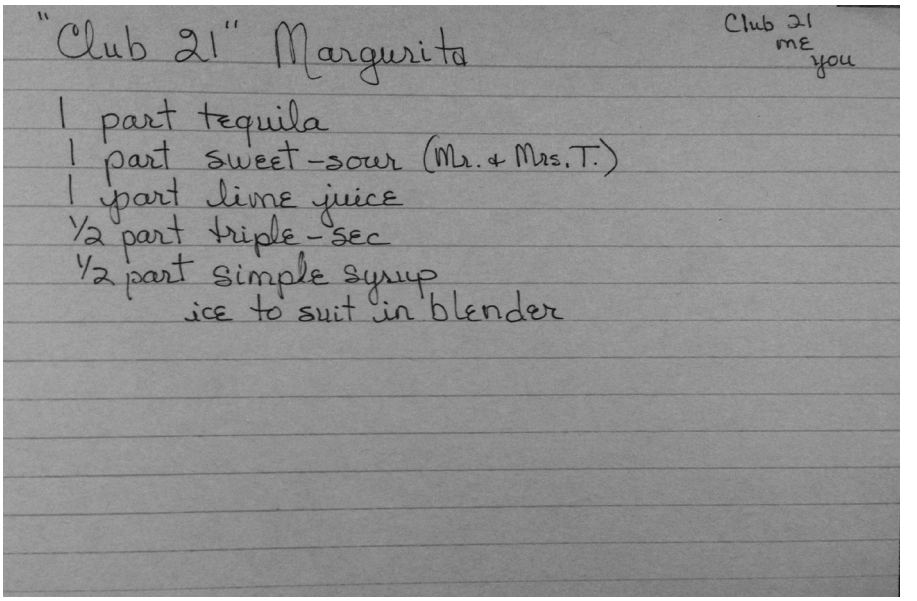
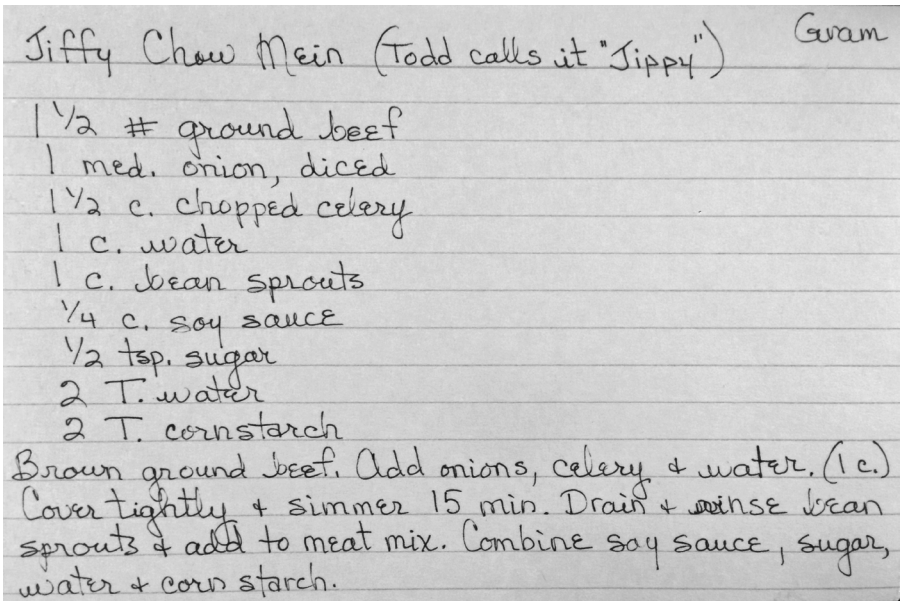


Figure 4: "Club 21" Margarita

This gift, ultimately holds more meaning for me because the tradition of handing down family recipes or recipes that one would have collected haphazardly over the years (similar in fashion to what I do) is becoming an antecedent genre in itself. In the past, recipes were forms of dialogue between families of different generations whereas now, I can simply go online and instantly have access to millions of different recipes from whatever cuisine that I happen to be craving at the moment. I wonder how this discursive diversion has changed how families communicate with one another. Certainly the movement toward new technologies has contributed to a loss in the ways that generations relate to one another. I can no more email my Grandmother a copy of the latest Pioneer Woman recipe than she can tag me in a photograph on Facebook. Juxtaposed between the paper recipe cards that are splattered with spaghetti sauce and the glossy iPad filled with hundreds of recipes that were created to appeal to a mass audience is a communication void that needs to be filled. Perhaps I am wrong (or tend toward the old-fashioned) with this assumption, as indeed the movement from index cards to e-recipes is itself

another example of trajectory. But the meaning made from the "Jiffy Chow Mein" index card, with its splatters of my own attempts at re-creating the recipe as well as my Grandmother's message that as a child my uncle Todd "called it 'Jippy'" cannot be replaced with an electronic format, however much appeal it has to a wider audience.



Jiffy Chow Mein (Todd calls it "Jippy") Gram

1 1/2 # ground beef
1 med. onion, diced
1 1/2 c. chopped celery
1 c. water
1 c. bean sprouts
1/4 c. soy sauce
1/2 tsp. sugar
2 T. water
2 T. cornstarch

Brown ground beef. Add onions, celery & water. (1 c.) Cover tightly & simmer 15 min. Drain & rinse bean sprouts & add to meat mix. Combine soy sauce, sugar, water & corn starch.

Figure 5: "Jippy" Chow Mein

The trajectory of a genre, or the ultimate progression of it, is not always easy to move along with, and indeed, when memories are attached to a certain genre, and there are explicit cultural and historical meanings that arise out of the activities surrounding the genre, it's not so hard to see why I might perhaps have difficulty with such a progression. Who knows, perhaps my own children will not share the same sentimental memories that I have with my families' recipes; however, with hope and perhaps blind faith I expect to alleviate this seeming void by folding my children into the daily ritual of cooking. Despite the notion that cooking can be perceived as a gendered activity, I want my daughters to appreciate the wonder of a home-cooked meal, and moreover, of having had experiences that are rooted in the fundamental human experience, so basic that we somehow overlook and thus code them as domestic and therefore boring. And despite my reluctance to fully engage in the online world of recipes, if only because it excludes people like my Grandmother who do not engage in online activities, I think the trajectory of the recipe genre will be a fascinating one to watch. In the very distant future, some treasure hunter might even discover a recipe of mine, and the tradition of "Jippy Chow Mein" will continue.

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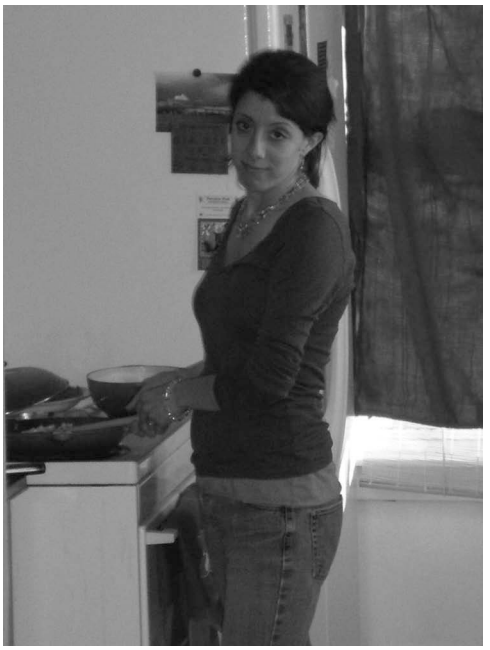

Jayna Leipart Guttilla is an English Master's student at Illinois State University, specializing in early modern English literature. When she is not reading for school or watching "Wild Kratts," she enjoys cooking meals that take 20 minutes or less.

"Write Me!": A Multi-Generation Analysis of Junior High Girls and Their Notes

Delores Robinson

In this article, Robinson identifies the similarities between the notes she exchanged with friends as an adolescent and the notes written and shared decades later by her daughter and her daughter's friends. A genre analysis of these notes passed between friends at school using the lens of cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) reveals some important socialization occurring alongside the production and distribution choices the girls make in their writing.

When I was in junior high and even into the first couple years of high school back in the 1980s, communicating with my best friends was way more important to me than what I was assigned to write about in my classes. Often, my friends and I would pass notes to each other throughout the day, starting at our lockers before first hour when we'd surreptitiously tuck an intricately folded note into each other's hands while anticipating all the clever inside jokes and snarky complaining that was soon to be revealed.

We would slide follow-up notes to each other during passing periods in the crowded halls, asking for clarification or adding questions below the original note. Sometimes one sheet of paper would be passed back and forth throughout the entire day, and the written conversation would drift and build until every open space was covered. At times, we'd even use the folded notes as part of a game during study hall, "punting" them back and forth across a couple aisles of seats with the note as the triangulated "football." We'd end the day with the command, "Write me!" as we looked forward to more of the same the next day.

The great pleasure I got from these written communications with friends came flooding back to me at the start of last school year when I noticed that

my oldest daughter's backpack (she was in 7th grade at the time) had several folded notes crammed into the mesh side pockets. Part of being a parent is helping my kids try to develop organizational skills, so we've gotten into the routine of going through backpacks and folders together, evaluating the importance of each stray piece of paper and deciding together what needs to be kept for either academic or personal reasons. School papers get ordered and put into the appropriate binders. Unneeded forms and old work goes into the recycle bin, while papers with more personal appeal (a beautifully drawn picture, a hard-fought-for A on a test) get put into a memory box in the closet.

When I grabbed a handful of the folded notes and waved them toward my daughter, asking her the usual "Recycle or keep?" question, she took them and hugged them all to her chest saying, "Keep! These are my notes from [my friends]!" I told her I had written the same kinds of notes when I was her age—a revelation that totally amused her—and that I had saved many of the ones given to me, too. It wasn't too many days later that she asked me to tell her more about the notes my friends and I had passed when we were in school. She showed me sections of her notes that she was particularly proud of because they were funny or had cute accompanying pictures, and I dug through my old bedroom closet at my folks' to find the folder of notes written thirty years ago in order to share some of my work with her.

With two folders of notes saved from my own adolescent note-writing phase and a daughter willing to share her own experiences with passing notes, I thought about all the ways that we could explore the similarities and differences between our writing experiences. Looking at notes passed in school is important because by writing these fun notes to friends, a girl is also, in a way, writing herself: she is performing the almost incantatory process of discerning her identity by making her thoughts and feelings concrete on the page. The genre of notes passed between girlfriends in school strengthens a teen girl's connection with other girls her age as she moves further away from home and enters the world of intense adolescent experiences and friendships.

It may seem unusual to consider notes passed between adolescent girlfriends to be "work," but composing and sharing the notes with each other takes effort and a great deal of thought; the resulting texts comprise a genre that—like any other text—can be analyzed by taking a cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) approach. CHAT offers a theoretical model of written communication which takes into account the production, reception, representation, ecology, activity, socialization, and distribution of a text (Walker 74–76). School friends who pass notes engage in complex social choices as they interact with each other in writing. Those texts also become a tool by which a girl can test out her emerging adult personality on others and comment on the world around her. The rhetorical activity of note passing

even helps an adolescent to question conventions and challenge authority as she and her friends engage in subversive (non-school-related) writing activities. A critical analysis of the characteristics of both my notes and my daughter's notes shows conventions of the genre that span both generations.

My daughter's and her friends' notes are remarkably similar to those my teenaged self wrote and received. The appearance of the notes and the processes involved in their production are alike, no matter whether the notes were produced in the 1980s or the first decade of the 21st century. CHAT analysis asks us to consider the production of a text—the circumstances under which a text is created, the particular context and situation which demands that a text take the form it does. Because our notes were created in school, yet at our individual desks, they had to be handwritten, and because both my daughter and I attended school before any sort of handheld electronic devices were a part of the curriculum, the notes we produced for our friends are more intimate than any word processed text. They are scribbled in pencil on lined paper ripped from a spiral, but those pencils and the lined paper are considered in a CHAT analysis to comprise the technology of the text: they are the tools that we used to compose the notes we passed during school.

An analysis of a text using CHAT requires us to think about the many forces that shape the creation, distribution, and reception of a text. No text—not even a seemingly inconsequential junior high note passed in the hall at school—is without its own complex history. The term *reception* in CHAT analysis refers to the intended audience of a text and the awareness of how a text will be received and used. The notes I read, both mine and my daughter's, show writers who exhibit a clear awareness of their audience and who narrate all the mundane details of their surroundings, using a tone meant to portray their contempt and boredom for the restrictions of the classroom (see Figure 1). The girls include in their notes crude drawings of people (usually a teacher) with various body parts insultingly labeled; describe an outfit being planned for the next day; suggest activities for the upcoming weekend; and allude in teasing, cryptic ways to the object of a crush.

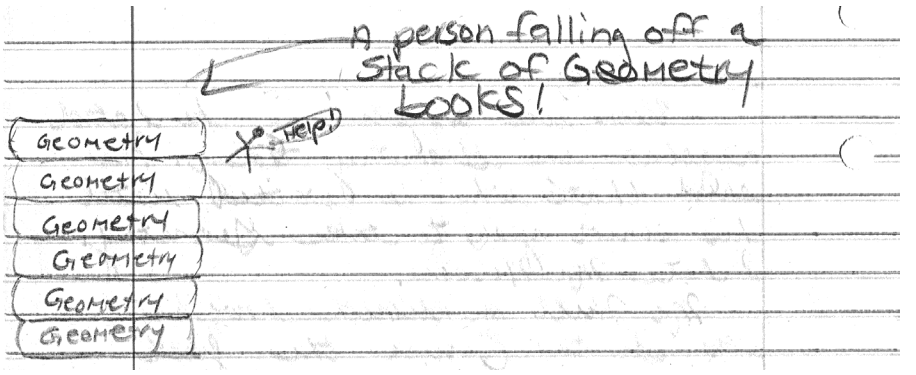

Figure 1: Stick Figure Falling Off Giant Pile of Geometry Books (1982)

From a September 1982 note: "G. G. [shorthand for Gorgeous Guy] was just scribbling with his pen on a piece of paper and it echoed throughout the room. Someone's stomach just growled. I hate 5th hour. As a matter of fact, I hate hours 2-10." The writer of this note knows that her reader will recognize the shorthand reference to another student, and she builds upon a shared history with the reader. Likewise, the writer knows her reader will sympathize with the writer's unhappiness. The narrative is intended to bond further the writer and the reader and strengthen their social connections. Most details in these informal communications are meant to help the intended audience imagine being physically present with her girlfriend who writes the note.

This socialization is one reason that the notes passed between my girlfriends and me when we were in school were so important to us. They helped us feel like we were together the whole day, seeing the same things and hearing the same conversations even if we were at the opposite end of the school building from where those conversations were happening. We traveled in a pack, dressing alike, wanting the same albums, going to the same movies (usually at the same time), and writing about it offered a way to feel accepted and to be reassured that we were fitting in. The text's creation and reception worked both to define what was socially acceptable and to reassure us that we were following the unspoken rules of our culture.

As an adult and a parent, I can recognize in hindsight that much of our adolescent note writing was cruel. While it might have been important for the process of our socialization, often the words we put on the page brought us closer by criticizing others. One undated note from my best friend adds a tiny postscript at the bottom complaining about a girl whom we found constantly irritating: "Krissy always asks if I'm going to Youth Group. What's wrong with her? I've never gone." Another time, she writes disparagingly about "a guy's mom [who] walked in [to the class] and then walked out again," followed by her fear that her own mom would come into the school and embarrass her by being there. The socialization aspect of CHAT analysis questions how a text continues the interaction between the users of that text and also how the text portrays the culture of the users. The culture of junior high and high school is such that most students try to fit in while, paradoxically, they try to form their individual identity, and as they do so, they immaturely disparage others in order to make themselves look better.

Seeing my old notes prompted me to think about all the many ways writing has been important to me over the years, even forms of writing that are not privileged as being academic or considered worthwhile—writing which may even have earned me a detention for having been produced during school when I was supposed to be working on what my teachers would deem more important projects. A CHAT analysis shows that these written artifacts of friendship and identity formation are texts that are produced within the constraints of the

school setting and its ecology. *Ecology* used in terms of a CHAT analysis refers to the physical environment of the production of a text. When we produced our notes, they were shaped by the setting in which the notes were created and used. Examining the ecology of the notes requires me to think about the constraints of the school environment. Our daily schedules, our use of pencil and paper, or our access to a mechanical means of production (a typewriter in the 1980s or a computer lab in the present) all comprise part of the ecology of the texts. Once a text is created, the way the texts are moved between creator and audience also needs to be examined. CHAT analysis looks at the distribution of a text, how the text is passed between writer and reader. In our case, the notes were distributed hand-to-hand to maintain secrecy and a sense of special exclusivity.

The characteristics of all the notes are very similar. My friends and I never consciously set about creating rules or guidelines for our texts; the similarities between them all evolved organically, it seems. This lack of formal planning yet naturally evolved similarity in content and construction of the passed notes falls into the category of *representation* in a CHAT analysis: the text comes into being based on the planning and conceptualization of its creators. For instance, both my notes and my daughter's contain code names which disguise the identity of whomever we write about, showing a rudimentary plan to shroud our communication should the notes be confiscated or lost (see Figure 2). This awareness of the need for protection and use of code names is part of the representation of the communicated text.

My friend warns me in one note to "be careful not to loose [sic]" the note or let anyone else read it. She writes about "Otto," a code name for a boy in her class, and she uses the abbreviation "YNW" for "you know who"—text talk that predates texting by a couple decades. My friends and I shared written stories back and forth about Dudley, Pizza, Señor, and Yoda—all pseudonyms that (to us) were hilarious yet also hid who we were gossiping about just in case somebody found one of the notes and read it. We created our texts solely for each other, yet we understood that an unintended audience might come across our missives, and we protected ourselves accordingly.

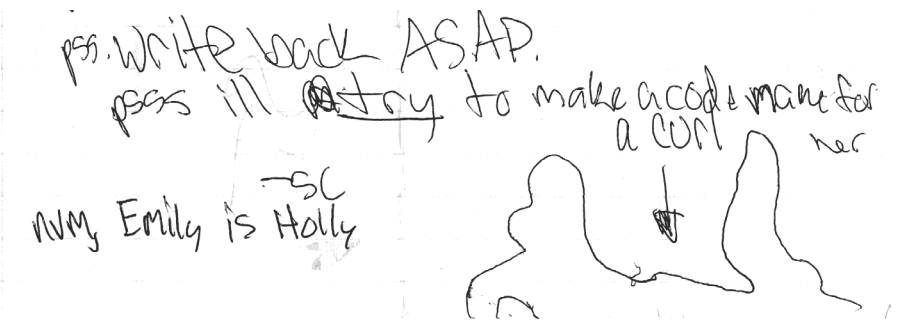

Figure 2: A Curl (September 2012)

Considering an intended audience's ease of comprehension is usually how a student is urged to revise his text. In our case, we sought to speak only to our friends and to confound any others with our own special jargon. One of my daughter's friends claims that the best part of writing notes to a friend is, "No one else knows what's on it or anything, so it's exciting." This element of having insider knowledge which connects a girl to a tribe of others is an important bonding experience and increases the excitement of passing notes in school.

Another similarity between all the notes, no matter which generation created the text, is the presence of drawings included within the text (see Figures 1-4). Sometimes my daughter's friends draw cartoon figures and pictures of cute animals to accompany their notes. Adding actual physical proof on the paper of the writer's presence happens in both my older notes and my daughter's notes.

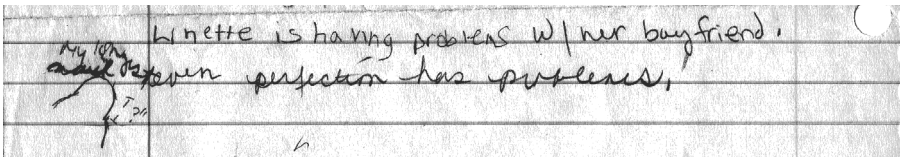

Figure 3: The Fingernail (April 1984)

For instance, my friend traced her long fingernail (see Figure 3) as proof that she was growing her nails out long enough to paint while one of my daughter's friends kissed her paper to show off her "Baby Lips Kiss," and another traced a lock of her curly hair (see Figures 2 and 4). It is not surprising that there is so much fascination with any physical aspect of their appearance that is the most stereotypically feminine: curly hair, long nails, painted lips.

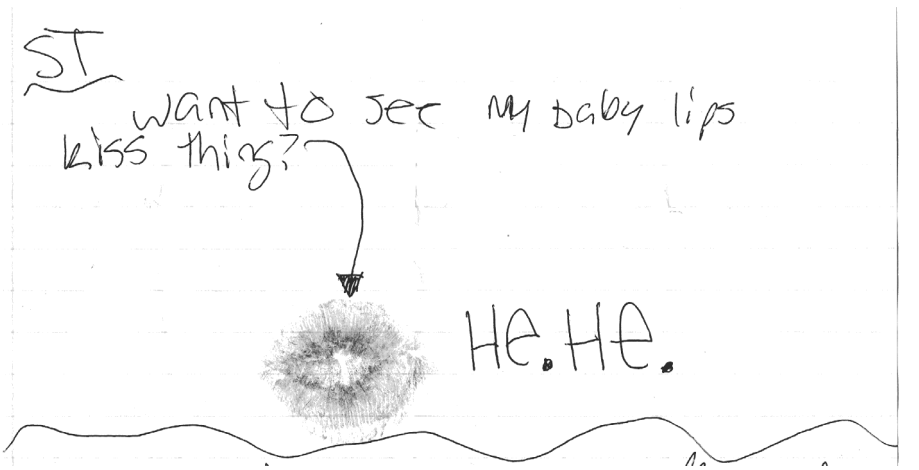

Figure 4: Baby Lips Kiss (September 2012)

These writers are busy trying to grow into what they perceive as cultural norms and expectations in order to be considered pretty and likable to others. One note shows a drawing of the writer alongside her crush, and below the figures she has written her name with his last name over and over. Then she tries linking his first name with her last name once, and immediately writes, "lol im kidding, boys don't change their last name." Defying gender stereotypes seems beyond the girls at this age. They are too fragile in their own emerging identity to risk drawing the negative attention of others, and they understand (even at their young age) that anyone considered different or unconventional is suspect.

Whether a note was written 30 years ago or last week, the content of the conversations is typically more about social concerns than anything related to academics. The girls write about other people, complain about school and teachers, and they all write about people they have crushes on and what they've noticed about those people. Notes from both generations have smatterings of rudimentary Spanish in some of them because junior high is when the girls begin learning a foreign language, most often Spanish, so they insert newly learned vocabulary words such as *escuela* and *mañana*. Often the writer of a note will wish for school to be over. One of my daughter's friends emphasizes her wish for school to be over NOW in much larger letters, and my friend's notes to me complain about her dislike of school and regularly relate her plans to ignore whatever the teacher is asking the class to do.

This challenging of the authority of the school environment is observed by Margaret Finders in her year-long ethnographic study of four adolescent girls and their circle of friends. Finders observes that "these girls had limited ways in which to assert identity or seek power," and as a result, the girls found various ways to subvert their teachers' expectations with their literacy practices (93). The girls who were considered by the teachers to be "good girls" and who were always dependable used their notes to each other to write about how much they hated these authority figures while girls who were identified as not being capable of earning good grades or focusing on school would reveal in their private writing a much deeper understanding of the material than they were willing to show publicly. In most ways, the literacy practices of the girls in Finders' study, including their note-passing, subverted expectations while they also used "literacy as an act of self-presentation and as a ritual of exclusion" (121).

School is an environment in which students are expected to write a great deal, even more so today than when I was young. However, there are serious repercussions for not following the prescriptive nature of the school's writing situations. My daughter's school handbook includes passing notes under the Level I offenses, punishable by, among other things, "withdrawal

of privileges" ("Shabbona" 38). Interestingly, writing on one's own body, according to my daughter, is considered a much more serious Level II offense, punishable by a detention and a parent conference, among other possible punishments (39).

In addition, a friend of mine who teaches elementary school says she's taken notes away from students, and the experience of having the teacher read the note (silently to herself) was always punishment enough. One friend of mine vividly recalls the embarrassment of having to write, "I will not pass notes" as a punishment when she was caught doing so. However, she says it did absolutely nothing to stop her from continuing to pass notes to her friend on a daily basis because she felt like the notes were a vital part of her friendships despite what the teachers said. CHAT theory has us question, in part, the power relationships that exist before, during, and after the production of a text, and junior high students are most definitely constrained in their behavior, gestures, dress, and speech while at school. By writing their notes, the students are transgressing the expectation that the adult teachers are in control and that the children must follow the school's rules.

My notes and my daughter's notes passed at school during some of the most tumultuous years of development are evidence of how much a girl's literacy practices help to shape her identity. Passing notes is both clandestine and dangerous as the girls defy administration and teacher expectations, yet passing notes remains a relatively safe way to test the boundaries of relationships and allow the girls to try to stretch and fit unfamiliar roles. Writing and passing notes, the action and process of putting thoughts and feelings on paper, is a way to investigate cultural norms and play around with fitting in by imitating the writing of others. The back-and-forth nature of note passing cements the girls' peer groups until each girl feels more secure in her own identity. The activity of passing notes strengthens friendships by reiterating shared experiences and deepening the secret language of a friendship, and it allows each girl to explore interests outside her family. Additionally, passing notes allows a girl to develop her own creative style in the way she folds, decorates, plays with, and draws upon the note while she seeks support from others by soliciting opinions on social situations and interactions. Finally, passing notes allows young writers to subvert the expectations of those in authority who may unconsciously insult the girls' emerging identities by (mis)labeling them and underestimating the importance and value of their written expression. Cultural-historical activity theory allows us to examine the important rhetorical choices made within the genre of notes passed between friends at school and to recognize the complex socialization happening as adolescents produce, distribute, and receive clandestine school notes.

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Delores Robinson is married and raising her daughters along with working full-time, leaving her little time for fun pastimes such as reading, writing, and taking graduate English classes. One of her favorite things is to receive a handwritten letter in the mail from a friend or loved one, and she thinks any card or note is improved with the addition of sparkly stickers on it.

One of Many: Examining and Reconciling the "Need to Acquiesce" in Composition Classrooms

Kylie Wojciechowski

Drawing from personal experiences as an undergraduate writing tutor, Kylie Wojciechowski describes how the bifurcation that separates the experiences of native English speakers from those of non-native speakers in a composition classroom can be manipulative in its attempts to mold one side to match its counterpart. That is, as instructors and professors must teach non-native English speakers to write according to the style demanded by higher academia in the United States, they often communicate that the student's way of writing and thinking is not valid, even when their intention is to help students succeed in the professional context of American culture. By focusing on how well students can conform their writing styles to match styles demanded by American, English-speaking higher academia and using techniques that judge accomplishment by compliance, this approach lumps especially international students into one general category, one universal culture: "not from here." Wojciechowski suggests a dangerous boundary is crossed when the way "they" write is vilified and dichotomized from the way "we" write.

Where I'm about to begin this article is not where I'm supposed to begin it; this is not necessarily how my professors and other scholars in higher academia want me to start. But, in the interest of pushing boundaries and challenging conventions (as all good radical college students must do), I will begin here.

This space is traditionally reserved for a general introduction to my article; I'm supposed to acquaint you, my audience, to the topic that I will discuss in the subsequent pages. In this general introduction, too, I should still be writing with strict adherence to the guidelines rhythmically belabored into my head during my time in American secondary and high schools: my writing should be a thesis statement, a concise sentence or two that effectively sums up my soon-to-be-revealed perspective on the aforementioned topic.

But I'm not going to follow those guidelines, not because I think myself better or smarter than the instructors who taught me those guidelines, and not because I think that those guidelines don't have their own unique rhetorical purposes. Instead, my diversion from these guidelines is because they don't effectively chronicle or communicate the purposes, processes, or results of the research that I conducted during my time working with Illinois State University's Writing Program.

This is because where I am now is not where I intended to be when I started this research a few months ago.

I began my research with a fairly narrow focus: finding the answer to a problem that I stumbled across while working as an undergraduate tutor in the Saginaw Valley State University Writing Center. I was hired as a peer mentor in the winter of 2013, my second semester of college. I adapted to the challenges of the job well; within a semester, I felt confident tutoring students from across the academic spectrum, representing varying disciplines, and from course levels ranging from remedial to graduate and those in-between. I had (and most definitely still have) one Achilles' heel when it comes to tutoring, though: international students.

As of fall 2013, 6.08% of the Saginaw Valley State University student body was from a country other than the United States. With 10,245 students total, that gives us around 622 international students. In the larger scheme of things, 6.08% is not significant ("SVSU"). But when that percentage is viewed through the filter of students who visit our writing center, the international student body presents exacting challenges, as it has unique needs that are often taken for granted in working with the portion of the student body hailing from the United States.

Don't think that my struggles in satisfying the unique needs of international students were in any way related to an incompetency in my tutoring ability. I had no real problems helping international students with the clarity or development of their writing. I could explain independent and dependent clauses or noun-verb agreements easily. Yet I struggled with something that, as mentioned before, I took for granted in sessions with English-speaking students from the United States: citation formatting.

Solving this problem wasn't as easy as hauling out the APA manual and finding the appropriate documentation for a particular source. Even though I had been exposed to this problem in my training, I was still entirely unprepared to handle it. In a training workshop dedicated to international students (specifically non-native speakers, or NNS), we watched a documentary written and directed by Wayne Robertson, funded by Oregon State University, called *Writing Across Borders*. In it, a student from China discussed her experiences with

copyright issues during her studies in the United States. In her mother culture, those issues are not a big deal, as "they are so used to sharing," she said.

Another student, from Vietnam, talked about the risk of penalization for students who go outside the classroom or outside a lecture and put "extra" information into an essay. She shared a personal story about writing an essay about the atmosphere of her classroom. She looked outside the window of her classroom, describing the scenery and vibe, and she was marked down for utilizing that "extra" information.

These particular nuances of academic writing in those specific Vietnamese and Chinese classrooms sparked my interest, as it contrasted so deeply with the tendency of the United States to view words, language, and ideas as personal property, requiring students to "borrow" the personal property of more-distinguished others to appear credible in their own writing.

I wanted to figure out why this was the case; I wanted to know why students from different cultures were not expected to do research outside of their classroom, why they didn't have to painstakingly create a references page in a defined sequence in the appropriate format, why knowledge was unselfishly shared without acknowledgment. Alternatively, I wanted to figure out *how* to explain to international students *why* those extremely-specifically-formatted references pages were so important. I wanted to understand *how* to explain this glaring inconsistency in cultural writing styles.

The fruits of such a research project would not only be useful to me in a pedagogical sense as a tutor, benefiting all students that I work with no matter their native language, but this research would also help me simultaneously as a student. Once I could determine why citation practices differed across borders, whether physical, cultural, or social, my research would be deemed fruitful. I wondered: if citations are concrete ways to institutionalize ideas of ownership and knowledge, could I determine what those ideas consisted of?

So I decided to figure out if I could find these answers—as a recipient of the Illinois State University Writing Research Scholarship, I worked with the scholarship's coordinator, a graduate student at ISU, Emily Johnston, to create a plan that would aid me in attempting to answer my question. My research plan entailed interviewing a few international students enrolled at my institution (Saginaw Valley State University) about how schools in their native country view utilizing outside sources; that series of questions would be supplemented with academic articles about cultural citation practices. That is, articles about how various cultures conceived the ownership of ideas

and of knowledge—and to which cultural dimensions that conception was related. By cultural dimensions, I would refer to a framework for cross-cultural communication developed by Geert Hofstede. His theory originally identified four main dimensions by which a culture could be analyzed in a general sense: power distance (PDI), individualism (IDV), uncertainty avoidance (UAI), and masculinity (MAS). While subsequent studies extended the scope of Hofstede's theory, the number of dimensions available in cultural analysis was expanded too, including focus on pragmatism and indulgence. Of those six recognizable dimensions, I wondered about the potential impact of each on cultural conceptions of knowledge and ideas and how those conceptions influenced cultural practices of citations and the like. Could differences between the United States and China or Japan in terms of Hofstede's proposed dimensions explain the cultural inconsistencies in citation practices? I couldn't wait to pursue my research to find answers to these questions.

And then I hit a road block. After contacting my institution's Office of International Programs to get in touch with international students who would be interested in helping with my research, the director refused to help me unless I could get approval from Saginaw Valley's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB is responsible for approving, monitoring, and reviewing any type of research that could potentially harm the humans participating as subjects. While the type of research I was looking to conduct didn't pose an obvious threat to the students I would interview, IRB approval was necessary to ensure the ethics of my research processes and the informed consent of my participants. However, in such a short time span, there was no realistic way to get approved and finish my initial research processes in a timely fashion.

I was frustrated. I cried once or twice. I wanted to give up, but, I guess as a good academic should, I adapted my research processes. With Emily's help, I determined that, instead of doing primary research on my topic, I would have to shift to secondary research. No longer would I have access to the rich stores of information inside the minds of the brilliant international students at Saginaw Valley. Those were locked vaults, guarded by the IRB. Unable to access them and conduct primary research of my own creation and design, I was forced to rely solely on secondary research that was already conducted and documented by other scholars. I wondered how I would do this research without simply reiterating what had already been done in the past.

Regardless, I set forth to dig through the databases provided by Saginaw Valley's library, in search of any articles that would give me insight into the problem that I observed in tutorial sessions with international students

regarding citation practices: specifically, their unfamiliarity with utilizing outside research sources and giving credit to those sources' respective authors in a very prescriptive manner.

I found some very useful scholarly articles, like "Learning How to Use Citations for Knowledge Transformation: Non-Native Doctoral Students' Dissertation Writing in Science" by Yu Ren Dong. I came across titles of and abstracts for scholarly articles that perhaps would have been very helpful to me, if Saginaw Valley's library had had the appropriate credentials or funds to allow me to access them.

I expanded my topic a bit to compensate for the lack of research that I could unearth. Instead of focusing solely on the citation practices of international students, I broadened my filter to look at the writing styles of international students and of the cultures from which they hailed.

I had a fairly solid foundational grasp on the variety of writing styles of different cultures; in the Saginaw Valley Writing Center, after working with international students for over a year, I became aware that the key, valued aspects of "good" writing in the United States were often very directive, up-front, and left no real room for misinterpretation on behalf of the reader. This is most commonly exemplified by an introductory paragraph that neatly funnels a reader into an explicit thesis statement and then the rest of the author's ideas, in the exact sequence that was laid out in the thesis.

In this traditional fashion, the article you are reading may be marked with a low grade in a composition class in the United States. My introduction did not funnel you, the audience, into an explicit thesis statement. I disregarded these social guidelines for writing in that they did not fit my rationale for writing or my purposes in research. I failed to write the way that "we" write. (In writing for this particular journal, though, I have had more freedom to structure my words in a fashion comfortable to me; this luxury is not typically afforded to students in composition classrooms.)

In saying and acknowledging that there is a way that "we" write, a very ethnocentric view of effective writing styles is revealed. Through tutoring students from other cultures, many of them expressed to me that this way of writing is considered backwards and odd, forced upon them.

For example, I can vividly remember a session I had with a student from Japan. Her organization of a personal narrative seemed convoluted to me, but she was able to explain why she did it that way. She told me a story:

There are two daughters at the string shop in Osaka.

The oldest daughter is sixteen years old and the youngest daughter is fourteen years old.

Japanese samurai kill their enemies with arrows.

The Japanese daughters at the string shop kill men with their eyes.

This is called "The Daughters at the String Shop" and is sometimes used in Japan to teach students how to write a proper essay.

Line one is referred to as the introduction, or "ki."

Line two is the development, or "sho."

Line three is the turning point, or "ten."

Line four is the conclusion, or "ketsu."

There was no place for a clear thesis in this writing style, or the turning point ("ten") would be foiled. The student and I worked to dismantle her exquisite Japanese narrative to meet the admittedly-dry standards that her professor was expecting.

I had to teach her, persuade her, the way "we" wrote was the appropriate way for this writing situation; to succeed in an American university context, she would have to learn to write like "us."

In other tutoring sessions I've conducted, I can remember times when I've explicitly said, "The way that professors want you to write in the United States is a bit different." I never really thought that saying that was a big deal; all I had to do was show the international student how to reframe his or her thoughts to meet conventional standards, to include a clear thesis and discernible speaking points. But to explore this idea further, I needed to find research that supported my thoughts and observations, as I wasn't allowed by the IRB to do the research I wanted to do in the timeframe I wanted to do it.

I remembered an article that I had read about a year ago as I was training to become a tutor. I couldn't remember the title or the author, but I could recall pictorial diagrams that illustrated writing patterns of various international authors. With only a fuzzy mental picture of those diagrams, I scoured the databases (and, rather desperately, Google) for the article that explained those diagrams. I searched for hours, typing in keywords like "writing patterns cross-cultural," "pictures of writing patterns international," "visual representation of international writing." And I got nothing.

It was not until a lucky chain of events that I happened across Robert Kaplan's article, "Cultural Thought Patterns in Inter-Cultural Communication." **Thought patterns**. Not writing patterns. Thought patterns. These thought patterns are broken down into:

- Germanic (English, German, Danish, Dutch, Norwegian): Communication is direct, linear, and digresses.
- Semitic (Arabic, Hebrew): Thoughts express a series of parallel ideas, both positive and negative.
- Asian: Topic is not addressed head on, but viewed indirectly from various perspectives, working around the point.
- Romance (French, Italian, Spanish): It is acceptable to introduce extraneous material, adding to the richness of the communication.
- Russian: Communication is often digressive, may include series of parallel ideas.

In some way, our abilities to write mirror our abilities to think.[1] So, apparently, in telling international students that that they couldn't write in ways that were comfortable to them given their cultural background, maybe it seems as if I was telling them that their *way of thinking wasn't valid*. When I told international students that "we don't write like that here," was I telling them "we don't think like that here; you shouldn't either?"

It seems as if I was essentially manipulating the way that international students thought, changing beautiful spirals of thought into straight, hedged paths. Is that right? Is that right for me to tell them? (Not a chance.) Am I the one telling international students that their ways of thinking aren't valid, or am I just the messenger? The messenger for whom?

"Our ability to write well is our ability to think well."
–Ruth Braun

A lot of reservations can be brought up at this point. I expressed my guilt to a few of my close friends, those who also work at the Saginaw Valley Writing Center. They told me not to worry about it; they told me that I wasn't telling the students I worked with that their way of thinking was *entirely* invalid, but that it

[1]Ruth and Ted Braun, generous benefactors at Saginaw Valley State University, fund a writing scholarship program. Every year, a publication of the winners' work is printed. As a recipient of the scholarship last year, I was invited to attend the awards ceremony. I picked up on what I think to be the "buzz phrase" of the scholarship program: a quote by Ruth Braun herself.

was simply inappropriate for this specific context in an American university. So, yeah. I guess that's a way to assuage the guilt. But is that correct? Is that true?

Opening up the conversation a bit, let me tell you about my younger brother. He's 17 and just graduated high school in May. He has big dreams of becoming of a physical therapist. One Sunday night a few months ago, he was working on a scholarship application. He had finished the essay portion of it and wanted me to look over it. Being the nice sister that I am, I agreed. His essay had to explain what his greatest success was, and how it would contribute to his future career.

Regardless of what he wrote, I had no idea what the prompt for his essay was until I dove into the fourth paragraph of his work. Judging by the standards that I typically assess papers by, both in my work at the writing center *and* my own academic writing, the organization was clearly ineffective. I asked him why he chose to organize his paper in the way he did. He said, "I built my paper like this, I guess. It goes up-and-up-and-up. But that's not how I'm supposed to do it, I guess."

"How are you supposed to do it, then?" I asked him.

"Well, you should kind of go up, then down, then up again."

"Yeah, okay."

We began working on revising his essay. I suggested that he construct a thesis statement that clearly laid out his topic and how it would relate to his future career. He refused to do that: "I can't do that in the first paragraph!"

"Why? Your topic isn't some sort of secret you're revealing," I said.

"But that doesn't make sense to me. That's not how I think!" he stormed off.

He and I argue all the time, but this one was different. Here, again, I was pushing some agenda about *how to think* when I was teaching writing. And my brother is not an international student; he was born in Bay City, Michigan, and has resided there his entire life.

The standards of academic writing are not just manipulating the way that students from different cultures think, but could they also be manipulating the way that some domestic speakers think?

Peter Elbow echoes my concerns—sort of. In his article "Inviting the Mother Tongue: Beyond 'Mistakes,' 'Bad English,' and 'Wrong Language,'" he asserts that Standard Written English, or what is considered appropriate academic language, is "no one's mother tongue" (362). However, "the common attitude toward 'wrong' language [or anything not SWE] is to want to get rid of it" (360).

Here, Elbow is mainly talking about less-valued dialects of English, like Black English Vernacular. He clearly distinguishes that he is not addressing the dialects or languages of ESL students. And I don't want to twist his words to seem like he is. But what he's saying is *so* applicable to the almost-coercive manipulation that higher academia imposes on the thought patterns of native and non-native speakers of English alike.

"For writing, there is still a need to acquiesce, to give in," he writes (362).

In writing for my courses and my professional endeavors, I admit, I do give in. I do feel a need to acquiesce, to organize my writing and my thoughts into streamlined, clean documents of communication that are easy for readers to digest. In doing so, I'm manipulating my thought patterns; writing in the way that is valued in higher academia in the United States is not comfortable, at least for me that is. We all give in in our writing; in this particular article, I was given enough freedom to not acquiesce. Reading this article, I fear that, you, as the audience, may have been aggravated at my apparent inability to focus on any subtopic for an extended period of time. You may have been unimpressed with my lack of a thesis statement. In communicating the nature of my research project, though, it was necessary to break uncomfortable conventions, to write in a way that actually mirrors my thought patterns.

Then, if the various thought patterns that are reflected in the writings of students from other cultures are being squashed (and, judging by the existence of writing tutoring centers and less-than-perfect marks in composition classrooms, those of students of English-speaking cultures are, too), why are so many members comprising higher academia still pushing this uncomfortable format on students AND ourselves?

"It's to help the reader," you might say. This particular English method of writing and thinking, ruthlessly impressed upon students during their secondary education in the form of a five-paragraph essay, puts little to no responsibility on the reader, offering clear, important points of an argument in bite-sized chunks right up front. As young American students are taught to write three body paragraphs, sandwiched by a general introduction with a thesis statement nicely folded in and a conclusion that restates what's already been said, though not in a repetitive way—a task that I'm not even

sure how to perform at this point—there are main values being taught implicitly. For example:

- Clarity
- Coherence
- Conciseness
- No room for misinterpretation (or, a different interpretation than intended)
- Convention

Even as American students learn to develop their composition skills beyond the constraints of five paragraphs and are capable of crafting a more sophisticated type of essay, the main values remain blatantly present. That is, while an essay may have more than five paragraphs and deviate from the standard logistical structure granted by an introduction and conclusion, the text therein will often still remain as it was taught so many years ago in secondary school, influenced beyond repair by those main values. By providing readers with clarity, coherence, conciseness, no room for misinterpretation, and convention, this standard of American writing proposes writing as a mere vehicle for information, a way to directly, unambiguously, and easily transmit ideas from one person to another.

Other cultures don't let their readers off so easily—to follow an argument around the digressive zigzag of Russian writing or the winding spiral of Asian writing, a reader must be fully engaged and prepared to sort through it. Writing is rather viewed as the advent of a relationship with an audience; the topic being discussed is a way to bond. It's clear that different values are being taught and thus represented in the writing styles that these other cultures teach. Speculation into these values is beyond the scope of this article and could easily entail a graduate thesis project, but it remains that these values are simply *different* than those propagated in American classrooms.

I guess, then, differences in writing styles (and citation practices) can be attributed to differences in cultural values. The valued styles of communication come across in the way that students are taught to write, as writing is a tangible, malleable, documentable form of communication. By teaching writing in a specific way, educators are able to propagate a culturally valuable form of communication that will help a student succeed in the culture of their native country.

There could be many more reasons why differences in writing styles exist, though; I could be completely wrong in my assumption—but I'm okay with that. That's the beauty of this research, and of all research.

At the advent of this project, I wanted a tangible conclusion and results that would directly help me and anyone who teaches composition to non-native speakers of English. That was how I personally valued knowledge—quantifiable results.

The way I value knowledge has shifted a bit, though. I now welcome inconsistencies, questions (rather than answers), and frustration. Research never was and never will be a neat, streamlined process; it doesn't mirror the final drafts of our essays.

Research is a convoluted mess, and I can almost guarantee that you won't end up where you began. Loose ends may never be tied up; instead, they may unravel further.

I never thought I'd find myself questioning the acceptable writing style that frames so much of what I do, of what I value. But for the sake of students for whom English is not their native language, and also for English-speaking students like my brother, I think that this status quo is worth challenging. I can still value and appreciate clear, concise communication; it's what I was raised to expect and deliver, although I can appreciate the beautiful nuances of writing and communication that wind deeply into themselves, digressing into relevant asides when necessary. I've learned that the way "we" write is not the only way to write; it's just one of many.

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Syllabus: Read Me!

Mike Shier

The syllabus is a dynamic document in an activity system with many different viewpoints. In this article, Shier explores the syllabus genre using his own identities in the university–as a student, a teacher, and an author of his own syllabi. Through this exploration of viewpoints, he argues that the syllabus mediates classroom relationships in interesting ways (and not always completely intentional ones).

I've been a student for a long time. I mean, I guess I hope I'm a student for my entire life, learning something new every day, but in a strict institutional sense I guess I've been a student for twenty years now? And I have at least three more years left after this. And I guess that's the distinction between "student" and "person who wants to learn every day of their life" for the most part—the institution. I have been in a number of long-term relationships with various schools, and some have ended better than others, but there's one thing they all had in common: the syllabus. It seems like that syllabus is one of the mediating factors in what makes a student a student, if my experience is any indication.

I have typically gotten the syllabus on the first day in most every class I've taken. There's a reason for this (yes, even one beyond "because you need something to do on the first day") though, and I'm pretty sure it's because it establishes a sense of student identity right off the bat. The teacher hands this thing off to you (or gives you a link on your class ReggieNet or other online space) and then the ceremony begins—here are the teacher's expectations of you, and here's how they're going to decide your grade (or, how you're going to earn your grade, depending on how you look at this sort of thing).

But I also know this because I've recently begun teaching and creating my own syllabi for students. It's a bizarre feeling having to create these things for your very own, especially after always being on the other end of it for so long, but the entire time I was crafting my syllabus, I saw it as a way to establish my own teaching persona in the classroom and relay to my students what was expected of them. This is the same aim as when I was solely a student, of course, just from a different angle—I wanted to understand what was going to be expected of *me*. And when I walk students through the syllabus on the first day, I almost feel like an expert guiding them through a new experience—but I know the experience is going to be decidedly new for all of us. And maybe I get this expert feeling for myself because that's the persona I've always projected onto my various instructors through the years; I see them as the expert. Now being on the instructor side of things, I know this isn't totally the case. Yet somehow the syllabus mediates and reinforces this idea, which is no small feat for a piece of paper.

That all being said, if the syllabus is just supposed to make the student feel like the student, then it seems like an evil thing. Almost like a form of punishment before anyone's ever done anything to be punished for. But taken with the fact that the instructor of the class wrote it, it can also be presumed that it will say a lot about that instructor, if it's read closely. So, in this way, it can serve critical purposes for both teacher and student, and whatever position people find themselves in a classroom, there's something to learn from the syllabus. Any cursory glance at a syllabus will reveal a certain anatomy, certain sections in a certain order and layout. And I think those parts (taken as a whole and as individual sections) reveal a lot about the instructor and the students alike. Let's take a look at some of those sections now.

ENG 101: Composition as Critical Inquiry | Fall 2013
Section 036 - MWF 1:00-1:50 | STV 250E
Section 046 - MWF 3:00-3:50 | STV 250A

Instructor: Mike Shier
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Phone: 309.438.2080
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Office Hours: MWF 2:00-3:00 and by appointment

Figure 1: ENG 101 Sample Header Matter

Header Matter: Also, Call Me Maybe

This is something I've seen countless times, and it's pretty much *de rigueur* for syllabus construction everywhere I've encountered one. Contact info, course title, days, times. At the very least, this is a good moment for certain

wayward students to realize they're in the wrong classroom and slip out quietly (I might be guilty of this). It seems like basic stuff, but this stuff is going to go at the top because it can function like a business card—however the students need to contact their professor, that information is ready and waiting for them. It also positions the instructor's name at the top of the document, which isn't much unlike a student putting his or her name at the top of a paper. It establishes a kind of ownership or responsibility for everything that comes next.

The header matter is also the time for the reader to get an idea of what the syllabus will look like, in a design sense. I can only speak from my own experiences as a student, but I know that the syllabi I remember most had some kind of memorable design. (My favorite? A queer theory seminar in my MFA program where the "Q" in the title was a bright color and the borders were pictures of famous "Q" things, the best being John de Lancie's *Star Trek: The Next Generation* character) I mean, maybe it isn't even memorable design so much as that the design told me something about the professor (and yes, he was fun and *engage-ing* . . . I'll let myself out). So I figured for many teachers, the idea is to make the syllabus look clean, have a sense of professionalism, but also not look exactly like everything they've already seen. So it probably wouldn't be a good idea to use a font with any "negative connotations" (sorry, Papyrus, Comic Sans, and Curlz MT—y'all were disqualified immediately), but when I made my syllabus, I also didn't want it to be a font that any of my students could go and pick from their MS Word font selector, so I did a little internet digging. That one you see right there in Figure 1 is called "Advent," and the body font I ended up using is called "Avenir," in case you were wondering. It's a subtle choice, but I think it says something about me when I was creating the document.

According to the course catalog:	For our class:
Composition as Critical Inquiry (ENG 101) challenges students to develop a range of rhetorical and intellectual abilities. Students learn how to analyze the multiple dimensions and meet the multiple demands of a variety of written rhetorical situations. Students also develop an array of strategies to help them navigate different genres and writing situations. These strategies include: reading, brainstorming, writing to learn and think, drafting, research (both textual and empirical), giving and receiving helpful responses, revision, editing and proofreading, publication, and techniques for researching writing processes, including their own.	In our investigation of composition, we will be analyzing the rhetorical modes and strategies of various Internet-related communications—from social media to memes and viral videos to more long-form content like blogs. We will work to identify various "genres" of internet communication, create our own examples of those communications, identify the technologies that lead to their creation, pinpoint the mechanisms that contribute to their proliferation, and understand the cultural and societal contexts in which they exist.

Figure 2: Sample Course Description

Course Descriptions: By the Book

Typically, syllabi will then move on to the course description section. Because, well, the course title is rarely descriptive enough. Sometimes you'll find the description lifted directly from the course catalog, and other times you'll find the teacher's description of what the course means to them. Teachers might choose to use the catalog description and then put their own description right next to it in another column—the idea being to compare the official language with their own interpretation of it. Other syllabi only use the catalog information or the teacher's own language, but I think even a decision like that is illuminating, just like all of the choices the creator makes when composing this text. If an instructor only use the official language, then students might interpret that the class is probably going to be very by-the-numbers, not particularly different or surprising. If the teacher only uses his or her own language, you might infer that they don't want to draw any comparisons between their course and the official model. Using a comparison could result from wanting students to see an alternate interpretation of the course so students can draw their own connections about how the instructor had interpreted it themselves. For my own neuroses, the "official language" helps to add some legitimacy just in case my ideas seem crazy, right? (Right?)

Required:

- Grassroots Writing Research Journal, Issue 4.1
- Access to Reggienet
- Email access
- Flash drive/Dropbox/a method of saving and accessing your in-class work

Figure 3: Sample Requirements Section

Requirements: Because You Have To

This might seem like an obvious section, with not much to learn beyond what a student needs to bring to class or buy at the bookstore. But beyond that, there's more to see here—in the case of Figure 3, a strong emphasis on ReggieNet, email, and other electronic requirements. Here's a syllabus that places a lot of emphasis on technology. On the other hand, there might be a syllabus where there's only books listed or something like a notebook and pen/paper—in that case, it can probably be presumed that the teacher isn't going to use technology in the classroom all that often. Not that pens and paper aren't technologies in their own right, of course, but an emphasis on either older or newer technologies will say a lot about the teacher in that setting. And there's nothing wrong with either approach, but the syllabus can reveal which

the teacher privileges and whether or not that meshes with the student's own strengths or weaknesses. While the explicit uptake from the document is one of classroom preparedness, the document can also have a slightly different reception from the audience's point of view and be used to assess the instructor.

Etiquette: Cotillion for the Classroom

After requirements, there are other sections, like an etiquette section. Some people call this "etiquette," some people call this "behavior," "manners," or whatever—and the word choice is probably indicative of what the instructor thinks about this sort of thing. And really, it's the most indicative section of the entire syllabus. See, in a lecture hall, this will tend to have some language about how talking of any kind is verboten unless called on after raising one's hand and asking a question directly of the professor. In a composition or literature course (any course where the group is nice and small), however, discussion is a cornerstone. In a class like that, where discussion will be encouraged, the syllabus might say something about polite discourse and being engaged in class discussion. I know mine makes a reference to respect being contextual—students get to talk unless someone else is speaking to the class, get to have technology out when we're looking at websites or doing other research, are encouraged to be out of their seats and moving around the class depending on the exercise, etc. One of my students produced a syllabus from one of his classes in a different department and he had (no joke) two pages of etiquette information. "Don't walk in front of me during lecture," "sit in the back of the room if you're late," "no cellphones," etc. Now, there are a number of ways to interpret this barrage of etiquette requirements in a syllabus, but one of my very own students posited that it could indicate that these very specific things have happened to this professor before and they must piss him off immensely. In that way, this syllabus can be a cheat sheet to not be noticed (and in a 200-person lecture, that's likely kinda what you want).

I remember thinking of the syllabus as a cheat sheet of sorts like this when I was an undergrad, and so when I had to design one myself, I wanted to make it so my students could use mine as such if they so desired. The most specific reference I have is to people thinking they're being sneaky by holding their phones under their desk or looking at them in their purses/backpacks (seriously—has that ever fooled anyone?). Sometimes I illustrate this moment of the syllabus by demonstrating how it looks to onlookers when a phone is being held crotch-level underneath a desk (lewd—the answer is lewd) but really, it's there because that behavior totally annoys me! I would think that much is clear from the document. This is the easiest and least friction-y way of explaining to a student "texting is a little disrespectful, but trying to fool me in another ballpark altogether," and it manifests the way it

is not only because of my personal peeves, but my own personality as well. But, overall, this section of the text also has a lot of personal information about the instructor, including their prior experiences in the classroom.

Policies, Miscellany, and Grades

Most syllabi also have a clear-cut attendance policy. These tend to vary by department (due to there being department guidelines for these things), but they can be illuminating in their own way. Clear tardiness policies (being more than 10 minutes late counts as a 1/2 absence, etc.) indicate that the instructor is not very fond of tardiness (although, who is, really?), and it would probably be a bad idea to interrupt him/her by walking into a classroom late. Of course, this might not be the case for everyone. Maybe the teacher isn't always on time, or maybe in their own university career they were habitually late and vowed to never punish students the way they were punished (that's the thing—every teacher has a whole bunch of personal education experiences to draw from). Still, this is another opportunity to learn something about the teacher. It's like a first date that keeps on giving.

Other sections like grade breakdowns and academic honesty tend to show up on most all syllabi, but they serve similar purposes. The breakdown is rather utilitarian information in that it's simply revealing how much certain assignments will count for through the semester (and also where a student should focus their diligence—I think we've all been in the position of mathematically figuring out the bare minimum we have to do to pass a particular class), but students often also use it to determine what's privileged. If participation has a high percentage, then it stands to reason that the class will be one where being talkative is crucial to success. Again, using the syllabus, students can negotiate their own tastes with what they can see the instructor expects to have in class and determine if the class is going to be beneficial to their specific personality and learning style.

The syllabus mediates this relationship between instructor and student, re-inscribes it and reinforces it. Right when it's handed out at the beginning of that first class, the instructor is probably thinking how much they've thought through this document and how helpful it will be to both them and their students down the line. But students are thinking about their own perspective—using the document to interpret who the teacher is and what he or she will expect from them. But writing or even reading the document leaves this interaction only half-finished—because it's only finished when both teacher and student enter the classroom and react to it. So thinking through the syllabus as a genre can be a big help to both a teacher and his/her students as they build this relationship, helping them to interpret the other's perspective and how this will affect the ways they mediate the classroom space. Students who learn to take up the

document in a slightly different way stand to learn a lot (maybe too much) about the instructor, and teachers who think about how the syllabus might define them in the eyes of students can also present themselves in more purposeful ways. Maybe the teacher has a whole section on not talking when they're talking, because that really gets under their skin. They probably think that's enough to drive the point home, but maybe a student just thinks the teacher *really* loves the sound of their own voice (because "don't talk over me" is kinda a given if you have any manners whatsoever, right?). So because of the syllabus, the student decides against verbally participating at all. But then the teacher is all "Oh no they hate me why won't they just participate?" and in some butterfly effect-y way, a simple line in the syllabus has led to the breakdown of a discussion course.

Maybe, just for this example, this is a case of there actually being such a thing as looking too deeply into something (don't tell my old literature professors!), but the point remains that it's clear that this document has a lot of intended (and unintended!) consequences once it's introduced into a classroom space. And that's what the point of this is, I guess. The syllabus is not merely "this piece of paper (or PDF file)" that just happens to exist. Like all pieces of writing, it's created in response to a specific situation and is an agent in an activity system. It creates a relationship. Not because it's fallen out of the sky and wants to do us all a favor, but because it was written for a purpose. It was researched by an instructor—that research may include some obvious and traditional outlets like seeing other concrete examples of the genre and adapting them, but it more likely than not includes the instructor's real lived experiences, both inside and outside the classroom. But it is also interpreted and received by students who similarly build their understanding of it from their own classroom experiences. The purposes might be many and the document might only be *intended* to give a student basics like class information and ways to contact the professor, but intent is barely worth considering. Especially when a little bit of research into this genre reveals *so much more*.

If a student wants to learn about the teacher, the information is pretty much right there. If the aim is to antagonize the teacher (Dennis the Menace? Bart Simpson? Those are way too dated. Help! Who is the prankster of our modern times?), then the syllabus can be exploited to those ends, too. But then, in turn, teachers can use that perceived uptake to learn about their own students. The syllabus facilitates this too, because a teacher can read a lot into how students react or respond to the syllabus. People still do prank calls, right? Anyway. Maybe in some classrooms, the teacher doesn't care for the syllabus all that much and just does it as a genuine requirement put upon them by the institution they're teaching for, but if the student thinks it's the most important thing and clings to its every word in the hope of getting an A in the course, the document still holds power, whether the teacher wants it

to or not. Regardless, the syllabus is always going to be doing *something*. And maybe the intended parties on either end of it (teachers and students) are just completely misreading/miswriting the whole thing. It's all possible—but it is only possible with this incredibly dense document we know as the syllabus, and that's worth paying attention to.

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Exploring Music

Kayla Connett

In this article, Kayla Connett explores a piece of sheet music and how it connects to cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT). Sharing some of her personal experiences as well as providing many examples, she shows readers how even in a genre that is not often thought about as "writing," it can be beneficial to examine different factors that contribute to the creation and use of the text.

Music is everywhere. No matter where you turn, it will always be there. Billions of people in thousands of countries speaking hundreds of languages around the globe are tuning in to all sorts of music via radio, personal music devices, and performances. Music can often bridge a cultural divide, connecting people regardless of what culture or previous exposure they have. Furthermore, music is the language of life. It can be soothing and exciting. Still, everyone interprets each melody, song, or symphony differently. But no matter the interpretation, music offers a sort of feeling that you can experience within your heart and soul.

Now, since you are reading this article in the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*, you may ask yourself by now what music has to do with writing research, genre, or even how cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) ties into all of this talk about music. Just think of the last song you have heard. Were you concerned more with the music itself (i.e. the beat or the rhythm) or were you more interested as to what the actual lyrics of that song meant? This was the question that inspired me to use a cultural-historical activity theory approach to investigate music, and in particular

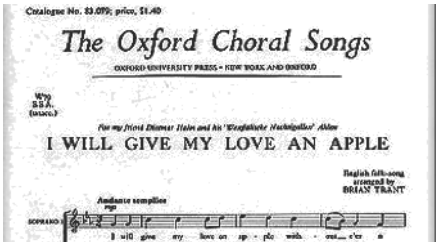

Figure 1: "I Will Give My Love An Apple" arranged by Brian Trant

sheet music, as a genre of writing and communication. What I discovered is that as a composition, music is more complicated than it seems, but we can examine specific elements of a piece of music to help us understand its meaning and function, just like any other genre.

Analyzing a Musical Piece

As a current choir student at Illinois State University, I wanted to learn more about the music that is such a big part of my life. Furthermore, I wanted to understand more about how I identify musical pieces before I sing them. To do this, my process was to use some of the components of CHAT I learned about in my ENG 101 course, and I hoped connecting music and CHAT would help me not only be a more thoughtful musician, but think about what it means to fully examine any text as a writing researcher, which is something that you can do even if you are not a choir student and want to learn more about another kind of writing or another genre.

Once handed any piece of music, I always start by "reviewing" the piece. Reviewing means that I glance through page by page to get a feel for what I will be singing about. After this, the next step of my process is analyzing. To describe what I mean, I decided to look at one particular piece of music: "I Will Give My Love An Apple," arranged by Brian Trant. The reason I chose the piece "I Will Give My Love an Apple" is twofold; this piece is one of my absolute favorites, and it is a piece that I feel clearly reflects some important CHAT components.

I have found that reviewing a piece of music is always a smart thing to do before I begin to sing. But although this kind of review of the text seems natural to me, taking a CHAT approach means analyzing my own interactions with a piece of writing like this composition. By thinking about the cultural and historical components of a piece of music, we can identify how these factors affect the genre, and by applying the seven components of CHAT, we can further analyze it. But CHAT is more than the terms production, representation, distribution, reception, socialization, activity, and ecology. According to Joyce Walker, CHAT,

> refers to 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. CHAT is useful because it's a more

> complicated and interesting way to look at writing, but it's also a challenge (because it's complicated).[1]

All of this can be applied to music, just like any kind of writing practice. Who knew that English and choir can be intertwined with one another?

In chorus, there is more than just simply taking out the music, practicing it, and then once practiced, going out and singing it at one of our concerts. In order to fully prepare myself, I begin by examining the features of the piece. I first examine who created the piece. Looking at the example "I Will Give My Love An Apple," the person who produced this piece is Brian Trant. Whenever looking for the person who has created a piece of music, this information can usually be found either on the top right hand side of the song, underneath the song title, or even the first page of that piece. Next, I try to figure out why this person has chosen to arrange the song the way he or she did. So, I simply ask myself (or do a little researching to find) where a writer might have gotten the idea from and what tools he used to write them down. In other words, what kind of production was used for this piece? Did he use a pencil and a piece of paper at the time to write down those ideas before actually using a computer for the finished product? In fact, not all pieces of music are handwritten, and this particular piece was printed—an important element of **production** similar to a lot of genres you might encounter.

Now, knowing that this composer probably used the pencil, paper, and computer to help him finish this piece, my next step was to shift gears into deeper thinking about the overall piece. My choir director often begins by playing a YouTube video that shows another choir performing the exact piece we are about to practice. After it is over, she starts asking us to think about why she chose this song to sing, and she often talks about how the song came to her from one of her past choral directors. This is an important element of the **distribution** of sheet music, but there are many ways that a piece of music like "I Will Give My Love An Apple" can be distributed and then placed into my hands as well as the choir's hands.

Understanding fully how this piece was given to my choir class is another thing I had to look at before I could even start to sing. I wanted to know why the choir director would choose this piece over any other piece. What caught her attention when she was reviewing this piece? How was the text **represented** to her? Did she have to think a lot before picking the piece or did she choose the piece because it reminded her of something? These questions all come to my head when I encounter a new piece, and they are all parts of CHAT.

[1]Walker, Joyce R. "Just CHATing." *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* 1 (2010). This article can be found at 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's article or the in-depth critique of generalized writing instruction written by David Russell: "Activity Theory and Its Implications for Writing Instruction" in *Reconceiving Writing, Rethinking Writing Instruction*, edited by Joseph Petraglia.

When I first received "I Will Give My Love An Apple," I remember looking down at the piece as if my choir director was crazy or something. How could I know why she had chosen this piece by simply re-reading it? I thought my head was about to explode. I was looking at my director, and I could sense she had something going on in her mind. But instead of explaining, she said, "Now class, begin by opening up to the first page of 'I Will Give My Love An Apple' and read each line to yourself. Then, let us discuss what those first sentences mean." By doing this, the others and I were engaging in **activity**: both physically holding the piece of music and mentally wondering to ourselves what these few sentences had meant. Once finished, we closely examined the next couple of sentences. But I was still wondering about distribution and representation.

I also realize that my thinking through how a piece of music works might be a unique kind of approach. My friend who sits next to me in choir once asked me, "Why does she [our director] always do this to us . . . I hate thinking like this, especially when I know choir is where we sing and not think?" I laughed in response, but I told her that choir does involve a lot of thinking, but that both of our reactions (while different) are part of the concept of **reception**, or how people take up a text once they receive it. My reception was unique from hers, because instead of wanting to sing instead of thinking or believing "I Will Give My Love An Apple" is a horrible piece, I was thinking about the lyrical symbolism that gives the composition meaning.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines symbolism as "the use of symbols to express or represent ideas or qualities in literature, art, etc."[2] Although this definition does give a great overall idea of symbolism, there are many others who have described what they feel is the true meaning of symbolism. For example, Richard Nordquist (an English professor at Armstrong Atlantic State University) defines symbolism as "the use of one object or action (a symbol) to represent or suggest something else."[3] People will interpret symbols differently, but how is the symbol represented? Whatever definition you feel that fully explains symbolism is up to you, but for me, it is expressing a word by using references to specific feelings.

Lyrical symbolism is definitely evident within "I Will Give My Love An Apple." By reading the first sentence, "I will give my love an apple without any core," I notice three symbols. These symbols are love, an apple, and a core. So, how does lyrical symbolism help us to not only analyze the piece but perform

[2]"Symbolism" *Merriam-Webster Dictionary.* 2014. http://merriam-webster.com (Aug 2014).

[3]Richard Nordquist discusses his definition of the literary term "Symbolism" at http://grammar.about.com/od/rs/g/symbolismterm.htm. (More info on Richard Nordquist can be found here: http://grammar.about.com/bio/Richard-Nordquist-22176.htm.)

it in a way that can grasp the audience's attention at our performance (part of our distribution of the music and the audience's reception of it, as well as the activity of performing and listening)? Taking those three symbols to place them all together, it reads: love apple core. I know that sounds a little strange, but to choir students, it is something we see everyday—phrasing that takes on more meaning than just the words when you connect it together. Next, I think about the similarities between the three words; how is love connected to an apple and then connected to a core? Well, love is similar to a heart, which is red, and an apple is red, but a core is not red. What if love is an analogy to an apple without a core? What if love is the apple and love is something that doesn't contain a core? Lyrical symbolism is something that may at first not make sense, but by digging into the exact words and thinking about their symbolic meaning, I realize that there is more to the use of language in this song than what's on the surface.

Lyrical Importance?

In "I Will Give My Love An Apple," my interpretation of the song is that it talks about the main theme of love, which is tied to the main symbolism. The song connects love to an apple and explains how love is something we shouldn't take for granted. Throughout the song, the lyrics express love through different questions, and specifically, the song tells us how love shouldn't be messed with, and instead it should be something that should be kept until the time is right. Part of the representation of this idea is the fact that the composer addressed these questions as if a girl was asking him, and he used symbolism to convey the meaning. But picking apart this symbolism isn't just helpful to understanding the meaning, but also relevant to how we sing the song—or in other words, the production of our presentation of the music we read on the page. By thinking about the use of lyrical symbolism, we can understand the overall feeling of what that piece is about, and this is used to determine the feeling

Figure 2: Bel Canto Choir—My Senior Year High School Choir Class (image taken by my choir director)

with which it's going to be sung. For example, analyzing the symbolism of the words in this piece gave me a sense of urging and desire to know the real way to love, so I would sing in a low tone with a lot of crescendos (increasing sound) and decrescendos (decreasing sound) to make the audience feel as if I were pulling back or struggling to sing the song like the girl in this piece is struggling to find out the real truth of love.

Musical Wrap Up!

To conclude, whether you are jamming to a song on the radio or walking on the quad listening to your iPod, take a step back and really listen to the music/lyrics of that song. You may be surprised to find how easy it is now to examine music if you are thinking about it from a CHAT perspective. In the end, it doesn't matter if you are in choir, but picking up on the use of lyrical symbolism or other elements of music that you can understand more clearly using CHAT can help you out no matter where your life takes you. I will leave you with this quote that speaks true to my heart, and I hope that after reading it, it will do the same for you:

"Music speaks what cannot be expressed

soothes the mind and gives it rest

heals the heart and makes it whole

flows from heaven to the soul."

–Anonymous

Kayla Connett is a sophomore Special Education Major at Illinois State University and hopes to continue her singing as well. On Mondays and Wednesdays, Kayla is involved in ISU's Women's Choir. She has been singing for over 12 years and, in her senior year of high school, she was involved in five choirs and was the president of one of them. She loves God, her family, her friends, and her two dogs. In her eyes "no one has a disability, everyone has an ability."

Jukebox Musicals: The Art of Creating the Hybrid Genre

Lauren Gill

In this article, Gill explores the art of creating a hybrid genre, using the example of the jukebox musical. Drawing on her own experience, Gill breaks down the different sub-genres that make up this hybrid, and she shares her thought process in trying to create her very own jukebox musical, explaining the necessary understanding of characteristics and conventions that goes into producing this unique genre.

Have you ever just been so excited about something you have to tell everyone about it? That's how I felt after I left my theatre class one day. We were talking about musicals, but I wasn't paying that much attention until I heard the words "jukebox musical." My ears immediately tuned in. I enjoy watching musicals and plays, but I have never heard of a jukebox musical before. We watched a short example on YouTube, and I loved it. After taking ENG 101, I knew that musicals and plays were genres; each is a composition that results from similar yet different literate practices. But what about this new composition? Are jukebox musicals a genre too?

After watching the video in class, I wanted to email my English professor to ask her if she believed it was its own genre. Here is what I wrote to her:

> "Hey! I'm sorry its so late, but I have been meaning to send this email all day! So I am in a theatre class, and today we were talking about jukebox musicals and we stumbled across this video on youtube, and it immediately made me think of our class! It made me wonder whether or not this is its own genre, or if music videos count as genre, and I thought I would share it with you! Here is the link: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7r7mGAxWB04."

After my English professor watched the video, she responded and explained that it is in fact a form of genre. She was excited to see me connect what I learned in class to outside sources.

Where It Began

The jukebox musical that inspired my further investigation into this genre is called *Cinderoncé*. That's catchy, isn't it? *Cinderoncé* told the story of "Cinderella," but with a twist. The video used only Beyoncé's songs. I have always had a fascination with musicals and plays. But when I watched this video, I loved it because it was something I had never seen before. The idea of making a video using all songs to tell a story just amazes me. I wanted to produce one myself. It was so creative; I wanted to show that I could be that creative. The problem with wanting to produce a text in this genre is that I knew I would never actually follow through. I have a problem with getting ideas and then quitting halfway through. Lucky for me, creating an example of a genre that interested us was our first project for ENG 101. I knew if it were for a grade, I would have the initiative to follow through and produce a jukebox musical. But my first step to trying to produce a jukebox musical was to research it. I had to find out what it really is before I could make one myself.

What Is It?

Through research I found that a jukebox musical is a stage or film musical that uses pre-existing popular songs as its musical score. The songs are then usually contextualized into a dramatic plot or story line. For example, the jukebox musical I saw in class was created by Todrick Hall. But in looking at more examples, I discovered that a jukebox musical does not always have the music by one artist. For example, as I was looking at the *Cinderoncé* video, I noticed another one called *The Wizard of Ahhh's*. It is the story of *The Wizard of Oz* but with popular songs from the year 2013. Jukebox musicals can vary in length, but *Cinderoncé* is 3-4 minutes and *The Wizard of Ahhh's* is 6-7 minutes. But the famous *Mamma Mia!* is also considered a jukebox musical.

I wanted to know more, so I started to study this genre by considering a strategy called the Four C's of genre research, i.e. characteristics, conventions, context, and culture. This was a technique my ENG 101 teacher discussed, and it seemed like it would work in this case. Characteristics are specific features or qualities that belong to a genre. The conventions are the usual way things are done. Context is the creative situation and the surrounding situations in which a genre is produced. But this is different than content, which are things

like what the genre is typically about. And let's not forget the culture: the genre's place within a larger social space, because all texts are produced in a unique location and moment in time. Those are just four components that affect a genre, but genre is not simply a category or type. It is a set of dynamic social actions. Dynamic—that is a fun word. It means constantly changing, and so genre is not always going to be the same every time we see it. But we can try to pin it down for the moment by its characteristics and conventions. Thus, in answer to my question, yes a jukebox musical is, in fact, a genre. The cool thing about a jukebox musical is that it is also a hybrid, or a mixture of different genres that go together.

The Dynamic Hybrid

Throughout my research, I watched Todrick Hall's *Cinderoncé* and *The Wizard of Ahhh's* to look for particular characteristics and conventions. Specifically, I wanted to know how the change in lyrics flowed. The more I explored this and other hybrid genres, I found that they frequently use multi-modalities. The jukebox musical uses alphabetic, aural, and visual approaches. By this I mean that it is alphabetic because there is a script, it is aural because there is sound, and it is visual because it can either be a music video or on a stage. The genre consists of a standard music, a script, and a production. The script is an important factor within this genre. It helps create what the musical is about, and to make a script for a jukebox musical, you must figure out what story you want (content). The script helps so the actors know what to do and when to sing, and it also helps to map out how you would like it to be acted out (and that's a characteristic of the genre). The music is used to help better understand the story, and it helps the story flow and keep the audience's attention (a typical convention of the genre). Music can make or break a musical. It has to be catchy, not too slow, but not too fast to where you cannot understand the words. Another of the big conventions of the jukebox musical is that in order for it to be a jukebox and not just a musical, the songs need to be pre-existing. In *Cinderoncé*, Todrick Hall took Beyoncé's songs to help explain the story of "Cinderella."

In addition to the content, characteristics, and conventions of jukebox musicals, I also looked at how they are produced and discovered—there are many ways. You can create a musical video and distribute it on YouTube or other types of social media. You can perform it live on a stage or in a film or movie. Regardless of which way of production you choose to do, you must have the appropriate tools. But context affects the tools you need as well. For example, tools to make the production include props, actors, and costumes. If you choose to make a film or a short music video, you will also need a video

camera or recorder. A stage production requires different tools—first of all, a stage or venue to perform. But in that situation, financial considerations and accessibility also play a role. On the other hand, if you have performance limitations, more songs, and a longer plot, a film may be the best option for you. However, the tools for a stage production and video differ, and thus affect the activity or reception of the text. To create a music video, the time frame is on average 3-3.5 minutes in length. In the case of *Cinderoncé*, Hall had to make it flow with the story but also with the video. The actors had to follow the songs and the words to create the fairytale that is "Cinderella."

Hall's choices were based on his context, and he chose to produce a music video. To distribute the product, he used a tool through a social media website named YouTube.

Figure 1: Cinderoncé Distributed on YouTube and found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7r7mGAxWB04

Figure 1 shows the video and how many views it has had. Once a video is on YouTube, anyone with Internet access can receive it. When producing a video, you need to think about the distribution as well. You must know your tools and any restrictions. YouTube used to only allow videos a maximum time of fifteen minutes, unless you are partnered with YouTube. This was something that Todrick Hall had to look at. The length of the production will limit you to how you may distribute it. Based on where and how you distribute, it will affect the reception you get back. And that is all part of context.

In this case, Beyoncé herself found Todrick Hall's video on YouTube. She posted the video on her official website.

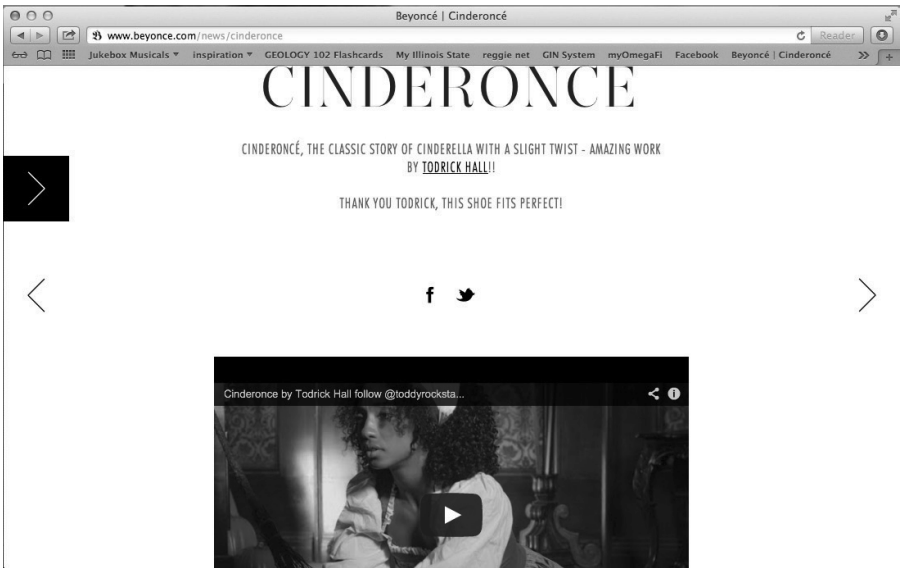

Figure 2: Cinderoncé Distributed on Beyoncé's Official Website

This is where production, distribution, and reception matter. Todrick Hall had the technology to produce the video. He also had the tools to distribute it. After distribution, that's where reception comes in. Since Todrick Hall put his production on YouTube, Beyoncé saw the video and, shown in the image above, she posted it on her official website. This is also known as activity. If people look at Beyoncé's website and see Hall's video distributed there, it might give him more job opportunities. Beyoncé can help get his name out there in the world.

My Production

So after I had spent time researching jukebox musicals, I used what I learned to begin my own production. To start off any project, you need an idea. My idea was to use a personal narrative I wrote for class as the basis for my content. The personal narrative I wrote was about the time my boyfriend broke up with me. It was out of the blue, and I did not understand until I found out he broke up with me for my best friend. Ouch, I know. No matter how long the dating process is, breakups are hard. There are always those thoughts in the back of your mind. *Was it my fault? What could I have done differently? Was it obvious? Why am I so stupid?* As you can imagine, these were a few of the questions that went through my mind after my breakup. My goal was to create a jukebox musical about my thought process after a breakup. I wanted to show all the different thoughts that ran through my mind afterwards. To create my idea, I needed to figure out how to integrate what

I learned about the characteristics, conventions, and context of the jukebox musical. I also needed to decide how many artists I would use and whom, and what songs I wanted. Then I had to write my script and figure out what type of distribution and production I would use and also think about how these factors would affect all of my other choices.

Music: Creating Content

The more I thought about how many artists I wanted for the musical, the more I realized there are numerous options to choose from, so I decided to just go with one artist. I just had to decide who would be the perfect fit for my tragic love story. It was a pretty easy decision on which artist I would use. I chose Taylor Swift because she is known to write songs about breakups. I know she is not the only artist out there with a tragic break up song, but throughout the years, she has been known to write songs after every breakup in her own life, and I felt as though her songs would be able to create my story with the appropriate emotion and words. Now that the easy part was done, I had to go through and look at all of her lyrics to find songs that would help the story flow and make sense.

The first song I used was "Better Than Revenge." It begins with the lyric, *"The story starts when it was hot and it was summer and I had it all / I had him right there where I wanted him / She came along, got him alone and let's hear the applause / She took him faster than you could say 'sabotage.'"* I chose to start with this song because it helps create a visual on when the plot, relationship, and story is taking place. It also shows that there was "another" girl involved.

After "Better Than Revenge," I chose to use the song "I Knew You Were Trouble." Part of the song I used goes *"And now I see. He was long gone when he met me. And I realize the joke is on me, yeah! I knew you were trouble when you walked in. So shame on me now."* This song was perfect because it expresses the thought of regret. It indicates the feeling of knowing it wasn't going to work out but instead deciding to try it anyway.

When deciding the songs to choose, you also have to think about the order you want them in. As I was listening to Taylor Swift's song, "Better Than Revenge," I was able to visualize my story. It was summer when my boyfriend and I broke up. I decided that "I Knew You Were Trouble" should go before "The Story of Us" because I was showing my thought process after the breakup. In my case, my ex-boyfriend had a previous past of being rude and, to put it lightly, not a good boyfriend, but I took the chance instead. I wanted to show that when my friend "stole" my boyfriend, I already "knew

he was trouble" (both part of the lyrics); I should have known all along it wouldn't have worked out. I followed "I Knew You Were Trouble" with "The Story of Us." The lyrics are, *"I used to think one day we'd tell the story of us, how we met and the sparks flew instantly / People would say, 'They're the lucky ones.'/ I used to know my place was a spot next to you, now I'm searching the room for an empty seat."* The song shows the thought of "what if" and the "what could have been."

After "The Story of Us," I used "Everything Has Changed," and "Sparks Fly." Both of these songs are about the happier times of the relationship, or the flashbacks. And finally I ended with "You're Not Sorry." One set of lyrics was particularly useful: *"But all this time I was wasting, hoping you would come around. I've been giving out chances every time. And all you do is let me down. And it's taken me this long. Baby but I figured you out. And you're thinking we'll be fine again, but not this time around."* This shows the realization that nothing you say can take it back. It is also the beginning of acceptance, which was an important part of the content I wanted to portray.

Script: Choices About Characteristics

Creating the script was easy, but I wanted to write it up in a way that would make it easy for my actors to demonstrate the characteristics of a jukebox musical that I wanted. I typed up all of the song lyrics I was going to use for each song and put each song on a different page. When I typed them up I put the page into two columns. One column had the typed lyrics along with that song I chose. The other side had the instructions of where the scene was taking place and what character would be doing what. Here is an example of the first scene with the song "Better Than Revenge":

Scene 1 Better Than Revenge – The story starts when it was hot and it was summer and... I had it all, I had him right there where I wanted him She came along, got him alone and let's hear the applause She took him faster than you could say "sabotage" I never saw it coming, wouldn't have suspected it I underestimated just who I was dealing with She had to know the pain was beating on me like a drum She underestimated just who she was stealing from	*[Scene- summer hangout spot/Sonic tables]* *(Crowded with people)* *--Starts with showing girl #1 sitting next to boy #1 and laughing* *-Girl #1 starts singing and as (She came along….) girl #2 walks up and takes boy #1 by arms and pulls to another table.*

Figure 3: "Better Than Revenge"

My directions for the script were very vague, because at first I did not know exactly how I wanted the scenes to go. The more I thought about it, the more detail I added to the script. You can see the difference in the rewritten script for "Better Than Revenge":

Scene 1 Better Than Revenge – The story starts when it was hot and it was summer and... I had it all, I had him right there where I wanted him She came along, got him alone and let's hear the applause She took him faster than you could say "sabotage" I never saw it coming, wouldn't have suspected it I underestimated just who I was dealing with She had to know the pain was beating on me like a drum She underestimated just who she was stealing from	*[Scene- Sonic tables]* *(Crowded with people)* *--Starts with showing girl #1 sitting next to boy #1 and laughing at table #1.* *--Girl #1 starts singing and as (She came along….) girl #2 walks up, says hi to Girl #1 and Boy #1 and takes Boy #1 by arms and walks to car.* *--Girl #1 finish singing song* *--Girl #2 and Boy #1 drive away at (She underestimated...)*

Figure 4: "Better Than Revenge" - Reprise

I still did not put too many details in the script because I want my actors to feel their own emotion through the production. Writing down every detail would take away from the emotion that is within them. Again, I was thinking about context (how the script was going to be used) and conventions (emotion was a key element in the examples I looked at) in making these decisions.

Music Video: Considering Context

I hoped to produce my jukebox musical in music video form like the example I saw in class. At first I decided this because I did not have a lot of songs, and it would be short. But after I completed the script and the songs, I realized I did not have a video camera to record and make the video. Yes, I could have performed the musical live once I realized I could not record it, but I also did not have actors to play the parts. Without the actors, there is no musical.

I had to get creative and think of new ways to produce it that would fit the tools I had access to and the context of my production. I did not realize how dependent the text, in this case the music video, was on the production elements, which altered my conceptualization of the genre. Instead I typed it

out in a script to make it kind of like the behind-the-scenes part of the whole thing. At the time, I wasn't able to complete my production, but I would take the next step if I needed to continue with it.

Another important idea I learned is that the audience definitely has a lot of influence on whether or not a jukebox musical will make it. The purpose of this genre is to entertain people and keep them wanting more. But it is not just entertainment, but enrichment too. Watching the jukebox musicals helps connect and relate your life to the story. The creator wants viewers to want to show their friends like I did. The goal is to make viewers love it and keep watching it over and over again. I watched *Cinderoncé* over and over again because it was something new. I had never seen something like that done before. The purpose is to have that wow factor that sticks in the mind. If the text doesn't engage effectively with the characteristics, conventions, and context of the genre, then the audience might not like the production, and it will get shut down, or it won't last. If the audience really likes it, there would be a possibility that it would go big, like Broadway! It all comes down to how you can navigate the expectations and purpose of the genre.

Although the process of investigating this genre was not always fun and easy, it was still a meaningful experience. I enjoyed being able to explore a genre that I was not used to. But I realized it was more complicated than it seemed . . . I had too much to do and not enough time to do it. The easy part was figuring out what songs worked towards my narrative, and who the artist I chose was going to be. But the context of production made it more difficult, and at times, I wanted to give up. It was a lot of work, but I am glad I stuck with it. I am proud with what I got done, but I am not done quite yet. Even though the project is finished, I hope to eventually produce the video for myself. It will be quite the project, but now that I have the tools to continue figuring out the genre, I know I can do it. Researching and learning about the genre is half the hard work, and that is done now.

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Tumbling Through Social Media: Exploring the Conventions of a Tumblr Blog

Shelby Ragan

Through an examination of Tumblr as a genre of social media posting, Ragan demonstrates how writing research is applicable to everyday interactions with genre. The article walks through how the author learned about composing a Tumblr post and how she discovered that even genre conventions that seem confusing at first do, in fact, make sense and are important to defining the genre.

It seems like keeping up with the ever-evolving trend of social media sites should be a full-time job. From the dinosaur Xanga (does anyone even remember what Xanga is anymore?) to MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, my own personal social media journey has been quite an adventure. The more technology makes advances, the more of our everyday lives these social media sites take over. It is through virtual spaces and interactions that many people socialize, stay informed about others' lives, and communicate. I have had people tell me that if you can operate one social media site, you can operate them all because they are not that different. This is something I know, through experience, to be false. With so many options available in so many different forms, it becomes crucial to understand the context and conventions of each different social media outlet in order to be an active and legitimate participant. This makes social media a good fit for a genre-studies approach, which examines how a particular writing situation works in order to be able to operate within it. By taking the approach of a writing researcher, I came to understand a new genre of social media, allowing myself to become one such participant. I discovered that in the genre of Tumblr posts, conventions may at first seem confusing and haphazard but once examined and understood are actually logical and important.

These days, everyone is getting online. From grandparents in other states to bosses to former youth pastors, the information you post on sites like Facebook is pretty much out there for anyone who knows you to see. The influx of family and adult connections being made on social media sites greatly changes the audience for whom posts are written. You have to constantly be on your guard, censoring your posts or pictures because you never know who is watching. There are privacy settings, of course. You can hide Facebook posts from Great Aunt Such-and-Such twice removed if you really want to. But then what's the point of posting it in the first place? This raises the question of purpose. Social media sites, as they currently exist and operate, are almost always about finding and connecting with the people you already know and about the dissemination of information about you and your life to these people. With that as the driving force, these sites tend to lose the fun factor and entertainment value. If the purpose of these social media platforms is to entertain the users rather than just to forge connections with others, then people need a place where they can post whatever they want, without having to worry about offending people they know or getting grandma on their case about the things they are posting. That's where Tumblr comes in.

I can guess the question you're dying to ask right now. What's so great about Tumblr anyway? That's the same question I faced when making the decision of whether or not to join, whether or not this was a genre I wanted to take up in my life. There was a time when I ventured into the world of blogging via BlogSpot. I had nothing interesting or specific to blog about, so I treated it as a sort of online journal where I wrote about what was happening in my life or how I felt about things and also people. By this time social media trends had shifted to sites like Facebook that I didn't feel were meant for blogging. What could it hurt because no one read it?

Irresponsibly, I put a link to my BlogSpot on my Facebook page, and people did read it—people I would rather have not read it. In this case, I had leapt headfirst into a genre that I hadn't taken the time to understand. You know what they say—only fools rush in. I based all my decisions on what I considered experience in the genre, a mistake that people often make, assuming one genre is the same as another and functions in the same way. Needless to say, that blog came down, and I left the world of blogging, in my mind, forever. But I wasn't done with social media. I stuck with Facebook because it was still the big thing, and I eventually made an attempt at the Twitter craze, but it never really caught on for me. A couple of years passed, and Tumblr came to the forefront of my social media journey. I was wary due to the antecedent genre experience I'd had with blogging, but a friend's praise of the site pushed me over the line. But this time I was determined not to have

the same experience as I had with BlogSpot. Instead, I wanted to take the time to examine and understand the genre of Tumblr posts before making an attempt to engage in the genre myself.

The first step of my writing researcher journey began with getting access to Tumblr and the posts that already existed so that I could analyze them, understand them, and then replicate them. If you go to the Tumblr homepage without being logged in, you're not going to get much. All the actual home page consists of is a prompt to sign up (or sign in if you already have an account), the current statistics of the website (including the number of blogs, the number of posts, and the time it takes to join the site), and a rotating background of posts from different users. Unlike a site such as Pinterest, a virtual corkboard, you can't just browse through Tumblr. You can access a specific blog, but you have to be able to go directly to that page by using its specific URL. This is a common element among social media sites. If you go to the Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram home page without logging in, you'll get the same sign up or sign in prompt page. In respect to privacy, this is comforting. These sites are designed to protect the users' privacy. So, I signed up.

Figure 1: Tumblr "Create Account" Screen

If you've ever joined a social media site, you know how tedious it can be to set up a new account. There's so much information you have to give to start and then even more information to create a profile. By the time I was done, I think the Internet probably knew me better than my friends. This is, obviously, the experience I was anticipating. Considering Tumblr is just another social media site, I assumed the genre conventions of creating an account that I had previously encountered would extend to this new site as well. Again, I was wrong in my assumptions.

Yet unlike many of these other social media sites, with Tumblr, actually setting up an account is easy, as long as you have an email address and can generate both a password and URL (your blog has to have a name, after all). With those three pieces, the puzzle of your new blog is complete; you don't have to provide a lot of personal information or create a profile. This lack of information seemed strange to me, but the more I learned about Tumblr, the more I realized it is a practice that adds to the anonymity of the website, one convention that draws users to the site. Once you've input the required information and your URL has been approved (not they-care-what-you-name-your-blog approved but make-sure-no-one-else-has-that-URL approved), you're released out into the world of Tumblr, supposedly ready to start blogging.

There is no tutorial about blogging or how the buttons on the site function, and having already experienced the dangers of participation in a genre without truly understanding the situation of the posts, I was not willing to repeat that experience. But drawing on antecedent genre knowledge of other social media sites enabled me to figure out, fairly quickly and easily, how to navigate the site. Tumblr's dashboard allows seven types of posts—text, photo, quote, link, chat, audio, or video. I did not anticipate the level of diversity present in the posting options, and at first the number of options seemed overwhelming and, to a certain degree, overkill. I had no idea why I would ever need to post a "chat" or an audio post. But through an examination of these different types of posts, I came to better understand how the genre of Tumblr posts worked, how different composers utilized the different types of posts, and where I might fit into that dynamic.

The second part of my writing research journey was learning about the genre's conventions in order to adhere to them. I spent a fair amount of time observing and reblogging other people's posts that made their way across my dashboard, making a mental list of the conventions of each type of post so that once I began creating my own posts, I could do so in a fashion that followed the genre conventions of other Tumblr posts. The text posts you find on Tumblr are one of the features that seem like a hybrid of social media and blogs. Twitter and Facebook are built on brief insights into a person's life or thoughts in less than 160 characters. Other blog platforms like WordPress, Blogger, or Svbtle are for long, detailed blocks of text. Tumblr functions as both, with three options for text posts—text, chat, and quote. Personal preference and what you have to say dictates whether you post witty one-liners or paragraph-long text posts about something that interests you or that you feel passionate about.

This is one area where the antecedent genre knowledge of other social media sites came in handy, since people who post Facebook statuses, Twitter tweets, or Wordpress blog posts already have experience composing those types of posts. I did not understand the hybridity in text posts at first because I was used to either a character-limited status update or a lengthy, wordy blog post—but not the option to choose. But once I had experienced more posts of other Tumblr users, I saw that the freedom to post either type of text post was actually helpful because many different types of blogs could be generated within the same website.

Tumblr is also a very visual and auditory site, which is where the photo, link, audio, and video posts become relevant. The site is chock-full of images: art, photographs, Photoshop manipulations, cartoons, videos, and graphics. The visual element draws on networks like Pinterest and Instagram that

are almost solely visual, but the hybrid nature of the site allows those with familiarity with these antecedent genres to expand on them in new ways.

Another element of composing Tumblr posts that initially seemed unfamiliar but turned out to be important is the tags. In many cases, the tag a post is tagged with is almost as significant as the content of the post itself. With a little digging, I learned that the tags on Tumblr serve two purposes. First, it is an organizational system for posts, which fit with my knowledge of my antecedent genres. You can browse Tumblr through the tags, like Instagram and Twitter, which compile all the posts that users have tagged under a certain word or set of words together in one stream. By tagging posts on similar topics with the same words, or tags, the posts will be grouped together both on the Tumblr search screen and within the individual blog. This is standard for social media sites that use tags. Yet by investigating Tumblr, I realized that tags have a second purpose, which is particular to Tumblr: to provide commentary on a post. By using tags rather than adding text to a post, the commentary itself is not rebloggable.

This second practice has developed on Tumblr over time because of the user-friendly nature of the site, and only comes to light through observing the practices of other bloggers, through reading the tags and text posts that address the practice of adding commentary to others' posts. There is a user-generated stigma to "tagging hate," which essentially means clogging up the tags that people who like a certain topic would use to search for positive posts with negative posts about that topic. This also applies to adding negative text comments to other people's posts, which are then viewable by the original poster and everyone who reblogs that strand of the post. Therefore, Tumblr is unique because it encourages the practices of neither explicitly tagging hate nor adding negative text comments, so that users instead put comments and criticism in sentence form as tags on the post. People can read the tags, but it is unlikely that searching a sentence-tag would generate any results. This practice, which exemplifies the fluidity of the Tumblr post genre, is one of the less explicit conventions of the genre. It's a practice that only becomes apparent to people who have those instances of tags and text posts come across their dashboard, which is the only way I became aware of it myself, though as with any convention of a genre, there are people who choose not to follow it.

Initially, I used the tags much like I use tags on Instagram: single words or maybe book, movie, or television show titles. I saw people I followed posting long, wordy tags, and I was confused. I would click on them and nothing came up. Again, I was drawing on genre knowledge I already possessed, and in this case that knowledge wasn't wrong. Tags on Tumblr can and do function in

the same way as Instagram or Twitter tags. But their use also goes above and beyond those of Twitter and Instagram. By existing as a place where thoughts and opinions can be written, Tumblr tags become part of the composition process itself. What is more, they add a level of composition to the reblogging function of Tumblr while still respecting the integrity of another person's post. The decision to compose in tags or in text on the actual post is one made when considering the audience for which you are composing. Once you reblog a post with text at the bottom and someone reblogs it from you, the text you provided becomes part of the post. If what you are saying is something that you don't mind anyone on the site who might come in contact with that post seeing, then posting text at the bottom is fine. But if your addition is negative or sensitive material that you don't want to share with people outside your followers, the option of composing within tags is highly valuable. Without taking the time to care about learning the conventions of Tumblr posts, the importance of tags to the composition process would have been lost on me, and I wouldn't have been as effective within the genre.

Another aspect of Tumblr that is both similar and unique from other social media sites is the "Like" feature, an aspect common to Facebook and Instagram, although the posts you like on Tumblr merely collect in a tab called "Liked Posts" on your dashboard (where posts from all the blogs you follow are compiled). While similar to Facebook in that you can "Like" other people's posts to show them a form of approval, the "Likes" that pile up on Tumblr are also a way of collecting posts you may want to go back and reference later without having to reblog it for everyone who follows you to see. Posts that are liked but not reblogged cannot be tagged, and so they just pile up in their tab with no way to search or navigate through them, and if you do not regularly filter through them, you will end up with a massive amount of posts you have to weed through to find anything, another piece of knowledge I chalk up to experience. I was familiar with the "Like" feature in Facebook, but here again the antecedent knowledge didn't cross over—"Liked Posts" in Tumblr function differently.

Similarly, Tumblr gives the option to reblog other users' posts, like Twitter's retweet function, so there is the opportunity for self-expression but also for adopting the thoughts and ideas of others, creating a sense of community and companionship. Like I mentioned before, this is the practice that took up the majority of my time in the first couple of months that I had my blog. But I should also note, there is a very explicit distinction made on Tumblr between reblogging and reposting. It is another distinction that developed due to the user-driven nature of the site, and is only apparent to users who come in contact with it in some way. The distinction is made in respect to people's intellectual and artistic property. Reblogging, which is

an actual function of the site and is indicated by the same square of arrows button that Twitter uses, is acceptable and encouraged because it allows the original poster to retain credit for the post. Reposting, which involves saving an image or post and then posting it to your own blog as if an original creation, is looked down upon because it is a practice that gives the new poster credit for the work rather than the person who created it.

Tumblr users are particularly passionate about the distinction between reblogging and reposting, and when you are new to the site and the community, as I was, it seemed like a superfluous distinction people were just being petulant about. But after being part of the community for a substantial period of time and making my own posts that I was proud of and wouldn't want someone else to take credit for, it became clear that there is a reason for things to be done the way they are done, even when they don't initially make sense to someone outside of the genre. Particularly in the online community created and fostered by Tumblr, members want to maintain the integrity of the posts and posters, which influences the conventions that are created and shaped over time in the genre.

Tumblr additionally gives the option for private messaging in the "ask box," a function that Facebook has used for years and Twitter has recently adopted as well. The private messages and reblogging are the places where the social aspects of Tumblr really come into play. It is in these elements that connections between people are made and communication is enacted. All of these elements are what people have come to expect in a social media site, and they are what we know how to use because they are so common across social media platforms so the antecedent genre knowledge most people possess comes in handy. The difference between Tumblr and the other social media sites is that on Tumblr connections are made based on mutual interests, whereas other sites establish most of their connections based on real-life interactions, a difference which necessitates the unique characteristics that set Tumblr apart from those other social media sites.

There are also actual posts from other sites that find their way onto Tumblr. Scrolling through your dashboard, it wouldn't be unusual for you to come across a Facebook status or a tweet. People take screenshots of tweets or statuses posted on other sites and post them on Tumblr, often marking out names to protect that sense of anonymity. Sometimes these crossover posts are created because a person agrees with whatever was posted on another site, or he/she wants to simply share information. Other times crossover posts exist for humor, because something is funny or the Tumblr poster thinks whatever the original poster said was silly or idiotic. Quite often I will see tweets or Facebook statuses screencapped on my feed with comments that either praise

or make fun of whatever the post is about. This is a common practice, and one that is socially acceptable, although Tumblr users tend to get offended when someone "steals" a post off Tumblr and posts it to another site because of the previously mentioned emphasis within the community on individuals always being credited for their work.

This seeming double-standard, where cross-posting is only acceptable in one direction, accounts for another way Tumblr is unique. Like most other social media sites, there is an option to connect your blog to Facebook or Gmail in order to find people you already know, but Tumblr doesn't prompt you to do so as soon as you sign up. It's a feature you have to search for. That, paired with the lack of personal information requested, went against the expectations built by my previous social media experiences. I made the mistake, early on in my Tumblr career, of mentioning Tumblr in a Facebook status, and it did not take long for one of my Facebook friends who also participated in Tumblr to inform me that the first rule of Tumblr is that you do not, in fact, talk about Tumblr. At first the reason for this seems odd, and it certainly is not obvious. It's not like Tumblr could actually be a secret with over one hundred and thirty million blogs . . . or at least not a well-kept one. But once you become more immersed in the Tumblr culture, it becomes apparent that one of the attractions of the site is its potential for anonymity. Tumblr offers a place for people to distance themselves from the person that they are in everyday or "real" life. The wonderful thing about the lack of required "profile" information on the site is the freedom it gives users to be whoever they want, emphasizing what parts of themselves they desire, or parts of themselves that they've never explored before. There is a sense of safety in divorcing these Tumblr blogs from not only other social media sites but also the people we are as we operate Facebook or Twitter or what have you. In the minds of the majority of the users, Tumblr is a sort of island unto itself.

Figure 2: I get set straight about the first rule of Tumblr.

"Tumblr Island," where Tumblr exists separate from anything and anyone outside of Tumblr, is not a concept that is inherent to the website as it was created, and it is not expressed directly to anyone (hence my lack of understanding that Tumblr isn't to be mentioned outside of Tumblr). It is a user-generated idea that becomes apparent through acculturation to the site.

Through investigating Tumblr as a genre and comparing it to the antecedent genre knowledge of social media sites I already possessed, I discovered that Tumblr, like Twitter and Pinterest and Instagram, focuses on the content of the blog. That's how people connect. The objective is to follow blogs that post content you are interested in, rather than just following someone because of a personal relationship. The way in which Tumblr differs from those other sites is that element of anonymity. You don't have to tell people who you are on Tumblr, and in fact it isn't expected.

Tumblr is a one-of-a-kind site, at least for now. It is very much a culture, one that is discovered through immersion and experience and is hard to explain to people who are not participants, though I have done my best to do so. It is only through approaching Tumblr as a writing-researcher, with the intention of examining the genre of Tumblr in order to participate in it, that I have been able to understand not only the composition of Tumblr posts but the genre of Tumblr itself as a social media site and therefore become part of the Tumblr culture myself. Drawing on elements of other social media and blogging sites is a necessity for the survival of any social media platform because social media sites are constantly in conversation with each other. Elements of interconnectivity and influence from the other popular social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Instagram are easily seen in the construction of the website itself. But it is the essence of Tumblr, the spirit of freedom and anonymity brought to the site by the community its users have formed, that truly answers the question of what is so great about Tumblr anyway.

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Not having yet received her Hogwarts letter, **Shelby Ragan** is a native Tennessean who spends her time collecting books, organizing those books, and even occasionally reading them. She also enjoys marathoning seasons of television shows and is currently studying Children's Literature as a Master's student at ISU. But she has not given up on that Hogwarts letter yet.

The Creation of a Personal Blog: Genre Bike Riding

Mary Cullen

In this article, Mary Cullen uncovers a correlation between learning how to ride a bike and learning how to write a successful blog. She takes the reader on a journey through the multiple stages she encountered when learning to compose in this way: piquing interest, choosing a style, finding teachers, training, making first attempts, practicing, experiencing the mishaps along the way, and finally reaching the overall goal. The article explores how learning the process of writing a blog is not as easy as it appears, much like riding a bike.

A common childhood pastime is riding a bike. Although not everyone may agree, I always find it to be one of my favorite outdoor activities. Knowing how to ride a bike seems like such a common thing. One might even say that everyone knows how! Well that may be true, unless you're my sister who learned when she was twenty-five; strangely enough, that's when her husband learned too. The truth is, not everyone can or even wants to ride a bike. There are some people who cannot ride bikes easily or at all. They may have different physical abilities or needs that require them to have special accommodations during the learning process. Riding a bike is not for everyone, and neither is writing a blog. One thing about learning how to ride a bike is that there are a lot of steps involved. These steps are both daunting and complex. You cannot simply get on a bike for the first time and ride it perfectly; you have to be taught over a period of time. There is a process. Much like learning how to ride a bike, learning how to write in a new genre also has a process that can be daunting and complex. As I learned more about blogs and the act of blogging, I noticed the unique qualities of this process are similar to the experiences I had when I was a child first learning how to ride a bike. Everyone takes his or her own journey to learn any new skill,

but this is the story of my journey towards blogging, and how I relate it to common bike riding experiences.

Inspiration

As a kid, I first wanted to learn how to ride a bike when I saw others doing it. Children, sometimes being of a "monkey see monkey do" nature, often have jealous tendencies. They frequently want what others have and want to do what others can do. For me, it was riding a bike. So what did many of us do as kids? We told our parents that we wanted to learn how to ride a bike, too. Maybe your friends were learning or maybe you saw some neighborhood kid ride by. No matter what it was, some outside force often inspires people to want to learn a new skill too.

When my professor gave our class the option of choosing our own genre for our final project, my mind jumped immediately to writing a blog. Why? Well, I have always wanted to start one. I keep a journal on my computer, and it contains all of the crazy thoughts that come to my mind. Also, I was inspired by watching the TV show *Awkward* in which the main character Jenna has a blog where she writes about current events in her life. Still having that jealous child within me somewhere, I wanted what she had. I wanted a blog! I always thought it was interesting and might be a great way to get my creative energy out; I just never got around to actually creating one because I knew close to nothing about them. But I did find a simple definition of blogs while reading through an article titled "Why We Blog": "Blogs combine the immediacy of up-to-the-minute posts, latest first, with a strong sense of the author's personality, passions, and point-of-view" (Nardi 42). This definition is what I wanted to achieve.

Choosing a Bike

If you were like me as a child, intrigued by the bikers around you, you may have already made up your mind about learning how to ride a bike after seeing a few neighborhood kids ride by. If so, it was time to get some wheels, and in my case, I could not have been more thrilled! It was a very exciting trip to the store where I got to pick out which bike I wanted from a wall full of different colors and styles. On my trip, I could even take the bike down and look at it up close before deciding that it was the one I wanted.

Choosing a theme for a blog is just as exciting. There are no rules as to what you can write about, but it is a good idea to stick to one general theme

for your blog . . . at least, that's what I noticed when I started researching blogs. The themes of a blog are a lot like the colors of a bike. They come in all different kinds of shades that can be formatted to your personality. With your blog you are free to choose from many different themes, but they tend to be somewhat consistent. Not every child's favorite color can be found on a bike. It is usually just the most popular colors that you see. With bikes, the popular color when I was learning was blue. In blogging, personal-themed blogs are the blue bikes. I decided to write my blog in a journal entry theme (also called a personal blog) because I knew I wanted my first post to be about a personal story of mine. It is also one of the only themes that I actually knew something about prior to researching, and drawing on your previous knowledge can be really helpful in learning any new skill, whether writing a blog or riding a bike.

Teachers

Almost everyone needs help learning how to ride a bike, especially me. It is not something that we have programmed inside of us, so usually someone has to teach us how to do it. In my case, this was a parent or some other family member who was willing to take part in the day's lesson. For me, just about everyone in the family had to pitch in. They had to slowly go over how to pedal, brake, balance, and steer. It would not have been possible to ride without first learning these initial elements.

Just like riding a bike, you cannot simply write a blog. There is a lot of learning that must go into the process first. And usually, it is a good idea to find some teachers to help you get started. Being a horrible student in bike riding, I was prepared to take on as many teachers to help mold my blog as possible. In order to write my blog, I looked at multiple blogs just to see what other bloggers wrote about and how they wrote. I did not learn as much as I had hoped about blogs from just looking at other personal blogs. I mostly found information about what people typically wrote about, which always related back to the overall theme of their blog (their personality-paired bike color).

I began researching blogs by searching "blog posts" on Google. Since my prior knowledge was lacking, I knew that I had to learn more about what a blog post really was. From this search, I began seeing the characteristics of a good blog. According to Debbie Hemley, who wrote an article entitled "26 Tips for Writing Great Blog Posts," these characteristics include having an eye-catching title, a post that is relevant to everyone, and a purpose to your post. If your post has some deeper meaning that the reader could take away, it is usually a more successful post.

From there, I realized I had no idea where one would even post a blog. What kinds of blogging websites are out there? What is the most popular blogging website? When it came to bike riding, even when I was learning I knew that you could bike almost anywhere with solid ground. But the "where" was a whole new idea in the blogging world. I began Googling things like "popular blogging websites." From this, I learned that the popular social network Tumblr is a blog. This blog includes mostly picture posts rather than paragraphs of text. I find it to be very similar to Instagram, which is a constant stream of photos with captions and comments. Tumblr is like the sidewalk of bike riding. It is well known, and it is where most bloggers get their footing before starting a blog on a more exclusive website.

This is also when I learned about all the different themes or topics of blogs such as fashion, business, technology, news, journal, food, and even travel ("Technorati Top 100"). I had no idea that there were so many different themes of blogs out there! It really is just like the many colors of bikes I looked at as a child. You truly can blog about anything. Along with this, I learned that specific blogging sites were for specific types of blogs. Like "Men with Pens" is a blog for businesses. I relate that concept to the bikes I saw as a child that were suited for adults. They had thicker wheels and funny looking gadgets on the handlebars. I now know them to be bikes for serious bike riders, just like certain blogs are for people with certain goals and levels of expertise.

I soon realized that I did not have a lot of information about what makes a blog popular. I figured this was important to know due to the fact that popular blogs have a lot of views and a lot of followers. In my research, I noticed a correlation between the number of followers and the strength of a blogger. The more followers, the better the blogger. If I wanted to write a blog that was successful and followed the characteristics of a good blog, this would be a good place to start. I decided to Google "popular blogs" to get an idea of how these bloggers wrote and what they wrote about that caught the eye of so many readers. I found facts about how to run a popular blog by reading an actual blog post titled "The 7 Secrets of Running a Wildly Popular Blog." The title sounded like it would be helpful, so I went with it. Still, I received a majority of my research from blogs about blogs. I wanted to learn from the experts so that I could obtain the best blogging education I could find. I knew I could trust what these writers said because they were successful bloggers themselves. On "7 Secrets," I learned a lot about how to actually write in the genre of a blog. I read tips about what to say and how to say it. I learned that it is important not to be too egotistical and to make sure that you cater to your readers' needs. This includes responding to comments on your blog posts and commenting on others' blog posts (Rieck). Commenting on other bloggers' posts gives readers a reason to go look at your page, thus,

bringing you more followers. It makes sense that it is very important to keep a good relationship with your readers so that you can get more of them and obtain a truly successful and popular blog.

As I mentioned previously, the number of followers appears to be an overall sign of a good blogger. Unfortunately, I was not entirely sure what being a follower meant, so I compared what I learned to other genres I am more familiar with. Similar to social networks like Instagram and Twitter, the people reading your blog can also be referred to as your followers. They receive notifications via email every time you post something new. Their relationship to your blog can also be compared to "liking" a page on Facebook and receiving notifications from their updates and events.

It was after reading these tips that I decided it was about time for me to actually get a blog and see what the layout is all about. I signed up with the blogging website Blogger because it was on the top of the list of the most popular blogging websites ("Top 10 Blog Websites to Create Free Blogs"). Unlike the Tumblr sidewalk, Blogger is more like a bike path. It's more risky and exciting than the sidewalk, but not as reckless as you can get. Making my account was pretty easy, but I soon realized that I had way too little information to start blogging. I needed to learn more. My first trip on the bike path did not last long either. I remember my training wheels got stuck in the gravel, and my mom had to walk me back home, bike in tow. Back to the drawing board. Similarly, I had to get more information about how to blog, not just what blogging is. I looked back at "The 7 Secrets of Running a Wildly Popular Blog" and found other blog posts that could be helpful to my research. From this, I found two more posts that could help to teach me how to blog.

The first, titled "How To Blog Like Bond. James Bond"offered me valuable information about letting your readers know exactly who you are and what you are about right away by creating an identity. This identity will allow your readers to relate to you more easily because they know more about you. In this blog about blogs, it mentioned that it's okay to be witty because sometimes it helps you get your point across to your readers. It is just important not to be too witty to annoy your readers with your constant use of sarcasm (Kamb). The most important aspect that I took away from this blog was that words are like bullets—don't waste them. This means being concise with your posts and not to drag on. Dragging on will cause your readers to lose interest, which of course I did not want.

The second blog I encountered was "11 Common Blogging Mistakes That Are Wasting Your Audience's Time." The title sounded intimidating enough that I realized I had to make sure I did not foolishly commit any of these blogging crimes. But luckily, being able to read about them from experts would

help me avoid the potholes. Two of the most important things I learned from this blog were to make sure you were not writing too complexly and to create your own blogging voice (Duistermaat). To avoid writing in a complex way, these experts suggest bloggers use standard proper English the majority of the time. When readers reach too many words that they do not understand, they will frequently lose interest and stop reading your blog altogether. In regard to creating a blogging voice, I found that this relates very closely to having your own identity. Your blogging voice is your own style of writing, and it helps the reader understand what kind of person you are. It plays through in your writing. For example, there are bloggers who make a lot of jokes and interact with their audience while writing, and then there are bloggers who write strictly about the topic. No questions and no jokes. It is totally up to bloggers what they want their writing voice to be like, but it depends a lot on their purpose and goals. It was then that I made the conscious decision that I would type my story just like I would say it in-person to a friend. I wanted my blogging voice to be as close to my actual way of speaking as possible. By doing this, I could also hope to accomplish a good relationship with my followers.

Even after receiving all of this information, I still did not think I knew enough, and I wanted to learn more. I decided to Google "introduction to blogging." This took me to another blogging website called WordPress. Here, I learned about blog content. Typically, blogs would focus on one particular topic per post, which would then relate to the blogger's overall theme ("Introduction to Blogging"). For example, if a blogger's theme has to do with food, his or her posts would all have a food aspect.

For one of our class reading assignments in the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*, we read "Bust a Rhyme: A New Poetics of Food Journaling," which included an image of a blog post on the WordPress blogging website (Browne). It was at this time that I decided to check out WordPress for the website I would use for my blog in case I did not like Blogger. I ended up making an account, and I found that the website was very difficult and hard to understand for beginners. This was due to the fact that there were a lot of writing choices included in the website, such as the layout of your blog as well as different ways of posting your writing. WordPress seemed as risky as it gets. It felt like the middle of the street compared to the sidewalk and the bike path. It was dangerous and open, but still filled with cars that could potentially hurt you. It was then that I decided I was not sure about using WordPress free blogging because it looked like it would take more time learning how to write than it would actually take to create my blog post. I was definitely not ready to attempt street bike riding yet.

This is where my research of blogging and how to blog stopped (temporarily). I thought that I had plenty of information to write a blog successfully, so now I just had to plan out what to say.

Training

Now, back to working with that shiny new bike. When I first started riding a bike, I did not just get on a regular bike and go. I had to start with training wheels. These wheels helped me get the feel of riding a regular bike, but were also there for me in case I messed up.

I wore a sort of training wheels while I was drafting for my first blog post. I had to go through a lot of planning before I started writing. I decided that it would be a good idea to journal or at least look at some of my previous journals because those are the closest things to blog posts that I have ever created. In the ISU writing program, something like this is called antecedent genres. These journals were a lot like the three-wheeler I used to ride around my driveway before I got green eyes for bike riding.

I began looking back on my journaling days when I was a little girl in elementary school. Most of the entries consisted of, "River is so cute, I hope he knows who I am!" I started realizing that these prior experiences with my diary would not be of much help because, frankly, I was a horrible journal keeper. Three-wheelers don't have the same feel as a bike. You don't have to balance at all. You just sit there and pedal. I needed something more similar to what I was trying to learn. It was then that I decided it would be a good idea to look at my journals that I have done more recently on my Mac.

Once there, I started seeing how I wrote while journaling, what tone I used, and the layouts of my writing. After looking through these, I came up with the idea of having an outline of my blog just like I would outline any of the papers I have ever written. I would refer to these rough outlines right before creating my blog post.

First Solo Mission

Your first bike ride alone was probably a little rocky. Maybe you ran into a bush, maybe you fell off, maybe you forgot how to stop. Maybe you stopped right there and quit bike riding altogether. Everyone had his or her own experience. No matter what, almost no one's first bike ride was perfect.

My first experience with blogging wasn't perfect either. Before getting to my actual post that had to do with all of my outlining, I wanted to take a test drive by writing an About Me page. I got this idea from the sections I read in "How to Blog Like Bond. James Bond." So I went on my blog on WordPress, and I clicked to create my first post. I ended up using WordPress after all because I did not feel that Blogger would let my personality show as much as WordPress would, which just goes to show how complicated decisions about medium can

be. Due to the personal adjustments that are possible to be made on WordPress, it is easier for readers to understand who I am. Blogger did not have any options to customize. Everyone who did not want to pay money had the same white background. It was a complete snooze fest. So even though it was a hassle trying to learn all of the tricks to creating my layout, I still think I made the right choice. I left that boring old bike route for the dangerous and freeing street.

I wrote a tiny paragraph about why I started my blog and who I was, then hit "submit post." It probably sounded a little cut off and short, because I was trying so hard not to have it drag on. How could I be successful in my blogging if I lost the interest of my readers when they only read my "About Me" page? Oh well, what's done is done. All finished with my first official blog page. Maybe it wasn't a perfect first post, but just like riding a bike, sometimes you have to give it a try and make adjustments later.

Practice

Finally, after days, weeks, months of practice, most people begin to get the hang of bike riding. After lots of practice, I contemplated removing my training wheels because I had become a good enough rider with them on. Maybe you kept them on for longer, or maybe you still have them on now! But for me, the time came quickly that my parents and I planned to take them off.

Once I exited out of my "About Me" page, I saw an option that said to write a "post." This was my first problem. Through all my previous research, I had not encountered what a "post" or a "page" was and what the differences were. I had to do more research. On WordPress they had a handy dandy section entitled *Post vs Page* that told me the differences between the two. There, I learned the following:

Post:	**Page:**
• Most common form of blogging • Text, music, image, video, or link • Entered in reverse chronological order on the blog home page • Sticky Posts: appear before any other posts • Associated with a date • Can be published by email	• Static • Not listed by date • Can be displayed in the sidebar using the Pages widget • No tags or categories • Ability of creating a hierarchy of pages (also called subpages), where the pages build off of one another (Example: about me page, then adding contact me page underneath it)

It was while reading these differences that I realized I also had no idea what tags were. I had even more research to do! I began Googling the word "tags" and landed back on the WordPress website, where they had yet another informative page. I learned that tags were unique to posts, and that they worked in the same way that hashtags do on Twitter and Instagram. This means that they group blog posts together that have similar topics. The inclusion of tags is completely optional ("Tags").

Bumps and Bruises

Every new bike rider has his or her fair share of falling down. There is often blood spilled, swollen bruises, and maybe even the occasional broken bone. I never broke any bones, but I broke my spirit plenty of times. At the time it was always painful, but after multiple times of flying over your handlebars because you hit the brake too hard too quickly, you begin to learn your lesson. In the end, all those bumps and bruises usually turn out helping you become a better bike rider.

In regard to blogging, bumps and bruises should be part of the description. There are always going to be readers out there who do not believe in what you are trying to say. They are going to try and tear you to pieces in a few carefully thought out words. Maybe you sound too bubbly on your posts. How dare you? Maybe you use excessive exclamation points when you're writing an upbeat post. Someone throw this writer in jail! They have committed a horrible crime! These are just a few real comments I have received on the blog I created while researching this genre.

In reality, these critics may believe you have done something wrong, but it is always going to be your blog. It is important to be true to yourself in your writing. If you like to end your blogs with a smiley face, go for it. Just know that these criticisms may not stop. It is all in how you choose to handle them.

When you get a scratch from falling off your bike, you have two choices: ignore it or patch it up. If you ignore it, the scratch could get infected and spread to other parts of your body. If you chose to patch it up, you will heal more quickly.

The same goes for blogging. By ignoring negative comments on your blog, you run the risk of losing followers or even getting more comments on more of your posts. It is best if you patch it up by respectfully responding to the post to clear up the bad air. By doing this you take the time to consider what they are trying to tell you, which in turn can help you become a better blogger by catering to your followers' needs.

Adequate Biker/Seasoned Professional

Finally, with the training wheels off and all of that practice behind you, biking often begins to come somewhat naturally. Your parents might finally let you go on rides by yourself because they trust that you would not fall and hurt yourself, at least not too badly. Maybe there were a few bumps and bruises along the way, but overall you were doing just fine. You learned to pick yourself up and dust yourself off after falling down, and became a better bike rider because of it.

In my blogging experiment, I also got to the point where the time to give it a try arrived. No more beating around the bush looking for more research to help me write my first blog post. It was time that my teacher, aka the Internet, let me spread my blogging wings and fly solo.

I began looking at the outlines that I noted back while I was still in the training stage. From this I recalled the main topics of what I wanted to talk about, and then I was ready to write. The most exciting part was realizing that I could write about whatever I wanted. Blogging has no rules concerning what you want to write about; it is completely up to the writer.

I wrote my blog post about my hometown and my childhood home. Funny, that is the place where I learned to ride a bike. It was easy for me to write within the characteristics and conventions of a personal blog due to the fact that my story was very personal, and I had also spent a lot of time reading other similar blogs in my research. I wrote just like I would be having a conversation with a person and telling them the story. The most difficult part for me was keeping it as short as possible. I had to go a little longer than the average blog post, but I knew that this was okay because my research told me to keep it short enough to get my point across.

After actually writing my post, I wanted to make it more personal by adding photos. I added pictures of both my hometown and my actual childhood home. You could even see the bushes at the edge of the driveway where I spent a lot of time crashing my bike and getting scratches from the falls. Through these pictures, I accomplished the personal point of view that allowed my readers to get to know a little more about me than just the story.

I also decided it was a good idea to add the tag "Wheaton," which is the name of my hometown. That way, others who also wrote about my hometown could see my post and relate to it.

There it was, Your Everyday College Girl's very first blog post. It may not have been perfect, but it was definitely a great success in my book.

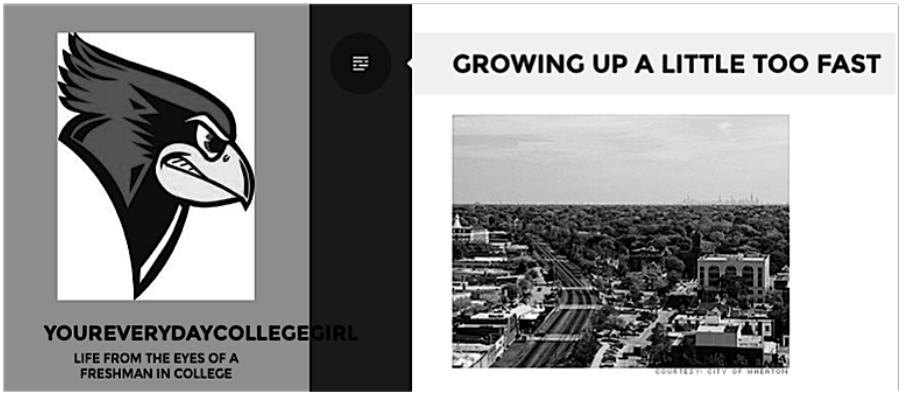

Figure 1: Blog Post Heading

Accessories

No bike is complete without some fancy add-ons. For many kids, to show that you were a skilled biker, you had to jazz up your bike. The attitude seemed to be that the more accessories you had, the better the biker you must have been. Every addition was like a little gold medal, proving to everyone that you were truly a great bike rider. Girls often want those streamers that hang from the handlebars, and boys frequently want pegs on their wheels so that they can ride their friends around the block with them. Some kids even got bells to annoy all of the neighborhood parents with. I have to admit, I was one of those kids.

Figure 2: Widgets Column

In regard to blogging, my bells and streamers come in the form of widgets. Widgets are completely optional. They are used to add content to the sidebars of your blog ("WordPress Widgets"). They show things like previous posts as well as all of the tags you have used. As you can see in the picture of the widgets on my sidebar after my first official blog post, a widget also allows my readers to see what blogs I follow. This can also help them figure out what kind of person I am by seeing what other things I am interested in. Since I have not been on the website for long, I do not follow very many blogs yet. As I continue my journey to being the best blogger I can be, my list will expand.

Conclusion

Riding a bike is not something that is commonly forgotten; it typically sticks with a person for the entirety of his or her life. I hope the same goes

for blogging. It is an art form that many have not yet recognized. Bloggers are open to the opinions of others in regard to some of their most personal thoughts. It allows people to get whatever is on their minds out in the open. Although my experience with learning how to blog correlated with my experiences with bike riding, yours may be entirely different. In my case, I could have stopped at any time and given up, but I did not. I conquered the blogging world just like I conquered bike riding. I plan to continue writing in the genre of blogging and try to further perfect my creation of a personal blog: Genre Bike Riding.

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Mary Cullen is currently a sophomore at ISU. She is an aspiring journalist who loves writing with every fiber in her being. She came into writing this article in her first-semester freshman English 101 class, and since that experience, her love for writing has grown so much she started her own blog! As for her personal life, she enjoys reading, being outside, spending time with friends and family. She has high expectations for her future and hopes you do as well!

The Power of Social Media: Creating Extraordinary Messages

Armaan Sanghera

In this article, Sanghera explores the power of social media and individual voice. By conducting a writing experiment to create her own website, Sanghera discovered how important goals are to any piece of writing. Her purpose of this article is to stress how powerful social media can be, how the voice of an individual matters, and the impact people can have on others through social media.

Starting from nothing and building something is a miraculous process and one that many people do not realize they are even participating in. When you sit down and create a product, no matter how big or small, it instantly becomes something unique. The power and capability that each of us have of creating something of substance is very strong, especially when it comes to writing and communication. I feel as humans we have a tendency to underestimate how much power our words have. What many people need to realize is that what they say and do matters. In contemporary society, we have a powerful tool that can help us make a statement: the Internet. Social media makes the process of "being heard" so much easier than in the past. Social media allows individuals to express their ideas, start a movement, and have a creative outlet to utilize for a variety of purposes.

Earlier in my college career, I was given the opportunity to create a non-fiction project for my English 145 class. This project was open-ended and gave all of us some creative freedom. Our professor gave us the options of going the traditional route by writing a paper, but we could branch out by creating a scrapbook, website, or anything else we could imagine. When we were first given the assignment, I knew I wanted to choose a creative way

to put my project together. There are not many opportunities in college to create a project that allows creative freedom. I wanted to take advantage of this. First, I decided to come up with an objective, and then I brainstormed good ways to execute it. The goal I chose was showcasing artists. Many of my close friends from high school create music. They have been doing this for a long time and have somehow managed to stick with it in college, even with their busy schedules. I have been fortunate enough to see each of them grow exponentially through this expression, so this was my way of giving them the recognition they deserve. I decided to create a website that revolved entirely around their work and their stories. Creating a website seemed perfect to me because it was a creative way to put the piece together. I also felt like creating a website would allow me to show readers more than other genres I could use. I knew that a website would be accessible to a wide audience, so this would mean the most possible recognition. I wanted the readers to be able to feel a connection to the artists and their stories. Creating a website would encourage those feelings.

When I first came up with the idea of making a website, I was not sure where to begin. Although this medium was a new one for me to work with, it did not scare me off. There are so many different social media networks available, and chances are that people are not even aware of the range of tools to use. Furthermore, not everyone will know how to use them or will even know their purpose. The key is to not let these factors intimidate you, because in the long run, social media can help you express yourself in new ways. First, you have to do some research. The first thing I decided to do was research websites that revolve around music. I researched *Pitchfork* and *Spin Magazine's* websites, both of which are sites I read on a regular basis. I had never sat down and analyzed them, so seeing them from a new perspective was a learning experience. The websites do a great job of showcasing new and old artists. They are seen as respectable music websites and make sure to include important aspects about bands and artists that people would maybe not always think about including.

Even after studying some examples of what I wanted to create, when I started writing, I felt a little overwhelmed, because I was not sure where to start or how to start for that matter. So, I decided to research different ways I could set up the website. I did this by examining websites I liked and taking notes about their layout. I began to think of different ways I could implement these unique ideas. The main way I did this was by drawing out how I might want the layout of the site to look. Eventually I found a format that matched my drawings, and I started thinking about other ways that I could keep the presentation alive and interesting. After surveying so many examples, I knew I wanted to incorporate important features about the bands, like how they got

started, their biographies, interviews, music, and pictures of them to make the site feel more personal.

Looking through examples was just the first step in my research, though, and I realized that I needed to do some content research too. Since the point of this project was to showcase my friends and their music, I wanted to make sure that when I interviewed them and gathered research that I was getting some of the most important information for the website itself. One of my main goals was to make sure that their biographies and pictures showcased the essence of their personalities and really made it so the readers felt like they knew them. Making the audience think about music and local artists in a different way was also a goal of mine. Local artists sometimes get the reputation that they are untalented or that they will not make it big anywhere. This is not true; everybody starts off at square one and works their way up. The image that I wanted to relay with this project was that these people are passionate individuals. Even though this project was about my friends, there was still a lot of information that I did not know about their bands or how they got started. I can safely say making the project was a learning experience.

In thinking about my own goals, I realized how important a person's objective is, whatever they are writing or producing. As I worked, my goal also became narrower. In addition to showcasing the artists, my goal in making this website became to help people be aware that all musicians start for a specific reason. Whether that reason is as simple as "I was bored so I picked up a guitar" or "I wanted to make music so people could connect and not feel alone all the time," it all just depends on the people making the music and what their objective is. I quickly discovered that just like my website, goals drive the texts that musicians create as well. I think that as listeners we sometimes forget that these artists have more to them than just what we hear, and like all writing and creative expression, they have certain objectives that drive what they produce.

While working on this project, I started thinking more about goals in writing and creativity. Passion and drive are important factors of any creation, including making an effective piece of social media. I was able to realize this intense sense of motivation and passion when I worked on this project. Working on my website brought up many nostalgic memories, considering a majority of my high school years were spent going to shows for these individuals and listening to them talk about their music or just hearing what they were currently working on. While I was working on my project, I got so completely submerged into the entire site that I forgot I was working on it for a class. This definitely made my writing and creating process much more meaningful. I had a goal I wanted to achieve, and that was exciting. I found myself writing for me and my friends and not necessarily my professor. My writing was genuine, and I

was able to write from a place I hadn't written from before. Once I started writing about everyone and their music, I found that my thoughts and ideas were actually overflowing, and I had so much to say about each of them. That was when I realized that if you are passionate about something, it will not feel like a chore to educate others. Writing gives a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment that cannot be received from anything else. Everything came back to my goal. I realized that I wasn't really even trying to change someone's perspective, but rather just help people understand that there is always more to things than we think there are. That's the case with my friends and their own goals in music, and my goal was to get that across in my writing.

Once I had written the biographies, I had to actually assemble the website. Again, this came back to my objectives. I had to put it together in a way that was appealing and easy to navigate and read. This was definitely the most challenging aspect for me. First, I was not sure how I envisioned the website, so starting was very difficult. This was my first time creating a website, and my immediate thought was to go to Wordpress.com. This was my first choice because it seemed like the most popular website to use for what I wanted to create. After doing a little more research into the site and discussing the project with my professor, I decided it wasn't the best medium for my goals. I decided to take my professor's suggestion and went with a site called Weebly. These sites are different from one another in many ways. Weebly is a lot easier to navigate and put together and also allows the creators to do more with the site. The templates are not set in stone, which was refreshing. Most of the features that are provided to you with Weebly allow creative freedom, and this fit perfectly with my goals. The templates were made to accommodate adding pictures, music, or text.

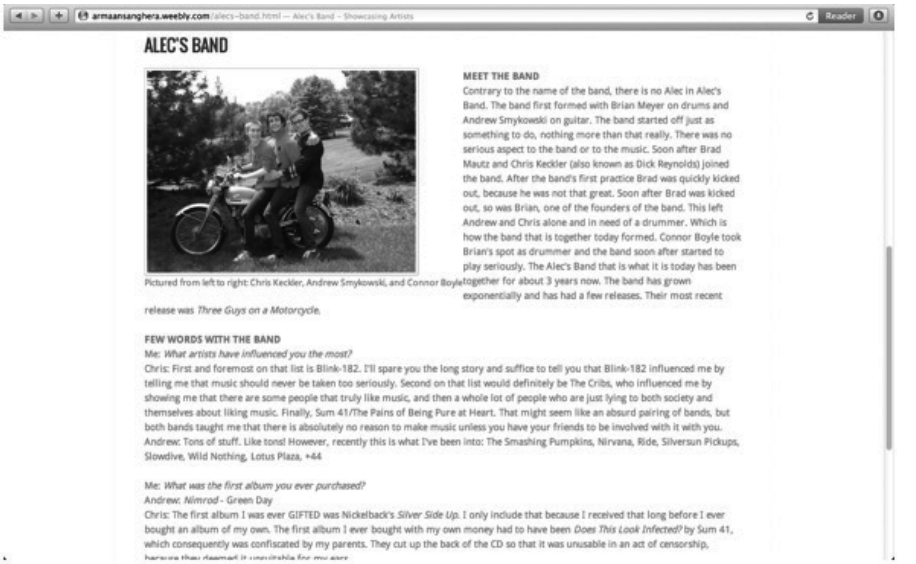

Figure 1: General Layout of the Articles

Once I found that Weebly's features matched my goals, I returned to the idea of examining examples to further investigate this kind of writing. After looking through a few Weebly sites, I finally managed to choose a template that looked sleek and simple. I needed something that would not draw too much attention away from what I was trying to put together. While I was doing research on websites, I realized that I wanted to make sure the website had more than just text. So I included pictures of the artists, links, or attachments to their music, and pictures that I had taken from previous years. I decided to do this because I think that when readers are only given text they do not get drawn in as much. A website with just text is less appealing to readers. I wanted to make sure that the readers were entertained, as well as felt a personal touch throughout the website. The pictures of the artists were included so readers could put a face to the name, and breaking the biographies into sections also made it easy to read. (See Figure 1 for an example of my layout, which starts off with a biography about the band and then moves on to an interview). I decided to utilize the layout in this way because I felt like it was the easiest on the eyes.

I also attached music so I could actually showcase my friends. Without the music and the pictures, these individuals would not have been fully showcased. Then I decided to add pictures that I had taken from previous years because I wanted the website to have a personal side. Since the project was really nostalgic for me, I included pictures from different memories I had with these individuals, just to show that the website was more than a project for me. I wanted readers to understand that the people I was writing about were not strangers. I wanted to make an impact with what I was saying and maybe even a statement to provide insight into my main point. (Figure 2 is an example of how I included pictures from experiences I had with these individuals, but again these choices all came back to my goals).

Figure 2: First Page of My Website

In addition to thinking about what I wanted people to take away from my website, there was another audience that played a crucial part in my goals and the choices I made to achieve them: my friends. While I was putting this website together, I was very concerned with how my friends would perceive it. I wanted to make sure that I did justice to each of these individuals. This played a big part in the pictures I chose, as in the example of Figure 3. Although the specific circumstances of these pictures wouldn't mean much to the audience, I wanted to incorporate them to give readers an insight to how much these individuals have grown and how hard they have each worked. The picture I chose had a lot to do with how I wanted my friends to perceive the site, in addition to my greater audience.

I used pictures as headers throughout the entire website. I wanted to make it a point to have a universal message for the rest of the potential audience: anyone who cared about music. I wanted to make sure that people knew they could read this even if they did not know the individuals that it was about. It was supposed to showcase artists, but beyond that, I also wanted to get people to possibly look into the music they listen to themselves a little bit more. I wanted the website to center around my own experience and the individuals' experiences, but also explore a generalized idea of how some people experience music. This was my way of using the Internet as a tool to make people more aware of something that they may have not even thought about before, just to change their thinking a bit. This was not necessarily my primary motive, but it was still a small motive that I wanted to achieve.

Figure 3: Headers Featuring Pictures of My Friends

Once my website was finished and finalized, I posted it on Facebook for my friends to see. I had barely posted it for ten minutes when the likes and comments came pouring in. I did not realize how much people cared or paid attention to things posted on Facebook or any social media network, really. This moment made me realize how powerful something like creating your own website could be. The fact that I could make people read something, just because I made it on Weebly, was really incredible to me. I found that the most interesting thing to keep an eye on was the stats on the actual website. Weebly has a feature where you can see how many views your website is getting and how many of those views are from individual computers. I was completely shocked; people had started to share the website on their own band pages, with their friends, and with their families. I couldn't believe how many views the site was getting. To be completely honest, I was feeling pretty overwhelmed. All my purposeful choices resulted in my website actually meeting my goals. It was after that point though that I realized how big of a difference all of us can make. Sometimes the Internet can be seen as a horrible thing that is addictive. Yet there are also some cases in which we do not realize how good we have it. Many of our parents were not fortunate enough to have access to the Internet. They never had an opportunity to immediately share thoughts or have someone listen to what they had to say. There was no way to have something you made go viral. Exposure and recognition like this, which was one of my main objectives, was not a realistic goal for generations before ours.

While I started making this website, I actually had the mentality of thinking that the Internet was ruining my generation. I could not think of a valid reason for why social media networks were beneficial for anyone. In my opinion, social media had just become something that was making people my age anti-social and lonely. It seemed it was starting to become something that was preventing people from living their lives fully and appreciating the people that surround them and the world outside the Internet. Seeing the feedback after having my website posted for a few minutes made me change my mind a little bit. It really started to put things into perspective for me. I started thinking about how important it was to me that my message got out to people. Whether they agreed with it or not, I just wanted people to take a second to take in my message. That was another goal I did not realize I had; I wanted a reaction to what I was saying. Even though this was not a goal I was aware of having, my choices helped me achieve it too. I started to see how big of an impact the Internet and technology can have on people, and I realized that it can be used in a positive way to make a difference. The person using technology to write has to want to make that difference.

When you think about it, many artists or musicians that get famous do so because of social media networks. Once you send something out, it is there

for others to share or send to their peers. The power that this generation has is outstanding, and I think that it is something that everyone should try to use. This website was only for my English class, but by the end of it I had learned much more than I expected. I achieved a sense of fulfillment that I can safely say no other project has given me. I was able to get a grasp of the importance of our opinions. I also learned that identifying your goals for a project can be the cornerstone of what you create. As I was creating my website, I started to realize how much I was actually capable of doing, as long as I had a goal to guide me. When I was done with the project, I was very concerned with how people would perceive my work. I was not even sure if I wanted to post it on the Internet for anyone to see. Now that it has all been said and done, I am very thankful that I did. Although, the website did not go viral or anything close to that, I still got the attention of many people that I did not think I would be getting attention from. There is really no way to describe the feeling of knowing that people took the time to read your message. This project gave me a sense of accomplishment and importance. I accomplished my main goal. I had done something for the first time in years that I was willing to share with the public and something I was very proud of. I learned much more from this project than just creating a website, and I am very thankful for that.

Visit my site: http://armaansanghera.weebly.com

Armaan Sanghera is currently a junior at ISU majoring in English and minoring in Sociology. Forever finding food on her keyboard from the night before, Armaan can also be funny . . . sometimes!

Who Do You Think You Are?:
The Effects of Internet Anonymity on Writing and Identification

Frank Macarthy

"On The Internet, Nobody Knows You're A Dog"
-Peter Steiner

What was the last movie you saw? What did you think? Before you saw the movie, did you read any reviews online? Maybe you clicked through a few pages of reviews on the *Internet Movie Database* (IMDb). Or quite possibly you wanted a little more snobbery critique and read some *Rotten Tomatoes* reviews. *Metacritic* is always there, too, with its heartfelt attempt at becoming a part of the Internet movie review canon. The options are practically unlimited. The rise of Internet culture has made sharing (wannabe) professional and unprofessional opinions almost too easy to ignore. But, the Internet also promises something a little more scandalous: anonymity.

Over the years, my fascination with film has prompted me to read all different kinds of movie reviews, both in print and online. Some of these reviews were written by noted professional critics (Roger Ebert, J. Hoberman, David Denby, etc.). Others, well, not so much. But, I always heeded the warnings and respected the rare positive review. Recently I have come to ask myself, why?

To identify A with B is to make A 'consubstantial' with B.
–Kenneth Burke

In 1950, rhetoric and composition scholar Kenneth Burke published one of his most important works: *A Rhetoric of Motives*. For Burke, "to identify A with B is to make A 'consubstantial' with B" (21). Consub . . . what? Through shared sensations, concepts, images, ideas, and attitudes, Burke argues that humans are able to understand each other, to become consubstantial. In order to become consubstantial, identities must be present. But, how can identities be present in an anonymous, digital world? Well, they can't.

So . . . what does Burke have to do with online movie reviews? Well, for one, he established a theory of identity that has remained prevalent to this day. Although he was writing before the invention of the Internet, Burke connected how we act, what we say, and what we do to how we present ourselves to others. Audience matters. This, in turn, relates back to movie reviews because it begs the question, does it matter if we identify with the reviewer?

Certain websites such as *Reddit, 4Chan, Omegle*, and *Chatroulette* (to name a few) all promote the concept of anonymous browsing and posting. So, how has the removal of identity transformed the ways in which we write? More importantly, how does anonymity affect the ways in which we, as readers, receive that information? In this article, I hope to analyze the power of writing on the Internet, especially considering the impact of online word of mouth (WOM) movie reviews have on actual box office numbers for specific films. Through this analysis, I will compare reviewers who remain anonymous to reviewers who choose to identify themselves in order to determine how anonymity transforms opinion-based writing and reception of that writing. Technology comes with a price, and the price we pay as a culture may be the price of identity.

I Don't Want To Know Who You Are. I Don't Want You To Know Who I Am.

Any sort of restriction placed on anonymity would result in a form of digital rebellion with unknown consequences.

Anonymity was a promise made by the invention of the Internet; without that anonymity, there would be (as many users would argue) a rebellion. What that rebellion would look like, I'm not so sure, but it would happen. Regardless of governmental interference or influence, there always remains a voice (or many voices) fighting for the assurance of free speech through anonymity.

This anonymous communication allows for uncommon and unpopular opinions to surface. Without the fear of any repercussions, the Internet user is able to voice what can be considered "real" and "unedited" comments on societal practices, cultural movements, and even movies. This communication is viewed as

unhampered by prejudices created by race, religion, sex, gender, and limitless other factors that Burke would argue are necessities for consubstantiality.

Anonymity isn't going anywhere. At least according to Internet users who argue for anonymous communication. Although many believe that "big brother is always watching," anonymity and its effects are felt most by the common, everyday user. Most Internet tourists encounter anonymous communication daily without hesitation or a second thought. Anonymity has become a norm on the Internet. Even communication that is based on identification (i.e. *Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn,* etc), is subject to suspicion (through problems such as false identities and "catfishing[1]"). Anonymity is expected, but not guaranteed.

To be fair, the Internet is not a completely anonymous entity. Although identity verification protocols are easily avoidable (a working e-mail account is typically the only necessity for verification), many users build an entirely "real" social identity through their profiles. But, when a digital identity is openly linked to a material identity, accountability rears its ugly head. Users are less willing to be inflammatory when their comments can be traced back to their physical person. When repercussions are removed, the actions (or in this case, the writing) transform. And not always for the better.

Anonymous communication takes on many different forms throughout online communication, but movie reviews represent a prime indicator of the power anonymity holds and how well anonymity is received by audiences. The amount of relevance these anonymous opinions hold within our culture can be investigated by examining the sway they hold at the box office.

Movie Reviews: The Good, The Bad, And The Anonymous

For some, the Internet has become nothing but a cesspool of filth, trolls[2], and lies. But many others peruse the digital aisles of the Internet without much hesitation. Regardless of how users view the Internet, it holds a great deal of power within our culture. How much power? Well, enough to sway opening weekend and overall box office numbers for specific films. Internet users and moviegoers often read online reviews to determine the worth of a specific movie and are basing their own decisions regarding whether or not to drop at least ten bucks on a night at the movies on the opinions of the anonymous.

[1]Creating a fake social networking profile in order to deceive other users of the physical identity of the user represented in the profile.

[2]"Trolls" is Internet slang for a person who intentionally starts arguments, posts inflammatory or off-topic comments, and intends to disrupt the online community in order to provoke an emotional response from other users.

WOM reviews have been argued to be the, "single most important factor for long-term success of movies," or put a little more moderately, "WOM strongly influences moviegoers' decision for a certain movie" (Kim, N. Park, and S. Park 99–100). Also, according to Chintagunta et al., "the valence of online WOM (mean user rating) has a significant and positive impact on box office earnings" (955). It has even been proven that negative reviews have a greater impact than positive reviews (Chevalier and Mayzlin). These scholars, and many others, have proven that online WOM reviews are often crucial for the success (or failure) of certain films. Regardless of the movie, online film reviews often represent both sides of the extreme polarizing opinions: it is either the best movie a reviewer has ever seen, or he/she thought it was an abominable monstrosity that is consuming the movie culture (and everything in between). Because the Internet has provided the general public a space in which they are able to voice their unadulterated opinions on any subject matter they so choose, it has become much easier to access any opinion that has been released to the digital ether that is the Internet.

After researching almost 1,000 Internet Movie Database reviews of the film *The Big Lebowski* (my personal favorite film of all time), it becomes apparent the differences that exist between anonymous postings and identified reviewers. Figure 1 is a representation of a typical posting by an identified reviewer attempting to build a specific ethos through his identity. The review is long and well-articulated with a language closely related to Standard American English (the normalized language of academic communication). This review would typically be considered similar to professional critic reviews that fill the pages of newspapers and magazines (other mediums in which identity is critical). I investigated further by searching for other reviews written by this same individual—Steve Pulaski—and in his history of almost 1,500 reviews, all were written in a similar fashion. This appears to be the common denominator of identified reviewers.

Established reviewers typically remain active in the review community and work hard to establish a professional "feel" to their reviews. For example, Pulaski's review of *The Big Lebowski* reads similarly to a professional movie critic review. Not only does Pulaski hit all of the conventions of a typical critic review (connections to past works of the directors/actors; a short, spoiler-free summary of the film's plot; a strong opinion of the film based on well-articulated reasons and evidence; and a bit of a personal touch), but his grammar, spelling, and syntax feel more "professional" than the typical anonymous reviewer. After analyzing almost 1,000 reviews for *The Big Lebowski*, it became obvious

that without a sense of accountability, digital authors often forgo basic "writing rules" for speed of creation and transfer of information. But, this style of writing also reduces the impact of the review holistically. Imagine a stranger texting you a movie review; that is the feeling these anonymous reviews generate. The more a user is able to "connect" with a reviewer, the more that user can become "consubstantial" with that reviewer. Along with a picture of the supposed reviewer, the bio page reveals even more identifying material that would educate a reader. Although Burke may argue that a short bio page does not equate to any form of consubstantiality, it is more than we should expect from websites that allow for anonymity.

Steve Pulaski Review (8 out of 10 stars)

The Coen Brothers already made a name for themselves after the release of their films like *Raising Arizona*, *Barton Fink*, and most recently *Fargo* in 1996 at the time. So when *The Big Lebowski* came out I'm sure they were all over this film…Besides the strange characters, the plot is equally as weird and is a little hard to elaborate… Both leads in this film are portrayed fantastically and are very funny when on screen alone and simultaneously. Bridges' character "The Dude" is one of the best characters in any Coen Brothers film.

When it comes to Jeff Bridges, I don't know a lot…When he gets into character with the LA slacker accent he can be a thrill to watch. He drops some funny one liners in this picture and is also accompanied greatly by John Goodman who plays Walter. When the duo appear on screen the laughs keep coming and coming and the humor rarely lets up.

The plot involves an unmotivated slacker nicknamed "The Dude" (Bridges) demands Jeffrey Lebowski (The Big Lebowski) to give him a new rug after his was urinated on by two robbers who were looking for a person by the same name as "The Dude's" (Jeffrey Lebowski). His request is declined but he is contacted again when Lebowski's trophy wife is kidnapped and after a series of events The Dude and Walter must return the ransom in order to get the wife back.

. . . *The Big Lebowski* is a highly enjoyable film. While not being what I expected, it still had a great cast and various scenes with lots of humor. I think I can say, it certainly does abide.

Figure 1: Identified Reviewer

HMW Review (1 out of 10 stars)

I had no control of the video when it was shown and due to circumstances, could not leave. The language in this movie is sickening. No one needs to hear "F" this and/or "F" that practically every sentence. What I will do is to tell people NOT to rent the movie.

huyha123 Review (1 out of 10 stars)

i have no idea why this movie got such high rate. i have read 30 reviews for other users. what i see is i need to see it at least 4 times to find its genius ideas or things.

but i am not that patient. after 2 times, really annoyed and hurt for see this stupid and hear lots of F words, i finally have to give up on it.

Figure 2: Anonymous Reviewers

On the other hand, Figure 2 represents two typical anonymous reviews that often populate the online movie review forums. Without a name and only a basic location as an identification signifier, not much is revealed as to the identity of these two reviewers. Thus, as anonymity facilitates, the reviews are much more inflammatory without much detail informing the reader as to why or how they came to their conclusions of the specific film. The language is basic with many grammatical, syntax, and spelling errors (something that "trolls" fill their comments with on purpose in order to spur reaction) and the analysis of the film is based solely on personal beliefs. For example, in Figure 2 the reviewer huyha123 opens his review with, "i have no idea why this movie got such high rate." Although the review is only five sentences long, it is filled with grammar, punctuation, and syntax errors. Another reviewer, HMW, ended his review with the statement that "What I will do is tell people NOT to rent the movie." This is a typical inflammatory statement that anonymous reviewers are prone to, considering the lack of repercussions for their writing. It is also important to mention that neither of these two reviewers have a profile picture attached to their account, removing even more possible identity markers. Characteristically, anonymous reviewers do not participate in creating as many reviews as the identified reviewers, and these two writers are no exception. huyha123 has only participated in four other reviews and HMW has only reviewed *The Big Lebowski*. Compare this with the nearly 1,500 reviews written by Pulaski and it is easy to understand the importance of creating and substantiating an identity that other users can trust in order for the review to be successful.

Both of these reviews characterize not only polarizing opinions, but also polarizing writing styles, which I believe is the result of anonymity. When a real name, photograph, and a short biography accompany a reviewer, that writer feels a stronger sense of responsibility. No longer is the writer anonymously spouting off offenses intended to irritate or anger the audience, assuming that the biographical information presented is genuine; the author is no longer anonymous and is, thus, accountable for their words. Accountability can change the way an author writes, but it can also change the way an audience reads.

"Cool Story, Bro, But I Don't Write Movie Reviews, So Why Does It Matter?"

I've spent countless hours sinking further and further into my couch while plunging into the murky depths of Netflix. Not to mention the amount of money I throw at my ever-growing movie ticket collection. I like movies. But, I don't like to tell other anonymous Internet perusing movie watchers what I thought of a movie. So, what does anonymity have to do with me and to all the other silent movie watchers like myself? Well, if you read movie reviews, almost everything.

WOM reviews have caused plenty of films to bomb at the box office. When a film is expected to be received poorly, some major movie production companies will not even allow any pre-screenings with professional movie critics, hoping that opening weekend box office numbers will make up for the myriad of expected bad reviews after the initial release. Some production companies will go as far as leaking the film for illegal download before the theater release date in order to draw some attention. But, sometimes WOM reviews can revive a film from the ever-growing forgotten film graveyard. *Fight Club*, *Office Space*, *Donnie Darko*, and, you guessed it, *The Big Lebowski*, were all box office failures according to their initial and overall ticket sales. So, why can many of us spout off line after line of Tyler Durden's anti-conformist rantings? And why is a red Swingline stapler a culturally identifiable comedy prop? Answer: word of mouth reviews. Even without the speedy pipeline of the Internet, news spreads fast. One person might enjoy a movie and tell another person about that movie. That person might watch that same movie, enjoy it as well, and tell more people about the movie. And so on, and so forth. This WOM affects the future sales and overall reception of the film holistically. But, without a computer screen to hide behind, reviews are limited to friends and well-respected critics.

When a reader is able to identify with a reviewer, or become consubstantial with a reviewer, it is more likely that the review will be successful in persuading the reader. This is why WOM reviews work so well. When we actually know the reviewer (either personally or through a collection of their other written work), it is easier to not only trust that reviewer, but to also compare our interests and

biases with theirs. Through my own experiences, I would (and still do) tend to seek out the most personally "helpful" reviews found on different review websites. These reviews are (typically) written by identified authors with whom I am familiar. Because of the identifying features in the review, I am able to better identify with the reviewers and relate my own personal beliefs with those of the author. That way, I can realize whether or not I should actually listen to the review based upon my own interests. This is something I was once

Michael Neel Review (no star rating)

The Coen brothers (Joel and Ethan) are the most innovative and, perhaps, the best filmmakers working today. Or they at least rank along side the likes of Martin Scorsese and rising director star Quentin Tarantino. Think about it: *"Blood Simple"* was the best film of 1984; *"Raising Arizona"* was the best film of 1987; *"Miller's Crossing"* was the best movie of 1990; *"Barton Fink"* was the best movie of 1991; and *"Fargo"* was the best movie of 1996. Now comes their latest effort, *"The Big Lebowski,"* which, while it isn't in quite the same league as the above films, is still one of the most thoroughly entertaining movies of 1998.

It tells the shambling story of a man named Jeff Lebowski, who calls himself The Dude (Jeff Bridges). The Dude's apartment gets broken into and a thief urinates on his rug. He finds out that the criminals were not looking for him, but looking for the OTHER Jeff Lebowski, the disabled millionaire (played by David Huddleston). That's all I can tell you. The rest is really too bizarre and complicated to put into words; but it's bizarre and complicated in the best ways of the words.

Still, what I'll remember most about *"The Big Lebowski"* is the outstanding number of utterly terrific performances. Bridges delivers the best performance of his career and probably the best of the year as a bum lie-about who just wants to be left alone. John Goodman is the real comic gem here as the forever-loudmouthed Walter, The Dude's bowling partner and best friend. Steve Buscemi co-stars as the dimwitted, bug-eyed Donny, the third bowling partner; there's a small but interestingly offbeat spot for Julianne Moore; and John Torturro stops in, as Jesus the bowler, for what is probably the best walk-on performance in years. If you are a Coen brothers fan or like humor that is distinctly offbeat, you have found your movie. As a rather avid moviegoer, I found the film to be a great excersise in pointless extremeties and respectable raunch.

Figure 3: "Helpful" Review

able to do when reviews (typically in newspapers) necessitated identification. With Roger Ebert for example, I was able to base what I knew about him through my own understanding of how he viewed a movie versus how I will view the same movie. Would he have enjoyed *Pacific Rim*?

Based on what I know about him, probably not. But, knowing that, I realize that I should not necessarily base my opinions on his opinions for this specific film because we differ when it comes to our opinions of certain movie genres. Personally, I loved *Pacific Rim*.

The late '90s were a weird few years for WOM film reviews: IMDB was sold to Amazon, Rotten Tomatoes was founded, and Metacritic was nothing more than a twinkle in the eyes of three young programmers. The Internet was a toddler, just learning to walk. As film reviews began to roll in with increasing speed, anonymity prevailed and the friendly critique became "trust a stranger." But, the trust a stranger technique does not promote consubstantiality, nor does it presuppose a solidified reason as to why we should trust these digital strangers. Identity and the ability to identify with a writer creates somewhat of a relationship between author and audience. It's a credibility, an ethos that drives a piece of writing. Anonymity may allow for unpredictable and seemingly un-punishable freedom of speech, but it doesn't promote trust. Your five-year-old cousin's review of *There Will Be Blood* might not be the most informed or reliable, how do you know that he isn't on the other end of that screen name that just wrote a (barely literate) scathing review of the film? Well, you don't. Anonymity not only changes the ways in which we write, but it also changes the ways in which we must read what is written.

It's All Fun And Games Until Someone Is Identified

Regardless of Burkean concepts of identity and consubstantiality, anonymity presents a myriad of issues facing online communities. How is one able to persuade if identity and identification are not present? Without credibility of an author, how is an audience supposed to accept a piece of writing as an attempt to sway opinions? What place does anonymity have within our culture?

Without an identity to tie a comment or review to, not only do we as an audience lose sight of an ethos that may substantiate the writing as important, but the fear of the unknown also makes a presence. The Internet functions as one of the most important tools of information delivery, while at the same time it functions

The Internet functions as one of the most important tools of education, while at the same time it functions as a congregation of immoral and unjust actions.

as a congregation of wild and unruly opinions. We must understand that online anonymity has social and cultural costs. Deception is a problem that presents itself within the realm of anonymity. From the classic "Nigerian Prince" e-mail scandal, to phishing[3] identity theft, to the increasingly more popular "catfishing," deception runs rampant throughout the digital realm. Along with the various types of deceptions are various reasons for deception. Sometimes the intentions are as simple as identity theft (credit card numbers, e-mail passwords, online bank accounts, etc.), but sometimes the reason is a little more personal. It is almost too easy to create a new "fake" Facebook account, and even something as seemingly harmless as a social network profile can cause insurmountable social damage. With the lack of extensive verification processes as previously mentioned, you can be whoever you want to be online. It is often impossible to know who is actually sitting behind the dimly lit computer screen. There is not much protection available concerning deception, so we must look after each other and ourselves.

Conclusion

It is clear that anonymity has affected the typified writing styles of specific genres. But, as the writing styles change, the audience reception changes as well. I may have only focused on movie reviews within this article, but the reviews themselves remain as a microcosm of the anonymous communication that occurs daily. Language and writing is an ever-evolving aspect of our culture. Both are affected by cultural transformations, while at the same time both affect cultural transformations. We must understand that writing evolves with our cultural norms and practices. If we do not account for these evolutions, we risk misinterpreting a new writing style or language.

Anonymity is a part of our culture. It is a staple of Internet discourse. Instead of merely accepting it, or tolerating it, we must understand how it functions as its own communicative community. What was the last good movie you saw? Before you answer, tell me a little bit about yourself . . .

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[3]An attempt by users to acquire personal information such as passwords, user names, credit card information, etc., by masquerading as a trustworthy corporation or person.

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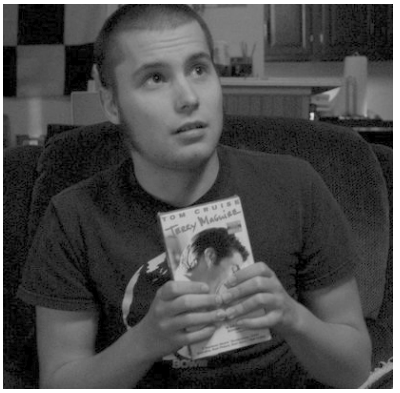

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Hehree Pawtuh en thuh Sawsuhrer's Stown: "Othering" via Speech in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*

Erin O'Connor

In J.K. Rowling's novel, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (1997), the author "others" the beloved character Hagrid via representation of dialect in direct speech. Erin O'Connor's article explores how rather than being a positive portrayal of diversity, this language choice exploits a cultural group. By marking the spelling and altering the grammar, Rowling calls attention to Hagrid's West Country accent while leaving every other "majority culture" character's speech unstigmatized. This article calls into question the technique and purpose of literary portrayal of accents and examines the manner in which Hagrid's speech draws upon stereotypes of a more rural culture of the United Kingdom in order to negatively characterize him as "dumb" in comparison to other characters, as Rowling effectively exploits this diversity to make him lovable due to the appearance of innocence.

In 1997, J.K. Rowling unleashed magic, Muggles, and Hogwarts upon the United Kingdom when *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (or *The Philosopher's Stone* in the UK) was first published. Unbeknownst at the time, this book—and its themes and ideologies—would end up becoming a worldwide bestseller, reaching audiences of every sort. Though the text presents an environment of acceptance for many audiences, one aspect of the text is not as progressive as it readily appears—and in fact, is used to marginalize a particular group. Rowling's representations of dialect in direct speech in *The Sorcerer's Stone*, particularly with Hagrid's speech, "others" his character and everything his character represents.

The creative portrayal of dialects or accents in phonetic spellings (or "sound spelling"—spelling words the way they sound when we speak) in literature is not a new tool by any means. In fact, it can be a very useful tool for authors utilizing it to create character individuation.[1] That is, the portrayals

[1]Character individuation as described by Sylvia W. Holton, but cited from Lisa Minnick's "Community in Conflict: Saying and Doing in Their Eyes Were Watching God."

of speech get used much the same way that eye color and height do—to characterize an individual. When authors create characters, the first thing they typically describe for their readers are physical characteristics so that we can get a "visual" in our minds from the words instead of from a picture. The attributes that authors tend to describe to create the most vivid of characters are very sensory, like hair color, instead of more intangible personality traits, such as emotion. This leads authors to describe what a reader can see, touch, hear, smell, and taste before the more dynamic and difficult to describe characteristics such as how the character *feels* about an issue. Characters are described by their hair color and texture, for example, because it creates an image in the reader's mind not only of what the character looks like, but also because it creates an identity when the reader makes a connection between the physical attribute and certain social characteristics based on that physical feature. For example, a character described as "having a tan" will call to mind several different social identities based not only on how the character looks, but on what "having a tan" implies about the character. It could mean that the character originally has a lighter complexion, or likes to be out in the sun, or that she/he works outdoors, or that she/he lives in a warm climate, or that the character is concerned with his/her appearance, etc. All because of one physical characteristic, the reader can make several assumptions about who this character is. And, much like visual physical features, auditory features evoke social personae as well. Accents, like voices, are a highly physical experience, and they are strongly attached to social images and ideas. And like many visual features, auditory features are often more readily noticeable in other people than in ourselves.

Language Stigma

Take a moment to consider an accent—any accent—and think of a feature that you recognize from it, a feature that is *different* than your own speech. Perhaps a pronunciation of a word that you think sounds "funny." Now, consider why that feature stands out to you. Speech variation is a dynamic process that occurs naturally and mostly without force. But once accents and dialects within a language become associated with certain social characteristics (such as socioeconomic status, gender, race, etc . . .) their features either become stigmatized or are left unstigmatized. Most often, unstigmatized features go unnoticed, as is the case with mainstream culture. It is, for example, unstigmatized in western culture for a woman to wear pants, and so this goes unnoticed, but it is stigmatized for a male to wear a skirt, and therefore it will call attention. Accents work the same way. As sociolinguist Asif Agha posits: because of unstigmatized features, "[n]ot everybody is felt

to have an accent. [. . .] In a common type of case, accent is what *other* people have" (232 emphasis mine). Due to these features being different from our own, we notice them, and because of *who* uses certain speech patterns based on geography or community, these features are "marked."[2]

In Britain, what's known as *Received Pronunciation* (RP) is the unstigmatized or "standard" accent and the "great majority of native speakers of this accent are of middle-class or upper-class origin, educated in private schools and [. . .] universit[ies]" (Roach 239).[3] One of the most popular phrases associated with RP is *talking proper* (236), revealing the notion that speaking any other variety of English is *improper*. RP is widely supported as the "correct" way to speak in the UK and is assumed to be the "default" or the foundational variety of English—like Midwestern varieties of American English are often assumed to be the default in the US, while other varieties are considered "deviations." In other words, when a British author writes with standardized spellings, the accent that is assumed is being represented in the writing is RP, unless told otherwise.

Now, how this language value gets utilized in *The Sorcerer's Stone* can be viewed clearly by an examination of the much-loved character, Rebeus Hagrid, "Keeper of Keys and Grounds at Hogwarts" (Rowling 48). Arguably the series' most beloved character, Hagrid is an unkempt giant and a heartwarming, loyal friend of the protagonist, Harry Potter. His characterizations generally center around his massive size, his disheveled appearance and his love for animals, and he generates a large presence in the first book (not just due to his size). Yet in comparison to the impact Hagrid makes on readers, his physical descriptions and actions take up a relatively small portion of his appearances within the text. So where is this large presence coming from? As is noticeable when Hagrid's request for tea comes out as, "I'd not say no ter summat a bit stronger if yeh've got it" (48), his personality comes mainly from his speech.

The West Country

Hagrid's origin is never directly referred to, but the accent he is given is what is called a West Country accent, representing the different counties on the west side of England, including Cornwall. This accent is often stigmatized as a "provincial" one, associated with more undereducated or agricultural communities. Quite often, the West Country accent is rated by speakers to be

[2]"Marked" refers to being socially branded as "different." For example, a language feature such as "G-dropping" on the end of the word *lightning* so that it sounds like *lightnin'* is marked as different. This is something that is not inherent in the language itself, but is applied to the language based on social stigma.

[3]RP is commonly called—and more likely familiar to American audiences as—the *Queen's English* and *Public School Pronunciation* (Agha 236), even though these terms have a slightly different implication and the former is more Victorian in style.

culturally on the same level as Cockney, the East Londoner urban accent that is highly stigmatized, and both are rated as culturally inferior to RP and its more educated-associated relatives.[4]

This accent is represented within the text by the use of phonetic or "marked" spellings, and also by grammatical features associated with West Country speech. For example, this is both heard and seen when Hagrid says: "I'm not sayin' nothin'," in response to constant pestering by the protagonist (197). In this line, Hagrid's speech features "marked" spelling and also the use of a double negative. To examine this use of dialect, I conducted a study in which I analyzed each of Hagrid's lines of dialogue. Within *The Sorcerer's Stone*, Hagrid has 221 opportunities to speak, consisting of over 530 lines of direct speech in dialogue, combining both complete sentences and fragments.[5] He is the only character in the text with consistent and repeated portrayals of dialect by marked phonetic spelling. Fifty-eight percent of the time, Hagrid is portrayed with phonetically spelled lines, resulting in the reader "hearing" Hagrid's West Country accent so that she/he is aware that the character is not speaking with RP.

For my study, in order for a line (complete sentence or fragment) to be considered in dialect via phonetic spelling, Hagrid must be portrayed with a phonetically spelled word at least once within that line.[6] Even though that leaves 42 percent of Hagrid's lines free from phonetic spelling, a large amount of these non-accented lines consist of one- or two-word phrases, often proper nouns, and so Hagrid doesn't have room enough for the opportunity to speak with an accent. If those instances were removed from the data, then Hagrid's amount of lines with dialect would in fact be even higher.

By comparison, every other character in the book is portrayed with standardized English spellings (which is, again, believed to depict RP when in writing by default) except for two noticeable but minor instances where two characters, one Cockney and one Irish, each generate a single line with phonetic spellings—not coincidently, these accents are highly stigmatized in the UK. Besides that, Rowling portrays only scattered, insignificant instances when characters will speak with a phonetically spelled word. And in those

[4]The study this information comes from was conducted by Howard Giles in 1970, but I gathered this information from Asif Agha's "The Social Life of Cultural Value" (240-41). Giles' study involved questionnaires given to citizens that prompted them to consider what values they placed on Mainstream RP, Near-RP, Provincial accents, and Urban accents.

[5]This data is mine. My counting methods are non-computational and subject to human error.

[6]Additionally, many of the accented lines are long, complex sentences and consist of several phonetically spelled words. For example, when Hagrid gives Harry his birthday cake, he says, "Got summat fer yeh here—I mighta sat on it at some point, but it'll taste all right" (47). This line contains four marked spellings but only gets tallied as a single line, while a fragment consisting of one standardized spelling also gets tallied as a line, therefore the data misrepresents just how often Hagrid's speech is phonetically spelled.

cases, the percentage is so low and inconsistent that it doesn't make an impact. An example of this is in the three situations where Harry's speech is marked, such as his use of *'til* instead of *until*, *d'you* instead of *do you*, and *dunno* instead of *don't know*—all of which occur only once, and all in separate lines.[7]

Marginalizing Hagrid

Though Hagrid's accent is represented by *both* phonetic spellings and grammatical features, Rowling relies on the spelling far more. Again, phonetically spelled or "sound-spelled" lines account for roughly 58% of Hagrid's speech, while only 21% of his lines consist of grammatical features of the West Country accent that deviate from RP. There are several reasons why this proves problematic, the simplest of which is that by showing Hagrid's speech as phonetically spelled to portray accent on such a large scale—without portraying any other characters that way—Hagrid is visually marginalized.

A little too frequently, authors dismiss the effect phonetic spellings have on their characters, and, in particular, they ignore their visual marginalization. When a word is deliberately misspelled on the page for the phonetic effect, this often creates an association of the character with *actual* misspelling rather than with only a pronunciation difference. If the word *you* is repeatedly spelled as *yeh* on the page, what is to stop the reader, especially a young reader, from thinking that Hagrid would actually spell the word this way? While the phonetic spelling isn't inherently wrong or even a "misspelling," readers might interpret it as such because it deviates from the spelling they expect and see in the dialogue of other characters. Though it might seem obvious to some that placing value on spelling is a social judgment on par with judging someone's accent, it's not always readily apparent to readers. Spelling, like athletic talent, gets better with practice, but it is a talent nonetheless. It has less to do with intelligence and more with diligence and a natural ability to recognize patterns, but a common assumption is that difficulty with standardized spelling means a lack of intelligence.

Several things occur from a situation like this. Firstly, we need to ask why there is moral value placed on the concept of "correct" spelling at all, when in fact standardized spelling was created simply to make communicating with one another more effective and readily achievable. However, that idea is not widely taught and, therefore, we've ended up in a society where high value is placed on "correctness" without ever understanding the origin of

[7]Rowling 227, 254, 277, respectively. Interestingly, these examples all occur within fifty pages of each other and nowhere else in the book. Perhaps Rowling used these variances during this period of writing, and not in other periods.

standardized spelling and grammar, as if you are a lesser being if you have difficulty with spelling. From this, many readers fall in line with the dominant ideology that spelling correctly correlates with high intelligence and therefore judge characters accordingly. This is not to say that there is anything moral or superior about the concept of "correct" spelling, but regardless, there is value placed on it, and because of this, Rowling's use of dialect can be interpreted as consequently marginalizing Hagrid.

It's important to note that Hagrid demonstrates that he can fit into the visual world of RP, however. In three instances, Hagrid's written word is depicted instead of his direct speech, and while he still features West Country grammar, in all of them he utilizes standardized spelling.[8] But even this concept is quickly overshadowed when, in questioning Hagrid about Voldemort's name, Harry asks, "Could you write it down?" to which Hagrid replies, "Nah—can't spell it" (54). Rowling's direct portrayal of Hagrid's difficulty with spelling only emphasizes the effect that his phonetic spellings have on the reader due to social assumptions about education and class. As a result, not only is Hagrid being associated with misspelling, but Rowling also makes a connection with the West Country accent and misspelling, both creating and maintaining the assumption that individuals with the West Country accent lack education.

Other assumptions this situation creates are, again, that speakers of RP don't *have* an accent, and also that they can spell just fine since all of their dialogue is standardized spelling. As mentioned already, everyone has an accent; it is only that unstigmatized accents get associated with correct spelling because they are considered "normal" or the default and therefore spelled the way they are pronounced. This is hugely untrue, because if it is English, it is most likely not phonetic at all. A great example of this can be seen in the language prejudices present in the US. Many of the Midwestern, middle-class varieties of American English are considered standard (i.e. SAE[9]), and other varieties are considered different, or more often, ignorant. For instance, this stigma is seen in the highly controversial use of *ax* for *ask*, associated with African American English. The prejudice against *ax* was highlighted on an episode of the *Oprah Winfrey Show* in 1989 when a caller remarked, "what makes me feel that Blacks tend to be ignorant is that they fail to see that the word is spelled A-S-K, not A-X."[10] Firstly, this example reveals that because of the pronunciation of *ax*, it is assumed that speakers don't *realize* how the word is spelled, which is untrue. And secondly, this reveals that the caller

[8]Rowling 52, 135-6, 234.

[9]Standard American English.

[10]The Oprah Winfrey Show as cited in Lippi-Green's "The Real Trouble with Black Language."

doesn't believe that she pronounces words differently than they are spelled, which is beautifully pointed out when Rosina Lippi-Green explains that:

> the authority cited here [by the caller] is the written language: *aks* is wrong because we write *ask*. This kind of criticism is particularly illogical, given the large-scale lack of correspondence between symbol and sound in English. The call-in viewer, citing the authority of the written language, provided excellent proof of this. She spoke what is commonly considered *SAE (albeit with a strong Chicago accent), and like others who speak unstigmatized varieties of American English, she did not aspirate the /h/ in 'what'; she pronounced spelled /spelt/, and she left out the /n/ and /t/ in 'sentence.' (191)

Thus, as is also seen in the standardized spellings of RP in the text, speakers of unstigmatized varieties of English, both in the US and Britain, believe that because their variety is normal that they must be speaking the way words are spelled, when in fact, they are usually not.

In England, for instance, a prominent feature often associated with RP is the use of triphthongs.[11] This shows up in words like *fire, inspire*, and *society* and then also in words like *hour* and *power* (Jowitt 36). As triphthongs, these words in RP sound close to and look like *fawya, inspawya*, and *sosawyatee*, and then *awah* and *pawah* when in phonetic spellings, thus revealing that there are ample opportunities for RP to be portrayed in text via phonetic spellings. However, Rowling never utilizes this tool apart from a rare truncation, such as Harry's use of *'til*, because it is assumed that these RP speakers *are* pronouncing words like standardized spelling.

Hagrid's Grammar

Now, had Rowling gone through her entire book and portrayed every accent in dialect by phonetic spellings, the text would probably no longer have been suited for children as it would be highly difficult to read. Also, the creative portrayals of dialect then become the purpose of the book, rather than the story. On the other hand, completely standardizing Hagrid's spelling wouldn't remove the dialect entirely either because, as noted before, Hagrid's speech is marked by grammar in addition to phonetic spellings, so his speech would still represent the West Country accent. Features such as double negatives, the use of *meself* instead *myself*, using personal plural pronouns (*we, us*) when referring to himself, and using the pronouns *we, they*, and *you* with the

[11]The IPA format of the popular triphthongs in RP are /aɪə/ and /aʊə/ – /inspaɪə/ and /paʊə/

verb *was* all signify this.[12] Therefore, removing the phonetic spellings does not eliminate the "othering" present in the representation of the West Country accent—because the grammar is stigmatized too.

Because West Country grammar works *differently* than RP on occasion, the common assumption is that it is *incorrect*, thereby suggesting that the speaker is undereducated. But the very word *grammar* implies rules and patterns in word and sentence structure that need to be followed in order to accurately convey meaning (Green 79-81). For instance, if a speaker of West Country uses a double negative, it is still possible to get that double negative wrong, implying that there is a system in which it is right. This reveals that if Hagrid knows how to use the double negative within his community and how not to, he is in fact more educated than an outsider (someone from majority culture, for instance) on how to use this feature. Unfortunately, because of the social value placed on "correctness" and the idea that there is only *one* form of English that is correct, readers are likely to assume that he is simply lacking in knowledge.

Speech and Descriptions Combined

So when is this language stigma manifesting itself? Consistently throughout the text, Hagrid is associated with animals and as being very animal-like. He drinks vast amounts and frequently, he lacks wealth, and he is often portrayed as naïve, or even dumb. Additionally, it is made known that Hagrid was kicked out of school when he was thirteen (59), furthering the undereducated, naïve persona. And notably, Hagrid is the only adult character that is treated like an equal, or even an inferior, by children within the novel.[13] Not oddly enough, all of these "unsophisticated" and provincial characterizations are associated with the West Country accent. And these characterizations not-so-coincidently are mostly communicated through dialogue, as with the case where Hagrid tells Harry he can't spell *Voldemort*.

But it is not always the accent itself that marks Hagrid's speech as West Country. When, for instance, Rowling has Hagrid name a ferocious, three-headed dog *Fluffy* (192), she is utilizing a West County stereotype to make the other participants in the conversation aware of Hagrid's naíveté but also his warmth. According to Carol Myers-Scotton's *Markedness Model*, the "links [made]

[12]Just as I did with the spelling, I analyzed each line (complete sentence and fragment) for standardized English grammar and features that are associated with West Country English grammar, such as regularizing subject-verb agreement ("you was"). Note, standardized subject-verb agreement, in fact, often has irregular patterns in English.

[13]See Rowling 303, where Harry scolds Hagrid like a child.

between the use of a linguistic variety and its effects in a certain situation" (23) get used to negotiate an idea. In this case, Hagrid's wording is carefully chosen to mark his speech and make it noticeable, thus enhancing the connection between his character and the simple yet lovable West Country stereotype.

Conclusion

Consequently, Hagrid gets "othered" by his visual accent and grammar, but also by the content of his dialogue and character descriptions being associated with his accent, creating a sort of chicken-and-egg problem. Does Hagrid act the way he does because of his accent, or does he have his accent because of the way he acts?[14] Now, obviously these sorts of characteristics are likely to exist to some extent. It's probable that in all of West England there is at least one individual who dropped out of school, loves animals, likes to drink, and is naïve—but this is also a stereotype regularly associated with West Country individuals and their accent, regardless of who they actually are. Therefore, out of all the characters to be portrayed as animal-like, naïve, and undereducated, should Rowling have portrayed *this* character with a West Country accent and continued to perpetuate the stereotype associated with it? Should texts also continue to portray females as loving pink and flowers, and minorities as the only characters with "accents"? Perhaps Rowling simply intended to be "accurate" by portraying the standard RP-speaking English boy, Harry, with unstigmatized spelling and portraying Hagrid's language as stigmatized because they *are* unstigmatized and stigmatized, respectively, in real life. And since the narration is through Harry's eyes, then he is appropriately not aware of his own accent but is very aware of Hagrid's *different* one. So is this simply not good "authentic" writing by utilizing the longstanding tradition of representing "standard" accents with standardized spellings and marginalized accents with phonetic spellings?

Ignoring this portrayal would be letting Rowling off the hook, and suggests that it's perfectly fine to continue portraying stigmatized language varieties as stigmatized and unstigmatized ones as "normal." It suggests that it's okay to marginalize and exploit groups of people for having a different accent and to continue pretending that there really is a "normal" accent, when there is not. Clearly, this decision can be made more easily with hindsight, as many authors are probably not even aware of the language prejudices they utilize—just as many speakers of unstigmatized varieties of English truly believe

[14]Extra food-for-thought: J.K. Rowling is originally from a West Country town near Bristol, only further complicating the reasoning behind her portrayal of the stereotype, especially by bringing in the factor of authority and responsibility. If Hagrid is portrayed the way he is out of love, does that remove the language prejudice?

they themselves don't have an accent. Therefore, instead of idealistically recommending that we rewind, recommending that every character had been portrayed with phonetic spellings, or that they were all given standardized spellings to be more equal, or that everyone's grammar is accurately portrayed, a better move is to question the purpose behind portrayals of dialect in the first place. Ultimately, portraying everyone's utterances in the same manner, all normalized or all not, "humanizes rather than idealizes" language and the individuals using it (Minnick 132). And with the purpose of publishing in mind, authors should always consider who they are "othering" and the stereotypes they are perpetuating via language portrayals.

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Erin O'Connor received her Master's degree in English from Western Michigan University (with an emphasis on linguistics) and currently teaches Freshman English Composition. A native of Southwest Michigan, if you don't find her teaching, writing or daydreaming, she is most likely diving face-first into the latest mainstream series of any medium or doing a linguistic analysis on some poor, unsuspecting novel–though it's all done with love.

We wrote an unpublishable article (that you can still read): This is not that article, but without that article, this one would not exist, or A Story of Collaborative Writing: How Technology and Unchecked Arrogance Led to an Unpublishable Debacle...

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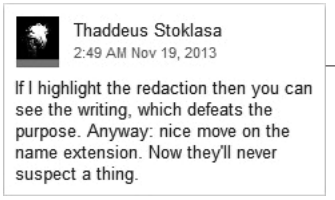
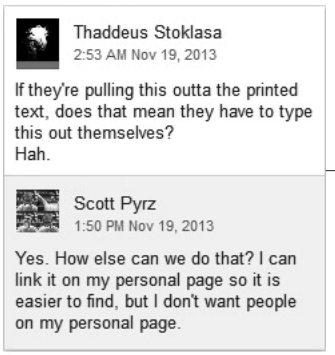
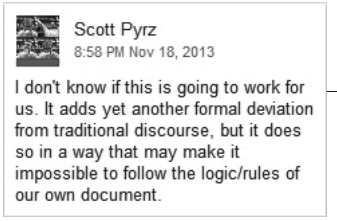


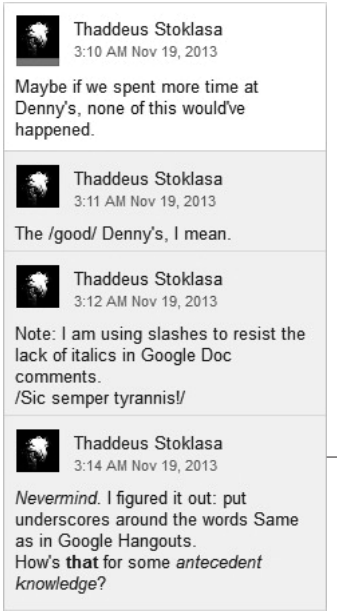
In this article, Thaddeus Stoklasa and Scott Pyrz, or Scott Pyrz and Thaddeus Stoklasa (depending on who you like/respect more) ruminate on the ways in which the technological and partnership choices one makes when doing collaborative writing significantly impact the successes and failures of that collaborative work. Drawing on the experience of collaborating to create an unpublishable article, the two discuss the technological and rhetorical choices they made that led to both the successes and (far more often) the failures of their article.[1]

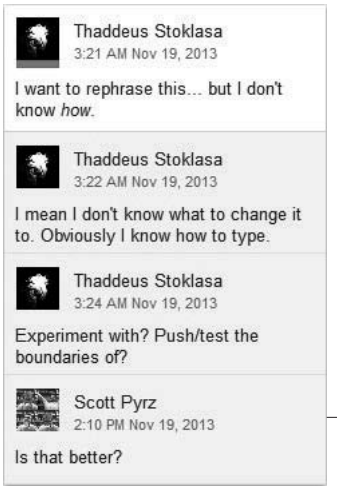


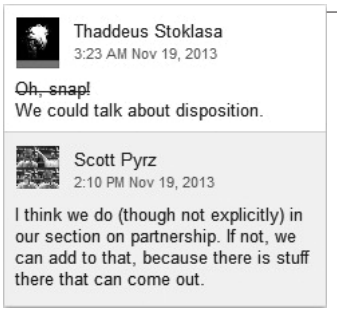
Note: In order to have a (relatively) complete understanding of this article, we suggest readers look at (if not read) our previous attempt. It can be found at: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1gXYfAdMvzUimFNEmTilutfyaCdfhuow-f7OJ-nj356A/edit.

[1]A note about the fonts used in this document: in order to distinguish between authors and in hopes of revealing some behind-the-scenes workings of our writing, each writer will use a different font.









An Introduction in Three Parts

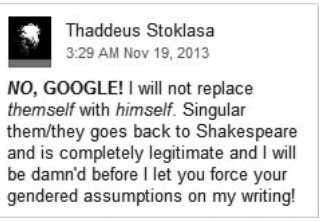
In our previous attempt to write this article (well, not *this* article, but an article like it) we allowed the similarity of our personalities and our affinities for technological play to significantly influence the content of our article, and as such, we created something that was both unreadable and not appropriate for the medium of publication. What follows is our attempt to rectify those shortcomings in an equally interesting way.

"We should write an article about writing an article!" That's what I said. Or something near to that, anyway. Metacognition is a big part of how I teach and think and generally go about wasting time in the world. But when you have *two* people who think this way, and multiply that by technology that enables them to push this impulse to the breaking point, you end up with editors who very politely inform you that your work cannot *physically exist*.

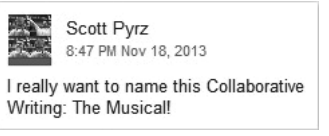
Collaborative writing is an integral part of literate practice (both in the humanities/sciences and in the private/academic realms). As such, exploring the ways in which collaboration informs/influences/affects/alters/etc. individual writing practices/experiences/conceptions is a valuable undertaking. We think that in order to understand how documents (read: genre artifacts) are created, thought of, implemented, etc. through collaboration there should be more transparent representation and discussion of how collaborative practices actually work. By focusing on the two main issues that plagued our original attempt to create a *Grassroots* article, we seek to articulate (and complicate) how collaborative practices offer opportunities for success/innovation/growth as well as opportunities for failure/miscommunication/etc. The most significant successes and failures of our previous article stemmed from our desire to play and experiment with technology, and our similar dispositions and personalities.

Collaborative writing (really any collaborative undertaking) is inherently complex. The complexity of collaboration is (partially) what makes it such a worthwhile and common occurrence, but this complexity also leads to a number of potential issues. Even an individual writer isn't just one inert thing: people are full of contradictory impulses and complicated inner lives that nobody outside that individual will ever be fully aware of (and assuming that the individual

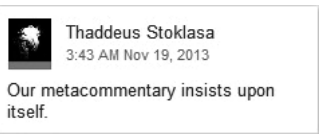
is fully aware of themself is still pushing it). So to a certain extent, this article can be read as a discussion of managing (or failing to manage) the individual as much as managing (see: previous parentheses) a collaboration.



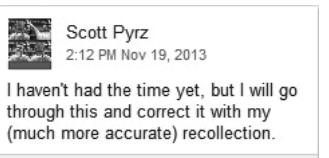
Collaborative Writing: The Activity

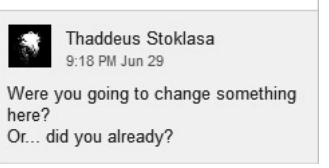


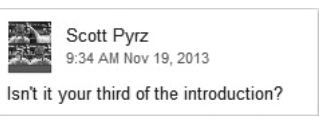
Most of this article (as well as its ancestor) was composed in different rooms of different buildings in different towns, via a shared document in Google Drive. In person, we sketched an outline of major touchstones (some of these would describe particular content areas, but quite a few were just reminders to include particular jokes or asides) that took the form of a brief bulleted list.



But if you want a chronological tale, it was something[2] like this: I said that thing, from up in my half of the introduction about writing an article about an article. It appealed to us both and seemed a good way of keeping ourselves engaged with the project[3]. I recall a meeting at Denny's (and not the good Denny's, unfortunately): we sat in a booth near the door, laptops on the table alongside the remains of breakfast-for-dinner (eating takes precedence over work; we are in grad school, after all[4]). This was the only time during the production of either article that we were both on our computers in the same place at the same time.







It's important to clarify that I have no specific recollection of what was hashed out post biscuits and gravy and pancakes and sausage and so forth. We had the first part of the title fairly early, and a lot of the structural plans (alternating colors, striking out [and eventually redacting] our names, footnotes and side comments galore), as well as an endnote explaining to our prospective editors that we wanted to incorporate their

[2]I reserve the right to obfuscate, approximate, or outright fabricate my own version of the truth in these matters. Because all writers do. And so do all people, for that matter. Whether they say so (to either themselves or others) or not.

[3]Whenever you have a choice, research/write what you're interested in. When you don't have a choice, find a way. If you really absolutely have no choice and are just crushingly uninterested, you have probably given up too soon. And anyway, what're you doing being so disinterested in things? Don't give me "gen. eds." as an excuse, either. "Oh, no! I'm being taken out of my pre-determined comfort zone!" Y'know what? I'm not talking to you anymore, hypothetical reader. You're getting on my nerves.

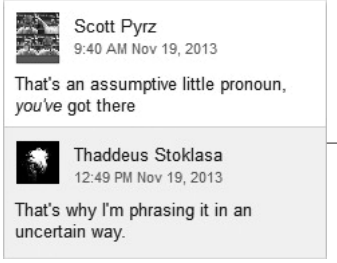
[4]Though the same applies for undergrads. Eat something similar to regular meals and invest in vitamins/hand sanitizer, lest you succumb to Dorm Death (or worse, pass it along to your instructors).

comments into the article in the next draft. As far as specifics go, we didn't do a lot early on.

Separate, percolate, collate. Most of the writing on the actual article took place in late September and early October, in separate houses and apartments respectively. Middle of the night (though how the pair of us define that is slightly different), hammering away at keyboards connected wirelessly to other servers in other places, connected across town by way of Google only knows where.

It might be a fair assessment to say that we knew (or at least suspected) early on that the article wouldn't physically work in the *Grassroots* journal. Sure, the colored text could be replaced with alternating fonts (as we've done with this article), but the comments? As central to what we wanted from our article as they were monstrously unwieldy (more and more so as they continued to pile up one on the other, stretching far beyond the boundaries of the individual pages they were meant to comment upon).

And what was it we wanted from our article? To show you (whoever you happen to be, person[s] reading this), what writing looks like. When you generally look at a piece of writing (here or in a newspaper or on the Internet [unless, of course, you're reading this on the Internet[5], in which case that was redundant]), it has an enforced cohesion to it. It pretends to be one thing. But it isn't that. It is many things from many times influenced by many people. It was almost certainly not written in the order presented, nor is what's written the exact way the writer(s) imagined it.



There's a certain irony in that we actually *did* end up with a document that reflected what we wanted to do. Our plan was to write something that couldn't function as the thing it was supposed to be (though we didn't think of it that way at the time, or at least I don't *think* we did). There are, after all, reasons that most articles don't look like this temporally fractured, metadiegetically-littered, unpublishable wreck. The mind likes stable patterns, both visually and logically. People expect uniformity, text that's all one kind of text[6] and is arranged in a predictable pattern down the page, sameness

[5]Which you might be if you're a) myself or my collaborator, b) one of the editors, or c) living in a future time where this has been archived in the ISU Writing Program webpage (which is assuming quite a lot, but I'm an optimist).

[6]Same font, size, color, voice, tone, etc.

so simple to read that the very act of reading, of decoding symbols into sounds and/or ideas, happens without a conscious effort. But our article breaks nearly all those structural conventions, looping back on itself in an infinite loop of self-reference. Whatever else can be said of our writing, reading it takes *effort*. Skimming is not an option.

Technological Play: Down the Rabbit Hole

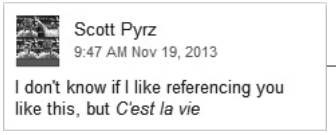
One of the reasons our original article failed was our desire to utilize and play with (read: explore/push the boundaries of) technological means of collaboration/production. By attempting to push the boundaries of technological production and distribution[7], our article exemplifies how collaborative practices function, but it also highlights the ways in which these technologies can be problematic.

Take, for instance, our use of footnotes, which are now much easier to include (something that was terribly irksome with previous technology, since there were issues of spacing and planning that I am grateful to never have to deal with [partially due to my inane inability to plan]). The removal of this barrier has (unfortunately) led to both of us wanting to play with presentation in a way that (often) negatively affects the reception[8] of our work. While this is not close to the biggest issue that our original article faced, it does serve as an appropriate example of how we are unable to tell each other no. Instead of either of us attempting to limit our footnotes, we entered a metaphorical arms race. By attempting to outpace each other's metacommentary, we carpet-bombed our article with marginalia and footnotes, effectively rendering it a radioactive mess of unfollowable digressions and markings.

If you need more evidence of how working with somebody who not only appreciates your technological and representational eccentricities but openly encourages them can negatively affect your collaborative efforts, look no further than the unnecessary and unduly fragmented and difficult formatting of this article's (and the original article's) presentation, including (but not limited to) my excessive use of parenthetical phrases (that may or may not add relevant information) and parenthetical phrases inside of parenthetical phrases (that, again, may [or may not] add relevant information to the discussion). Or

[7] *Production* and *distribution* are used here in a sense heavily informed by CHAT (i.e. Cultural-Historical Activity Theory). Production refers to all the technology and actions involved directly in the production of a text. Distribution is used to describe how texts spread through the world and who they spread to.

[8] *Reception* is also used in the CHAT sense (see footnote 7). It refers to how the audience [receives/interacts with/takes up] the text, how they respond, and what actions (if any) they take with it.



look at Thaddeus' tendency to use colloquial ramblings and lengthy digressions[9] wherever they'll fit (or, if they won't fit, then wherever I decide to make room regardless of constraint because you aren't the boss of me[10]), as some hypocritical attempt to represent myself on the page. Trying to synthesize a collective voice in a collaborative work will almost invariably (to my mind anyway [though it might just be paranoia talking]) be closer to one author than the other. So we went the other way, being the most overt and distractingly individual versions of ourselves that the available technology would allow.

The impact of technology on the representational aspect of these texts (our original article and this article) cannot be overplayed. Without the combination of multicolored text, different font styles, cloud storage, sidebar comments, and various other little bits and bobs, these articles would have had the "polished" appearance readers are conditioned to expect of collaborative writing efforts or, (more likely, they might never have come to exist in the first place). This is not to say this crazed, meta, mash-up style is necessarily new or unique. Rather, these elements tend to stay on the other side of publication. The technology at hand (in this case, Google™Docs) allows the text to formally represent the kind of back-and-forth inherent in any kind of collaborative undertaking. This representation of the back-and-forth is, without question, necessary to add transparency to our discussion of collaboration, since it explained the almost constant exchange of concerns/ideas/additions/subtractions that usually occurs behind-the-scenes, but it was also so profuse that both the core text and the marginalia could not appear on the same page, essentially marking our inability to control our impulses and to fully understand the physical constraints of the genre in which we were/are working. Our inability to fully understand/acknowledge the genre constraints we had to deal with drove us into a content overflow. Our pop culture riddled-asides, digressions, and marginalia, created an article of self-referencing, self-perpetuating, and (possibly) never-ending conversations that (while working in parallel) never coalesced into any traditionally understood meaning.

Partnership: Where Two is Not Better Than One

Another issue that plagued our original article is the ways in which our personalities worked together, in that we are so aligned in our goals/

[9]My 495 word footnote (a.k.a. footnote 15) in the unpublished article was probably my proudest achievement in this sort of jackassery. But sadly, I must curb that impulse here.

[10]Yes, even the Editors. You may be the boss of the text that is allowed to appear in the *Grassroots Journal*, but I remain an independent entity. My consciousness, such as it is, is yet my own!

dispositions/approaches that we were unable to successfully limit practices that effectively detracted from the article. Generally, we think that having collaborative partners who think similarly and who have similar goals would be a benefit, but this is not always the case; too much alignment can (and for us did) lead to unchecked use of difficult and questionable rhetorical practices as well as problematic textual relationships between the two of us.

We enabled one another to an unhealthy degree. But there's an important point of clarification needed here. There was nothing inherently wrong with the article as we planned to write it. There are plenty of ways to resist the traditional structures of a publication and still manage to be published. No, the problem is rooted in the enabling. Without a certain amount of boundary-drawing, any project can fall apart. Anybody who has lost hours browsing randomly on Wikipedia knows that any one particular topic can lead you in any number of other directions, across innumerable disciplines and places and times. Except instead of reading, you're making the article instead of just reading it. Also, there are two of you, and you're different people (except for all the aspects you share), and neither one knows how to work the brakes.

Scott Pyrz
8:11 PM Jun 29

Good point, buddy. I was making it seem as though our methods we the problem, which really is not the case. The problem was that we couldn't stop ourselves or the other from taking the conversation in any direction or form they wanted.

Thaddeus Stoklasa
5:12 AM Nov 19, 2013

Is there a specific word for that?

Scott Pyrz
2:13 PM Nov 19, 2013

I don't think so? Wikiflaneur?

Thaddeus Stoklasa
5:39 AM Nov 19, 2013

I'd say this is a mixed metaphor, but there's not actually a *mix*. It has an ending and no beginning.

Thaddeus Stoklasa
5:08 AM Nov 19, 2013

Are… are you Frankenwriting with your *past-self?*

Scott Pyrz
10:02 AM Nov 19, 2013

Yes, I am. Though, so are you.

Thaddeus Stoklasa
12:52 PM Nov 19, 2013

Yeah… pretty much all of it is. But don't tell *them* that.

Scott Pyrz
2:02 PM Nov 19, 2013

I'm actually kind of glad you responded like that. This again is an example of us going to far. I get it. You learned how to put **bold** or *italicized* words in the comments. Now stop it.

Scott Pyrz
8:13 PM Jun 29

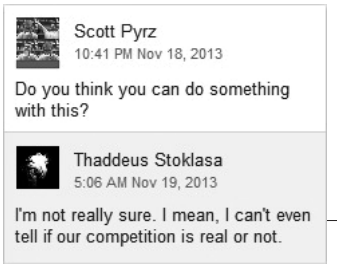
Now that I think about it, this is of our biggest undoings. We were young postmodernist, trying to prove how clever we could be.

Suffice it to say, that there was a (probably) excessive amount of gloating when I realized that I had been singled out and quoted in the editorial response to our previous article (and thus validated and privileged) in the response to the proposal. This exemplifies how the reception[11] of a text is problematized when it is explicitly collaborative, because this kind of reception (how a reader privileges specific portions of the text) creates an inherent competition between the creators of the text. This is partly why instead of limiting our formal and linguistic departures from traditionally accepted modes we overly pursued complex/confusing methods. Our desires to not be the forgotten writer meant that we approached each sentence with more awareness of our stylistic choices for clarity, originality, and audience than if only a single voice/ideas were present in the text, since we were/are acutely aware that including any ideas/phrases that are unclear or insignificant in some way risks one of us becoming the forgotten author—the one who toils in self-

[11]See footnote 8.

denigrating and depressing obscurity. Though, this also raises ethical issues about who is able to claim what in a collaborative piece: are we both allowed to claim anything presented in our collective work as our own? An answer is that the reader doesn't know whose words/ideas they are privileging are, so it doesn't matter who gets to claim the praise or criticism, but this answer falls apart when we consider the multiple spaces in which collaborative writing functions. In a professional setting (i.e. a collaborative presentation) it seems wrong (or at least inappropriate) to claim praise or blame for ideas/words that were not your own, but in other settings (for instance, this article) it seems more appropriate for me to accept praise and blame for words/ideas that I didn't write.

These uncomfortable feelings about observation (and inherently judgment) greatly affected our production of both articles, by increasing the potential for competition and by limiting our willingness to engage in some of the richest practices of our writing and thought (since if I know I'm being watched I may start to doubt myself[12] when I let my cursor hover over a single word for minutes while I dig through the OED for a sufficiently better replacement [What if my observer thinks I'm not working or that I have a pathetically, and laughably, inadequate vocabulary?] and I think we were both unwilling to edit and rewrite as much as we normally would since we wanted to keep everything we wrote in the document, making it messy and uneditable). The pressures of being observed and working collaboratively led to an increased and hidden tension in both texts.



The (In)Visible Hand of the Editor(s)

A week or so past when we submitted our article (the previous one, not the one you're reading now), we received three letters in response: one from The Editorial Team as a collective, one from an unknown party calling themselves Editor One, and a third from the similarly *nom de plumed*[13] Editor Two.

I can't speak for my collaborator (though I intermittently do regardless), but I found these comments a touch disheartening. Especially the one that suggested "cutting back on the meta-commentary," which was presented

[12]Hey! This is what my giant footnote in the other article was about. Except with *Star Wars* references and therefore inherently better.

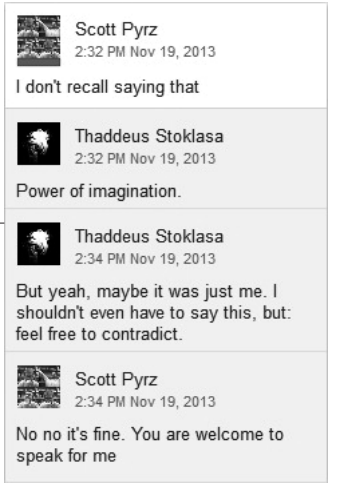
[13]And yes, I know that isn't correct French. What do you want? I took French in High School. I've been several entirely different people since then.

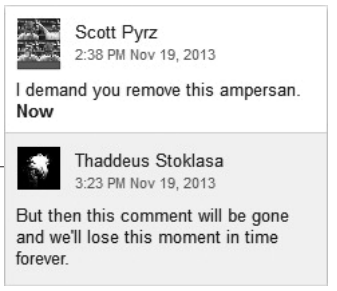
in that united voice of The Team. Both of us seemed to agree that we hated (at least portions, of not the entirety of) our article but also thought it was amazing. This fed into a response something akin to, "Hey, nobody can rip on our work but us[14]!"

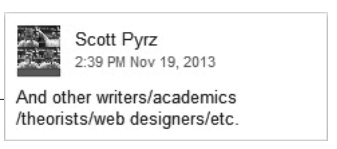
Much of their commentary was focused on trying to carve something legible out of our textual behemoth. The Collective of Editors wrote that the "article as it stands now needs some reshaping and revision in order for it to better fit the scope and aims for the journal," with Editor One saying it was "challenging" while pointing out that the dense and branching structure "may detract from the main points" and Editor Two describing the mix of structural elements as "fascinating and confusing at the same time." These points are not without merit. While it was our intent to create a dense/challenging article presented in a formally complex/fascinating way, we failed precisely because our presentation detracted "from the main points." This is a valuable lesson when thinking about any genre: the form and content are inextricably linked. Which is not to say that content cannot appear in different forms, but that the form and content affect each other.

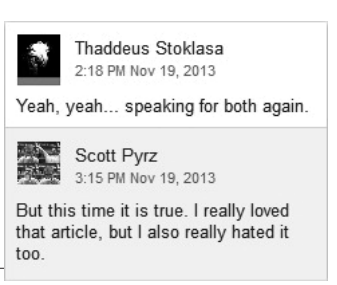
There's also a certain comedic value in the fact that both Editors One & Two discussed the potential for making editors a part of the discussion within the article.[15] Granted, we had said this ourselves and always planned on doing it, but there's still something funny about seeing them say it. But this text is nothing if not an attempt to make the invisible visible, in regard to collaboration. And if you're getting published, even as an individual, you're collaborating with editors.

In all seriousness, the article you're currently reading does reflect specific points of commentary from our editors. Editor One closed their letter saying "I hope the writers will save this original draft for possible submission to other publications." And Editor Two remarked that we could







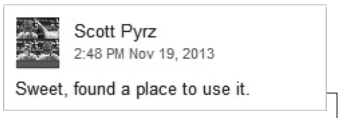


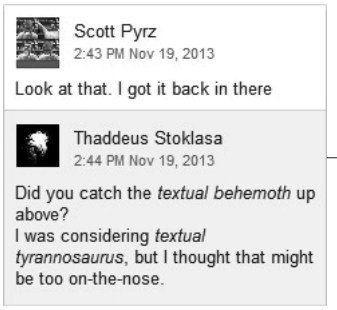
[14]Not that any of the editors were rude or combative, but people often have weird and intense relationships to things they created. And, despite (or, if we're being honest, because of) the fractured meta-bizarritude, ***it was something we both developed some manner of attachment to***. Can you be in an unhealthy relationship with a piece of writing? I submit that you can.

[15]**Editor One:** "I encourage the authors to think through how best to acknowledge the role that editing by outside editors plays in shaping a published piece."
[15]**Editor Two:** "They could also bring the editors into the article and show us as secondary collaborators."

perhaps "follow [our] step-by-step process of writing together and explain how [we] navigated the problems that arose." It's not the entirety of what this article is, but it does reflect a direction we took with this piece.

A Conclusion in Three Parts





I don't know that we succeeded in creating an article that is coherent or singularly focused (though that was never our goal), but I do think that the process of creating an unmitigated disaster of an article has allowed us to refine the ways in which we formally approach complex ideas. Just because we have the ability and technology to represent our ideas in certain formats, does not mean that those formats will enrich our (or our readers') understanding of the text itself or the ideas contained therein.

No matter who one collaborates with, there are going to be issues. Perhaps the lesson here is the importance of being aware of yourself as a collaborator: weaknesses, flaws, that sort of thing. People tend to want to work with people they share some commonality with, but that's not going to bring about success on its own. There is such a thing as getting along too well. If we as individuals had been as self-aware as our article(s), there might not have been a second draft here.

This article, while not the article we originally wanted to write, is (we hope) an example of how the collaborative process actually functions. Without our previous attempt at this article, we would not have had the gentle, guiding hand of our "Editor Team"[16] to reign in our textual deviancy, which was (quite clearly) something we could not do as a collaborative unit. The collective achievement of these articles (if there is any, which I admit may be a stretch) is that they provide ample evidence of: how complex/problematic collaboration is; how inextricably connected content and form are; and how difficult it can be to present (and think about) practices that tend to remain invisible/hidden/forgotten/marginalized/etc.

[16]And we do mean that. Any appearance of distaste for Editors is purely ironical. Probably.

[Thaddeus Stoklasa or Scott Pyrz] is* a PhD student who really (only kinda-sorta) isn't a fan of rules and who has so many interests (academic and otherwise) that reducing them (and his "self") to a list or (even worse) a "blurb" is an insurmountable task that he (at least at the time he was asked to write this) simply refused to do.

*I suppose this depends on what your definition of is is.

[Scott Pyrz or Thaddeus Stoklasa] was a first-year PhD student at Illinois State University when he co-wrote this article (as well as the other unreadable one referenced in the title[s]). Some time before that, he picked up Master's and Bachelor's degrees from Missouri State University (though probably not in that order). Where he is now and/or what he might be doing is impossible for me to say, as I have no idea when you happen to be reading this. I'm just ink on a page, after all. Or pixels on a screen.

Publishing with the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*

GWRJ Editors

Our Mission Statement

The *GWRJ* is dedicated to publishing articles 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 in different genres and 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.

General Information

Submissions

Articles can be submitted to the *GWRJ* at any time. However, we do have deadlines for upcoming issues. For issue 6.2, which will come out as we begin the Spring 2016 semester, articles must be submitted by January 20, 2015. The deadline for consideration in our 7.1 (Fall 2016) issue is May 15, 2015. Please 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 prepare for publication. So if you think you have a good idea but

are not sure how to proceed, please contact us. One of our editorial staff will be happy to work with you one-on-one to develop your idea and/or article.

Honoraria

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

Style and Tone

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

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

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

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

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

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

6. Whenever possible, articles should make use of published research about writing practices, but the research should be incorporated into the text in

a relevant and accessible way so that readers who are not used to reading scholarly research can still benefit from the references.

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

Media, Mode, and Copyright Issues

The *GWRJ* can publish both visual and digital texts. We encourage multimodal texts, including still images, audio, video, and hypertexts. However, authors working with these technologies need to be careful about copyright issues as we cannot publish any kinds of materials that may result in copyright infringement. We can sometimes seek copyright permissions, but in the case of materials such as works of art or graphics/images owned by large companies, this is often not possible. This is true for print-based articles that use images as well. We can, however, include materials that are covered by Fair Use; see 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 eighteen and medical patients covered by HIPPA, among others) are not acceptable for *GWRJ* articles unless the author has received approval from Illinois State University or another institution to conduct research with human subjects.

Researching for Grassroots

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

But what does it really mean? In more practical language, it means finding some situation where humans are doing things that involve language (which can mean composing in oral, aural, visual, etc. genres, not just writing on paper) and thinking, "Hey, that looks interesting," and then taking the time to investigate that practice in some detail.

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

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

Investigating Genres

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

Personal Explorations of Literate Practice

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

Composing Practices

This kind of research looks at particular kinds of composing practices, including invention (coming up with ideas), research, revision, etc. It often overlaps with personal exploration research because authors are often investigating their own practices. However, this research could certainly involve interviews or observations of how other individuals or groups engage in these practices. One issue that concerns the *GWRJ* editors is that this kind of research can lead to assumptions that these composing practices are "universal"— that is, that they work in similar ways across all kinds of genres and writing situations. While it is possible to trace similar kinds of literate practices across different situations (and, in fact, it can be really interesting—see, for example, Kevin Roozen's writing research, "Tracing Trajectories of Practice: Repurposing in One Student's Developing Disciplinary Writing Processes," in *Written Communication*, 2010 27:3), it is important to remember that we really can't talk about an activity like "revising," for example, as if it's something that a person does the same way in every kind of situation.

Literate Activity in the Wild

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

Case Studies of Individual Literate Practices

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

Linguistics Writing Research

The work that currently exists in the journal in this area tends to focus specifically on grammar conventions or on the usage of particular kinds of stylistic or punctuation devices. However, we want to encourage linguistic writing research that is more robust and complicated, including projects that explore corpus linguistics (using a collection of data to look at particular kinds of textual practice) or sociolinguistics (investigating the particular ways that humans use language within social systems).

Global or Intercultural Literate Practices

It is only within a few issues of the journal that the *GWRJ* has been able to publish research on literate practices as they move across cultural and/or geographical spaces. For examples, see Adriana Gradea's article in issue 4.1 ("The Little Genre that Could: CHAT Mapping the Slogan of the Big Communist Propaganda") and Summer Qabazard's article in issue 3.2 ("From Religion to Chicken Cannibalism: American Fast Food Ads in Kuwait"). We would like to encourage more of this kind of research in future issues as we are highly interested in research that studies the ways that people and textual practices move across these kinds of boundaries.

The Researcher's Process

According to one of our *GWRJ* authors, Lisa Phillips, it can be useful for authors to investigate and articulate a personal process that will be meaningful for them when developing ideas for research projects. She offered us her notes on the process that she followed to create her article for the journal,

"Writing with Tattoo Ink: Composing that Gets under the Skin." Her process is presented below in ten "steps" that *GWRJ* authors might find useful.

Step One

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

Step Two

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

Step Three

Next, think about both the research practices that will be needed to gather data as well as the style of article that will be most appropriate. One excellent way to do this is to read existing articles and examine the different ways that authors have approached different topics and different kinds of research.

Step Four

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

Step Five

It can also be important to think about "target genres," or types of writing that might be used as examples during the research and writing process. Obviously, previously published *GWRJ* articles can be useful in this way, but it can also be interesting to think of other kinds of writing that might serve as examples. Writing research in the field of rhetoric and composition can be useful (for example, books and articles found on the

WAC Clearinghouse Website at http://wac.colostate.edu), but other kinds of research into social practices or even different kinds of journalism can be used as interesting models.

Step Six

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

Step Seven

Thinking carefully about what information (data) is needed to make the article credible and useful for readers is a critical step. Thus, once an author has made decisions about the type of research he or she wants to do, it will also be important for him or her to make a plan for how to do that research. Will it be necessary to visit sites where writing is happening? Interview people about how they produce or use different kinds of writing? Find historical examples of types of writing?

Step Eight

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

Step Nine

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

Step Ten

As the text is being produced, it is critical to keep in mind the needs and interests of *GWRJ* readers. They are interested in reading about a wide range

of topics, and they enjoy articles written in a wide range of styles. But since our readers have such a wide range of interests, it is important not to take them for granted. Writing that is interesting, lively, and accessible is important, but perhaps the most important thing to remember is that your research, no matter how it's presented, represents your knowledge and thinking about a topic related to writing that is important to you. And since we're all writers, and all of us are learning all the time about how to "do writing" in the world, sharing your knowledge is, ultimately, an act of community.

Questions?

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