

GRASSROOTS WRITING RESEARCH JOURNAL

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From the Editors

Samantha Moe

As our thirteenth year of publication at the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* begins, we are excited to share this new issue with our readers. The 13.1 issue includes a variety of articles by new and returning voices, each providing important and intriguing research into pedagogical cultural-historical activity theory (P-CHAT), discourse communities, and more. These fifteen new articles range from a focus on activity systems and genre to the ways in which discourse communities are formed through tabletop gaming and music streaming platforms. In the Writing Program at Illinois State University, we use a version of CHAT that is specifically aimed towards pedagogy. This is because the *GWRJ* informs and is informed by the first-year composition courses that make up its discourse community. Our pedagogical version of CHAT includes seven terms that provide a framework around which students interrogate texts and genres as they exist in the world, while accounting for the nuanced and dynamic structures of such texts.

We feature fifteen new articles, ranging from authors engaging with the ways in which P-CHAT is at work within the many activity systems we use, to the different modalities and tools we employ to produce texts. As we continue to expand the scope of the journal, these articles include nuanced conversations about the ways in which our studying habits continue to change and transform from the pandemic due to the different literacies we use across the jobs we work at. These articles take a closer look at what literate activity means, as well as the different ways it shows up and transforms our lives. What we continue to find so important about these articles is their consistent focus on communities. As we continue to work and live in a global pandemic, these articles express the ways we use what genres we have, as well as learn about new genres we're unfamiliar with, using our antecedent knowledge and writing research to form new connections, as well as to reconnect with ourselves and our learning practices through use of our pandemic literary spaces.

These articles feature different ISU Writing Program Learning Outcomes through research into the literary activity of looking at sports anthems as a genre, our pandemic learning spaces, and the ways in which we socialize in the various discourse communities we are a part of. With this latest issue, we also had the opportunity to work with the incoming Managing Editor and *Grassroots* author

Charley Koenig, as well as returning author Edcel J. Cintron-Gonzalez, in a multi-authored article focusing on the podcast, *A Conversation with a Grassroots Author*. Certainly, the work of the contributors to this issue continue to expand our collective understanding of the multifaceted nature of genres and the work of writing and researching in the world. We hope you enjoy this new issue as much as we do.

To start off issue 13.1, we have **Gideon Kwawukumey's** take on Chelsea anthems, as well as other sports anthems, as a genre that reflects both loyalty and fanaticism. Gideon also discusses the ways in which football supporters take up information and messages from these anthems, as well as the ways in which anthems work to reinforce the love and support of fans for their favorite teams. 13.1 also continues with our newest *GWRJ* genre, Picturing (Pandemic) Literate Activity Spaces, or PLA for short. The call-for-participation was originally created by PhD student Demet Yigitbilek and current *Grassroots* Managing Editor, Samantha Moe. Our newest PLA piece in issue 13.1 features incoming Managing Editor **Charley Koenig's** current workspace where she engages in multiple literate activities. Our second full-length article, written by **Nichol Brown**, uses a P-CHAT lens to focus on the Twilight Renaissance. Specifically, Nichol explores the ways in which the *Twilight* fandom operates amongst new and old fans, as well focuses on the primary events that led to the Renaissance.

Next, **Isabel Crabtree** takes us through the true crime discourse community, citing her antecedent knowledge of true crime discourse as a way into the specific discourse community popular on YouTube. Isabel also explores the multimodal aspects of the true crime community, as well as the various ways in which listeners and watchers of true crime shows engage in various forms of socialization and ethical communication. The next three articles focus on the ways in which writing tools and research influence our responses to research, new genres, and writing new texts. **ulysses c. bougie** moves us into a writing experiment in which they discuss and employ writing as a spiral. Through discussions of what they call "spiraling writing," ulysses uses Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* as well as a discussion of ADHD and the ways in which writing as a spiral can serve as a journey down the rabbit hole, leading writers to intriguing and nuanced writing genres. Following, we feature an article by incoming *Grassroots* Managing Editor **Charley Koenig**, who details the different literate activities that took place as she learned to play chess, as well as the rules, key terms, and tribulations found along the way. Following Charley's article is a brief infographic which maps out the different paths taken on the route to learning chess. Our next article is a dive into the world of professional dancers. **Tava Matesi** explains

to readers how important it is for professional dancers to utilize writing as they map and write their own choreography, analyze past works, as well as keep journals with these details, ideas, and more. Tava also discusses “labanotation,” a form of writing that can help record motion.

Next, **A. B. M. Shafiqul Islam** takes us through the different challenges faced by international students when looking for housing. Through an activity system approach, Shafiq explains the various tools needed for house hunting, as well as the various actants/people, and interactions he encountered along the way. Following, **Alex Helderman** looks at the different forms of writing that can be found in the nursing field. Alex uses a P-CHAT lens to explore why these writing genres are so crucial to the nursing profession, as well as looks at some of the skills needed to become a good nurse. **Brianna Zangara** then leads us through a history of her family’s Italian heritage and cooking traditions. Brianna cites various examples of cookbooks, utilizing her antecedent knowledge to explain how her family’s cooking history has impacted her learning. **Nicholas Gajda** investigates the different literate activities and texts someone might encounter as they work to become a CPA (Certified Public Accountant).

The last three articles focus on different discourse communities and the tools, genres, and multiple modalities present in various community-specific literate activities. **Edcel J. Cintron-Gonzalez**, **Charley Koenig**, and **Samantha Moe** discuss the *Grassroots* podcast and how it pertains to the writing process. Originally developed by **Emily Capan**, the *GWRJ* podcast involves interviewing authors about their writing processes, literate activities, and research completed while writing their articles. Edcel and Sammy pull from their own *Grassroots* articles and interviews to illustrate examples of the types of genre research and literate activity that go into writing and revising an article. Next, **Madi Kartcheske** takes us through the table-top roleplaying game *Dungeons & Dragons*, discussing how playing the game helped her gain confidence as a writer. Madi also explores the types of writing we compose in a community setting, such as planning out campaigns for D&D. Lastly, **Madelyn Morrow** takes us through the different modalities used on the Spotify streaming app. Madelyn includes QR codes that are linked to various audio and visual examples of music, as well as video clips of the creative spaces in which one composes music videos.

The 13.1 issue concludes with a reprinting of “Publishing with the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*,” which seeks to encourage prospective writers to submit their rigorous investigations of how people, tools, and situations affect writing in complex ways. As we complete our twelfth year

of publication, we continue to receive record numbers of submissions from writing researchers interested in publishing their studies in the journal. In the coming year, we hope to receive even more submissions that reflect a diversity of perspectives, explore a variety of distinctive genres, and provide a richer understanding of the culturally and historically bound spaces in which those genres are embedded.

The Genre of Sport Anthems: A Critical Analysis of How the Chelsea Anthem Text Conveys Loyalty and Fanaticism

Gideon Kwawukumey

In this article, Kwawukumey looks at the genre of sports anthems to understand how the Chelsea anthem text conveys loyalty and fanaticism. Kwawukumey also explores how the issues of loyalty and fanaticism are part of how a particular discourse community, Chelsea supporters, illustrates their shared understanding of these concepts. Finally, considering the Chelsea anthem as a spoken genre, Kwawukumey shows how football supporters take information or messages from the anthem and how it influences and reinforces their love and support for the club. Kwawukumey uses P-CHAT terms and the concept of multimodality to do this work.

Introduction

Chelsea is an English professional football (Americans often call it soccer) club based in Fulham, London, and competes in the English Premier League, the top division of English football. An interesting text that might be studied using concepts of P-CHAT and multimodality is the Chelsea club anthem. Because Chelsea has the biggest supporting fans in Ghana, which is where I'm from, I'd like to look deeper at how the anthem is taken up and used by fans in their conversations. The anthem, called "Blue Is the Colour," contains six verses, and I hope readers will give it a listen before continuing with the article since the anthem is, above all, an audible genre—one that exists in people's memories as both sound and word (see Figure 1). It was performed by the squad and released in 1972 to coincide with the club's ultimately unsuccessful appearance in the League Cup final of that year against Stoke City. It has become one of the most well-known English football songs. As of 2021, forty-eight years after the song was first released, it is still very popular among Chelsea's supporters and continues to be their main signature tune. It also plays at every home game and cup finals in which Chelsea competes. In Ghana, where I'm from, the topic of which football club has the best anthem



Figure 1: Link to the YouTube video for the anthem “Blue is the Colour.”

continues to be a heated debate among football supporters, where football is a popular and cherished sport. However, it’s more than a sport. People in Ghana are passionate about football, and Ghanaians are enthusiastic supporters of both their national team (which has qualified three times for the World Cup, an international football tournament that takes place every four years) as well as a vast range of football clubs around the world, including Chelsea. This sportsmanship is illustrated by the huge promises the government of Ghana made to football players in the 2010 World Cup, when Ghana beat the USA in round sixteen, including the Ghanaian star and captain, Michael Essien, who was nicknamed the African Bull in Chelsea. Since players are chosen for National Teams (for the International World Cup competitions) through various connections to the participating country, the 2010 Ghana World Cup team was comprised of players who play professionally on teams worldwide. This intermixing of players and teams across international boundaries is why a football club (like Chelsea) can end up having fans from around the world. This complex system of loyalties, both to the sport in general and to a range of international professional teams, means that conversations about favorite teams (and anthems) can be lively.

Sports Anthems and Chants

Sports fanaticism involves treating sporting events with a high intensity, and fans often believe that their fanaticism can alter games for their favorite teams. Fanaticism can also include people who use sports activities as an ultra-masculine “proving ground” for brawls, as is the case of football hooliganism. Sports fanaticism can be thought of as an **activity system**, which, as David Russell states, “are cooperative interactions aimed at achieving a goal” (ISU Writing Program, n.d.). Activity systems have five main features. They are “historically developed, inherently social, dialogic, collective, and constantly changing” (ISU Writing Program, n.d.). In football fanaticism, the fans work together in social ways to connect to their team, particularly to their teams’ historic victories. They use a range of resources to find new ways to show their loyalty and ultimately create and use many different types of texts (one of which is anthems) to show their extreme fanaticism for their favorite teams. Most football teams have chants, mainly because that makes spectating intense and lively and adds beauty to the game. In Ghana, football clubs like Kotoko, Hearts, Aduana, Olympics, and others have different varieties of chants based on the same anthem tune, and these chants are unique to each. Chelsea fans also have different versions

of chants that seek to express the ideology of sports fanaticism. These chants are often about the club’s success. In 2012, this was one of the chants that were dominant among Chelsea’s fans (see also Figure 2):

Didier Drogba, tralala,
 Didier Drogba, traaalalala,
 Didier Drogba, tralala,
 Drogba wooddrogba woo
 He comes from the ivory
 And he’s a fat wanker
 Whereas your family gone
 Haaa



Figure 2: Link to the YouTube video “Didier Drogba Song Chelsea.”

This was what Chelsea fans were chanting about in 2012, when Didier Drogba, the Ivory Coast International player, helped Chelsea clinch their first-ever Champions League title. This chant is an excellent example of how sports fans participate in activity systems to find new ways of supporting their teams. Other chants fans use might express fans’ opinions about the club’s success or failure or be related to a decision taken by the board management that they don’t like. When Rafa Benitez was appointed as the interim coach of Chelsea, the Chelsea fans chanted (see also Figures 3 and 4):

The interim one, Rafa Benitez
 Not wanted
 Never wanted
 Rafa out!



Figure 3: Link to the YouTube video of chants by supporters that shows the former Chelsea coach, Rafa Benitez, was not wanted in Chelsea.

Often, these anthems and chants express the obsession of supporters with the club (Figure 5). They are enthusiastic about anything that affects



Figure 4: A picture of Chelsea’s former coach, Rafa Bernitez, in 2013 at Stamford Bridge where the agitated fans chanted that they don’t like him, and they want him out! The chant can be seen as an activity system.



Figure 5: Fans were cheering and chanting for the club.



Figure 6: Video of Chelsea fans singing "Carefree."

the club's victory. The chanting of lyrics shows this enthusiasm (Figures 6, 7, and 8). As they create and participate in new chants, fans feel as if they are participating in the overall life of the club.



Figure 7: Audio of the anthem "Blue is the Colour."

My Personal Experience with How the Chelsea Anthem Generates a Heated Debate Amongst Fans

The question of which football club has the best anthem continues to be a heated debate among football supporters. Whereas some people choose their favorite anthem based on how these anthems preserve historical names and tradition, others say they are swayed by the anthem's tune, sound, and lyrical nature. I quite remember how this topic sparked a heated debate even among my colleagues in sports journalism in studio B when I was a student presenter at Atlantic FM in Cape Coast. Atlantic FM is a broadcast media station with wide coverage in the Central Region of Ghana. The heated debate was fascinating and fun because my journalist colleagues support different clubs in Europe. Well, I stated that I developed a love for the anthem because of the success they achieved in 2012 when they won the European title and how the anthem incorporates words of loyalty, such as:



Figure 8: Fans of Manchester United enthusiastically singing their anthem.

Blue is the colour, football is the game
We're all together, and winning is our aim
So cheer us on through the sun and rain
'Cause Chelsea, Chelsea is our name

Here at the Bridge whether rain or fine
 We can shine, all the time
 Home or away, come and see us play
 You're welcome any day

Blue is the colour, football is the game
 We're all together, and winning is our aim
 So cheer us on through the sun and rain
 'Cause Chelsea, Chelsea is our name

Come to the Shed and we'll welcome you
 Wear your blue and see us through
 Sing loud and clear until the game is done
 Sing Chelsea everyone

Blue is the colour, football is the game
 We're all together, and winning is our aim
 So cheer us on through the sun and rain
 'Cause Chelsea, Chelsea is our name

Well, this could not convince my sports journalist colleagues because they each had their preferences. And, of course, their loyalty to their own teams' anthems didn't convince me (I still think Chelsea has one of the best anthems and the best fans in Ghana). However, other teams have great anthems like Manchester United (Figure 10), Manchester City (Figure 11), Arsenal (Figure 12), and Liverpool (Figure 13), along with Real Madrid, Barcelona, Juventus, AC Milan, and even the Los Angeles Galaxy anthem in the United States of America.

Sports Anthems as a Genre

Music can inspire, motivate, praise, and create sympathy or empathy. According to the Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.), an anthem is a song with special significance to a country, organization, or club sung during special occasions. Club and national anthems are **anthemic**. They help people connect to something—and feel happy and enthusiastic about it.

In her article on the symbols and syntax of national anthems and flags, Cerulo (1993) further explains national anthems as official patriotic symbols like the auditory equivalent of a country's currency, crest, or flag. The same is true for football clubs, whose anthems are songs of loyalty and patriotism sung to reflect a club's tradition and philosophy. For example, in



Figure 9: Video of Liverpool fans chanting.



Figure 10: Manchester United anthem.



Figure 11: Manchester City anthem.



Figure 12: Arsenal anthem.



Figure 13: Liverpool anthem.

England, particularly in the English Premier League, the Chelsea anthem is one of the most recognized anthems due to its popularity among football supporters across the globe.

Understanding anthems as a kind of genre requires a shifted understanding of the concept of a genre from what I used to have. Based

Antecedent Knowledge

Based on working with the ISU Writing Program, I've learned to see **antecedent knowledge** as a term used to describe all the things a writer already knows that can come into play when a writer takes up any kind of new information. In this case, it meant changing my beliefs about genre.

on how I was taught in school, I understood “genres” as different types of literature, such as drama, prose, poetry, etc. However, the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* encourages a further understanding, which challenges my **antecedent knowledge** of genre. To explain, I can use Carolyn Miller’s definition in “Genre as Social Action,” which looked at genre as “typified rhetorical ways of interacting within recurring situations” (1984). This means that a **genre** would be any type of text with defining characteristics or **genre conventions** that mark it as belonging to a specific group of texts. For example, a wedding invitation has certain features that mark it

as recognizable as a wedding invitation, such as the couple’s names in large print, the location of the ceremony and reception, the date and time of wedding activities, and often a list of stores where the couple has registered. These different conventions make it possible for us to know when we receive it in the mail that it is a wedding invitation. Now with respect to the Chelsea anthem, as primarily an aural genre (something you listen to or sing, rather than something you read), it has many of the features belonging to all anthems. It has lyrical elements (although I think Chelsea’s is the best) and words that are chanted or sung. It inspires loyalty either through national or other communities of connection. Finally, it also makes fans happy and enchanted with the team and their game play. In other words, it creates bonds and inspires patriotic—or fanatic—action (Cerulo, 1993, p. 244).



Figure 14: Graphic accompanying a version of the Chelsea Anthem.

Nationalism and Fanaticism

Anthems are important in football, both on the level of club football and a national basis, because individual football club anthems and national team anthems can be essential. So, for instance, Chelsea as a football club has an anthem, but national teams usually use their national anthem to represent the team during games. Unlike the club anthems, national anthems have more different applications and places where they are played. Apart from singing it during a football match or other sporting event, it's echoed at other events, such as concerts, political events, and commemorative moments in public culture. When it comes to club team anthems, they are usually primarily a symbol of support in which fans can participate. Still, while I can support LA Galaxy and my neighbor might support Red Bulls, a national anthem is designed to bring together people throughout a country. Before competitive matches played by national teams, when both teams line up at the centerfield, the national anthem is played from each country. World Cup, CONCACAF (The Confederation of North, Central America, and Caribbean Association Football) cup, International Friendly, Africa Cup, and Asian cup matches include vivid moments where spectators listen to anthems that indicate a kind of national patriotism.

Rhetorical Tools of the Chelsea Anthem

The words of the Chelsea anthem have historically rallied the supporters behind the team. Fans have also identified themselves in the sports stadium with the club's color that defines their conviction about the team. For instance, in Figure 15, the words: "CHELSEA, ONE LIFE, ONE LOVE,



Figure 15: Chelsea fans use aspects of the anthem to show support.

ONE CLUB, PRIDE OF LONDON” are neatly inscribed on the blue flag to communicate their conviction, loyalty, as well as support for the club.

The idea of solidarity and unity is communicated through the anthem’s words. For instance, the anthem entreats supporters to constantly cheer with phrases like: “So cheer us on through the sun and rain.” Through the anthems and club’s symbols, the clubs can rally the rank and file of the team to stand with them through the game of football. Sports, in general, invoke emotions, and the club anthem is one of the critical sources of emotional expressivity in sports. The anthems are sung with enthusiasm and love. The words of the supporters reiterate the messages of the anthem. The use of the adjective, “ONE” in the anthem echoes the consistent use of the first-person plural pronoun and its variants in the anthem. “**We**’re together,” “Winning is **our** aim,” “So cheer **us** on,” and “Chelsea is **our** name” are instances where these pronouns are used to establish collectivity and unity in the team. It is, therefore, a repetition of the solidarity and unity message that the fans in Figure 15 use the sign to depict oneness, unity, and togetherness among all and sundry in the club.

In the moment when Chelsea won its first-ever Champions League, in 2012, Chelsea fans could reminisce how Didier Drogba, one of Chelsea’s greatest footballers, converted a final spot-kick (the last player to shoot in penalty kicks in a competitive match) that led them to clinch the Europa title. It was a great moment for all Chelsea fans, particularly fans in Ghana. What I call the “enchantment” (enthusiastic recitation of the lyrics of a club anthem) of the anthem was done with much enthusiasm after the final penalty kick was taken.

One awesome experience I have had as a Chelsea fan is that irrespective of where the enchantment is situated, the enchantment is done with power,



Figure 16: Fans use body paint and clothing to show support.

enthusiasm, and with a super devotion to a cause. In 2012, I watched a match on television at a drinking bar in Agbozume. Then, a large number of Ghanaian fans went on the street jubilating and chanting the words of the anthem when Chelsea won the Champions League.

In Figure 16 and Figure 17, you can see that club flags, wrist bands, T-shirts, and even body paint are some rhetorical tools used by fans to express their support, and many of these also contain part of



Figure 17: Ghanaian Chelsea fans cheering up for the club in a thanksgiving service in their EPL title triumph.

the anthem. The lyrics on these rhetorical tools are lifted high before and after competitive matches.

I hope you can relate to some of these experiences. Although football is not the most popular sport, rhetorical effects are relational to most people, including nonfans of clubs. In the next section, I'll explore how P-CHAT terms like production, socialization, and activity can be used to see how fans repurpose the words in an anthem in a range of different literate activities.

Why P-CHAT and Football Anthems?

Pedagogical cultural-historical activity theory (P-CHAT) is a kind of analytical framework used by the ISU Writing Program to study how the interrelation of different actors (people, semiotic tools, texts, goals) can form a map that shapes how texts are produced and how they work to interact with the world. This framework helps us break down literate activities using seven concepts: production, representation, reception, distribution, socialization, activity, and ecology.

When we look at the activity systems that football fans engage in, we could consider a massive range of different kinds of activities. And while the Chelsea anthem might be regarded as primarily an oral text, there are all kinds of multimodal activities and texts that are connected. For example, there are not only the different iterations of the anthem and its lyrics (such as various bands who might make versions of the anthem, or fans who might record themselves signing it), there is also a range of different kinds of texts that use aspects of the anthem (mainly words or phrases taken from the lyrics), such as merchandise like flags, cards, or jerseys; or online texts like sharing memes that use the songs or engaging in Twitter exchanges.

Production

According to the ISU Writing Program (n.d.), **production** refers to tools and activities involved with the making of texts. Although the anthem might be understood as an oral text, the enchantment of the lyrics of the Chelsea anthem by Chelsea fans worldwide is an example of production. And since these productions often take place in real time, each one is in many ways unique, even though they are performing the exact same words and music. In addition, we can also look at how the words of the anthem helped produce a text with a specific goal—to help fans come together and show support for their team. For example, the use of the word “blue” in the lyrics allows the fans to create an image of the color that symbolizes the club. Another example of how the anthem’s lyrics are used as a part of production is how fans use lines from the lyrics, such as “Winning is our aim,” to cheer up their club players and inspire them.

Socialization

Another P-CHAT concept I feel strongly fits into my analysis is **socialization**. “Socialization describes the interaction of people and institutions as they produce, distribute, and use texts. When people engage with texts, they are also (consciously and unconsciously) engaged in the practice of representing and transforming different kinds of social and cultural practices” (ISU Writing Program, n.d.). The anthem provides fan-based lyrical content that identifies them as club fans. It also reminds them of who they are. It depicts the performer’s identity. When the anthem is sung in a stadium before matches commence, most club supporters stand on their feet and sing along with the players. The physical movement is usually consummated with shouts and handclaps to establish their solidarity with the players. What happens is that fans who are sitting together after being identified as Chelsea fans through the anthem singing stage are likely to have a mutual interaction that benefits their relationships.

As Emma Hayes (Figure 18), an English football manager who is currently the manager of FA WSL club Chelsea Women, stated, “I want to see our fans come together in their droves, with their songs, flags, and energy and intensity that ultimately helps us towards three points.” This quote is an example of the influence and socialization of anthems.

Activity

Activity is what is happening in the process of reciting and singing this anthem. Activity according to the ISU Writing Program (n.d.) is a term that encompasses the actual practices that people engage in as they create text



Figure 18: Emma Hayes, manager of the Chelsea Women's team, discusses her view on the importance of rhetorical tools and their impact on the game.

(writing, drawing, walking across the hall to ask someone else what they think, getting peer review, etc.). The anthems recitation involves spoken words, intonation, word break, accent, and pitch. There is the use of trumpets, drums, and sound effects by fans to assist in the recitation of the anthems. Many fans clap, jump around, and gesture while proclaiming the Chelsea anthem. Before recitation, we can even think about the activities like body painting, dressing in all blue, and getting into the stands to perform the anthem.

In the enchantment of the anthem, there are emotional expressions such as love, laughter, joy, enthusiasm, and patriotism. These emotions capture the passion that comes with the game. Irrespective of the results, the performance of the Chelsea club anthem becomes a motivating song to cheer up players to victory even amidst defeating times or moments. As a sports journalist, my interactions with Chelsea fans in Ghana show how enthusiastic fans are. I recall when a fan said: "I will continue to love the Chelsea lyrics even if they are relegated to Championship." When I asked them why, they explained that the anthem always made them fall in love with the club. I wondered if they thought the anthem was expressive or emotionally appealing. They explained that "the words alone invoke some sort of patriotism. It brings me and my colleagues to always support this club we have always loved. When reciting the lyrics of the anthem, we never forget what Chelsea did to Bayern Munich in 2012. It's really unforgettable."

P-CHAT has shown how humans can use sports anthems to achieve a distinct communicative function expressing loyalty and fanaticism. Loyalty is the commitment of club members, fans, managers, and well-wishers to the club's vision, dreams, and activities. On the other hand, fanaticism is avowed solidarity with the club, usually expressed in a commitment to paying dues, sponsoring club matches, betting for club matches, and patronizing club matches by buying the tickets to watch games.

Multimodality of the Chelsea Anthem

I also want to explore **multimodality**, all the modes that humans can use to communicate. These modes include alphabetic (stuff we write using the alphabet), visual (pictures), aural (sound), oral (spoken), and symbolic (ISU Writing Program, n.d.), which are used to enhance the enchantment of the Chelsea anthem. When considering the modes of the sports anthem genre, the most prominent are oral and aural. The anthems usually have spoken or sung verses. They also have instrumentals, whether melodic or just percussive, that help support the structure of the executed verses. A gesture component can also accompany the chant depending on the particular anthem.

With sports anthems, these words and melodies get spread in other ways. They can be represented in the alphabetic modality through signs, bumper stickers, and T-shirts. If you look at the images included in this article, you can see how parts of the anthems are displayed in alphabetic form. See—I am even doing it in this article! Sharing these anthems through the alphabetic mode makes it easier to distribute new lyrics and versions of the Chelsea anthem to fans worldwide. Not everyone can sit in the stadium of a match, but anyone with a computer can search for new versions of the anthems to sing from their homes or sports pubs.

As a visual modality, loyalty to the team can be depicted by blue representation. Some of the photos in this article show jerseys and body paint that feature blue as the primary signifier of loyalty and extreme fanaticism. If you look at any images of the Chelsea anthem or Chelsea fans, you will notice intense amounts of blue presented, particularly in merchandise. These multimodal representations of the Chelsea anthem are part of why it is so popular and important to fans all over the world.

Final Thoughts

The issue of loyalty and supporter ideology is expressed in the genre of sports anthems. The Chelsea anthem is an example of this spoken genre communicated through lyrics to the football discourse community. How the Chelsea anthem expresses loyalty and fanaticism is mainly transmitted orally and aurally, which is significant in understanding extreme fanaticism. From the beginning, P-CHAT helps us explore ideas, objects, people, and how they come together to produce any sort of literate activity. Lyrics are not just words but metaphors and symbols that unite the fans and promote loyalty towards the club and sport in general.

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The *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* Presents: When Worlds Collide (But Make It Cute)

Charley Koenig

PLA Narrative: These past few semesters have been all about adaptation: adapting to a pandemic, to grad school, to a new baby; and of course, adapting to all this mashed up together. Consequently, my work space migrated to where I can spread out and do a lot at once: write, take notes, attend class, plan lessons, snack, let my dogs out, pump, snack again, feed my daughter, attend Zoom meetings, entertain my daughter, feed the dogs, nap, e-mail, grade . . . I've modified my literate activity space to make room for all the life things that now exist alongside it.



Figure 1: My pandemic work space, already an exhibit in juggling and multitasking.



Figure 2: My pandemic workspace meets (collides with) my pandemic life.



Pandemic Bio: Charley Koenig is a PhD student who runs on peanut butter M&M's, Coke, and baby laughs.

The Twilight Renaissance and Nostalgia: The Power of Community (and TikTok)

Nichol Brown

In this article, Nichol Brown analyzes the Twilight Renaissance through the lens of pedagogical cultural-historical activity theory, focusing on the key terms socialization and reception. She explores the way the revival in the *Twilight* series has allowed old fans to embrace their younger selves and defy the shame associated with the fandom, while also allowing them to build a community with new fans.

If you're reading this article, you may have already had an extremely visceral reaction to the title. *Twilight?* What is this, 2008?

Well, buddy, have I got news for you! We're about to unpack all your complicated feelings about *Twilight*—if you have any at all. If not, buckle up.

For the sake of developing credibility here, I must admit that I was a pretty passionate *Twilight* fan back in its heyday. Although I was fairly young when the series was first released (about eight years old when the first book came out in 2005 and about eleven when the first movie came out in 2008), the *Twilight* series was nonetheless very formative for me. It plunged the publishing and film industry into a paranormal romance boom and defined a substantial part of my identity in middle school. In the spirit of fully exposing myself, I will even reveal that I went to *Twilight* conventions with my Mom to meet the actors (Figure 1). So, yes, a fan, to say the least.

However, I can still vividly remember the shame involved in that time as well. Even in *Twilight*'s prime, I did not openly admit to most people that I was going to conventions. It felt like the whole world was snubbing their noses at



Figure 1: Middle-school Nichol with actors who played various werewolves: Alex Meraz, Bronson Pelletier, Chaske Spencer, Kiowa Gordon, and Booboo Stewart.

the movies and their fans. The fans were trashed as “rabid teenage girls” or “bored stay-at-home moms.” As Priscilla Zuni tells *Buzzfeed News*, “Everyone I knew either really loved it or really hated it. It seemed there wasn’t much in between” (Krishna). When *Twilight* actors attended Comic-Con events, male attendees even stood around with banners and signs, declaring that *Twilight* had ruined Comic-Con.

So there seems to be a very clear insider and outsider **community** when it comes to *Twilight*. There are the fans,

and there are those who mocked them . . . which is particularly upsetting to think about when you remember the age disparity here. Many of the fans were teenage girls, and they were not only mocked by their peers, but also by grown adults—sometimes even professional news outlets. Every time I think about *Twilight*, I ask myself, “Why does the world hate teenage girls so much? Why do we judge everything they love?”

There are numerous approaches one could take when looking at the ethics of *Twilight*. For example, we could look at the series itself and the

problematic content within the books and films. When the series was initially released, there were many concerns with the portrayal of Bella and Edward’s relationship as potentially abusive. In recent years, there has also been a greater call for accountability when it comes to Stephenie Meyer’s exploitation of the Quileute Tribe in La Push, Washington, as the treatment of the tribe in the books as well as in the process of filming the movies perpetuates systemic racism and the historical oppression of Indigenous peoples.

This article will look beyond the content of the series, approaching the ethics surrounding the *Twilight* community by looking at the way the texts have been received in society and the way this reception has affected its audience. In particular, I would like to explore the ethical dangers of causing teenaged fans emotional

Cultures & Communities, Learning Outcome #8

The ISU Writing Program has nine primary learning outcomes, and **Cultures & Communities** is Learning Outcome #8. Within this learning outcome, we are prompted to “[c]ompare [our] own experiences in writing (and how that experience has shaped [our] literate activity and writing research identity) with the experiences and products of others in order to understand and explain the ways that writing experience writes itself into the literate activities of diverse individuals and groups of people” (ISU Writing Program).

trauma in the way that their interests are perceived, dismissed, and snubbed by those around them.

If you had asked me a year or two ago about *Twilight*, I probably would have remained at a distance, talking about it more as a cultural moment or a critical text, rather than looking at my own personal experience with the series. If you had told me three months ago that I would be exposing my awkward middle school years to the world? I would have laughed in your face. Before this, I had completely internalized the shame of being a *Twilight* fan.

But I've decided to reclaim that time of my life. I've decided to be proud of middle school Nichol. Because you know what? She was passionate. She was excited. She was part of a community so much bigger than herself. And the Twilight Renaissance has given me the power to reclaim her.

What the Heck Is a Twilight Renaissance?

Yes, a Twilight Renaissance. It's a real thing, I promise. As CJ Connor writes for *Book Riot*, "It's 2021, yet from the sheer amount of *Twilight* memes shared on my Instagram feed, I could be fooled into thinking it's 2009." This Renaissance seems to stem from two primary events: the release of the book *Midnight Sun* and the addition of the *Twilight* films to Netflix's catalog. Stephenie Meyer released *Midnight Sun*—a version of *Twilight* told from Edward's point of view—in 2020. This book was originally slated for publication years ago, but it was leaked, leading Meyer to pull it before it could be published. In 2021, Netflix also added all the *Twilight* films to their site. These two events have created a revival in interest, in access, and in engagement—especially through memes on social media.

Another factor that we have to address, of course, is the global COVID-19 pandemic. In her article for *Book Riot*, CJ Connor points out,



Ethical Concerns with the Quileute Tribe

In recent years, there has been significant criticism over the way the *Twilight* franchise handled its relationship with the Quileute Tribe. Stephenie Meyer drew on the history, culture, and legends of the Quileute Tribe while writing the book series, and the films even used the reservation in La Push, Washington for scenes in the series. However, the Quileute Tribe was never compensated for the way that Meyer used them as direct inspiration, despite the success of the series. Although further analysis of the Quileute Tribe in the *Twilight* franchise is beyond the scope of this article, you can check out Screen Rant's comprehensive article for more on the ethics of the Quileute Tribe's involvement with and portrayal in *Twilight* (QR code above).

“The timing also must have influenced how strong of a force the Twilight Renaissance has become. In times of uncertainty, nostalgia can be comforting, and I think many of us were and still are taking comfort in escapist reads.” For many people who were existing fans of *Twilight*, the series still offers that same comfort and brings us back to simpler times. We can fondly remember our younger selves and the enjoyment we derived from the community and the series.

However, it is important to note that it is not just nostalgia and comfort that we have been seeking during the pandemic. In fact, it is community itself that we are searching for. While isolated from loved ones and navigating uneven social terrain, society has turned toward unconventional methods of community building—whether that be Zoom trivia nights, socially distanced outdoor gatherings, or interactions on social media. While cut off from our physical community, we strived to find ways to reconnect with old communities, as well as join new communities . . . which is where, funnily enough, *Twilight* comes into play.

A Return to Forks for Pre-Existing Fans

For those who were already fans of *Twilight*, the Twilight Renaissance has allowed them to revisit their past selves. In some ways, we are even given the opportunity to interact with and socialize with our younger selves—in the same way that I am engaging with middle school Nichol throughout this article. This ability to “socialize across time” can be tied to the ISU Writing Program’s use of **pedagogical cultural-historical activity theory (P-CHAT)**. Although P-CHAT includes seven primary terms (production, representation, activity, distribution, socialization, reception, and ecology), I’d like to focus on socialization and reception in this article. The Writing Program defines **socialization** as “the interactions of people and institutions as they produce, distribute and use texts. When people engage with texts, they are also (consciously and unconsciously) engaged in the practice of representing and transforming different kinds of social and cultural practices.”

For many fans, *Twilight* helped foster a sense of community. When I would go to the *Twilight* conventions (hosted by Creation Entertainment) as a kid (Figure 2), I would see the same attendees every year. They would exchange contact information and stay in touch in the year between each convention. They called themselves “convention friends.” Although I was too young to fully engage in this practice at the *Twilight* conventions, I went to similar conventions for *The Vampire Diaries* in high school (exposing myself,

yet again . . .), and I was able to bond with a lot of other attendees over our shared interests and passions for media. This shows how a text can bring people together in a way far greater than the text itself.

This discussion of socialization also brings us back to shame. There were many negative reactions to *Twilight* when it was in its prime. For example, there were the reactions of those male Comic-Con attendees, who tried to exclude *Twilight* fans from the Comic-Con space. There were the reactions of parents, who may have tried to limit their children’s exposure to the series because of concerns about its content—such as the love triangle, the sexual component in the later books, and the portrayal of a potentially abusive or toxic relationship. All of these interactions reflect what the Writing Program talks about with socialization: “the practice of representing and transforming different kinds of social and cultural practices.” These naysayers deemed *Twilight* beyond the acceptable parameters of their social and cultural practices. As a result, many *Twilight* fans retreated in on themselves. They hid their interests and their passions because of the way society dismissed them as a group—not only as *Twilight* fans, but more generally, as teenage girls.

In an article for *The Harvard Crimson*, Millie Mae Healy writes, “Beyond the dazzling number of issues with ‘Twilight,’ it is possible not all of the cringe-culture surrounding it was fair. Just like boy bands, K-POP, and YA literature, media with a demographic primarily made up of teenage girls is often unfairly belittled and demeaned in a way that media aimed at boys is not. This modern resurgence has allowed adults to shamelessly re-engage with what they enjoyed as teenagers and look at it through a more evolved lens.” A critical feature of our interpretation of the term “socialization” in this context is the way that we perceive and interact with teens as a result of the texts we associate with them.

This brings us back to the questions I asked earlier: Why does the world hate teenage girls so much? Why do we judge everything they love? This judgment of media made for or taken up by teenage girls has influenced how teenage girls approach future passions and how they interact in the world. And now the Twilight Renaissance is giving these *Twilight* fans the opportunity to proudly re-embrace their inner teenage girl. As Joanna Murphy tells BuzzFeed News, “We’re really just trying to enjoy ourselves . . .



Figure 2: Middle school Nichol with Nikki Reed, who played Rosalie.

Representation and Conceptualizing Ourselves

When discussing the way shame influenced the teen audience, we can also tie in another P-CHAT term: representation. According to the ISU Writing Program, **representation** involves all the ways we conceptualize and plan a text. Essentially, by shaming teenage girls, society infiltrated their minds and impacted the way they conceptualize and plan their future interactions with the world—which includes the way they conceptualize and plan their own literate activity, their own texts, and their own lives.

because we were too ashamed to do that the first time around” (Krishna). In a twist on the term socialization, the Twilight Renaissance is actually fostering socialization between our present and past selves.

An Introduction to Forks for New Fans

The Twilight Renaissance is also opening the door for new fans—whether that be the younger generation who missed the initial release or other generations who were around but simply never involved themselves in the discourse. The inclusion of the *Twilight* films on Netflix in particular has created an opportunity for this new audience to

enter the discussion. In pursuit of better understanding this new audience, I interviewed my friend Kathryn. Kathryn, a twenty-something working woman, was heading into middle school when the first *Twilight* film released, but she never watched them because her parents did not allow her to watch anything that involved magic or lore. She shares that she was aware of the hype when she was younger, but didn’t feel a huge drive to watch them herself. She remembers the discussions of the love triangle—Team Edward vs. Team Jacob—but she wasn’t super invested because she had never seen the movies. She was able to follow along with the discourse just by talking about how attractive the actors were. She decided to finally watch the films in 2021, as a twenty-four-year-old, after seeing videos on TikTok and noticing that the films were now available on Netflix (Figure 3). She shares:

Kathryn: . . . when I was on TikTok, almost every tenth TikTok I’d watch was about *Twilight* because everyone was watching the movies. And there were all these theory discussions around things that people had missed before, like commentary on things that Kristen [Stewart] said and how her character really developed over time. And I was just really interested in that. And I was like, *Oh, I understand the commentary, but I don’t understand the material they’re talking about, so I really want to watch it.* And then you were also an influence, I knew you had watched them, you’ve been into them, so I was like, *Oh, this is something I could bond with Nichol over because I can finally understand the references.*

Nichol: When you finally did watch them, what was your experience?

Kathryn: I watched them alone, but I viewed watching them as a comforting thing. I think I started on a Friday afternoon, I finished work early and I just decided that I’m going to take this time to have “me time,” and I’m going to watch *Twilight*. And then I just sat on my couch with my blanket and my tea and Sandy [her dog], and I watched. And it was great. Well, the movie quality wasn’t awesome, but it was a great experience. And I ended up watching as much as I could that weekend. I think I got to *Eclipse*. And then the next week, I tried to pick it up again. So I finished them in like two weeks.

Nichol: And what were your thoughts on the series as a twenty-something? Did you notice anything in particular? Were you focusing on anything? Also, did you enjoy it? How did it make you feel, just what was your reaction in general?

Kathryn: I think I focused a lot on movie quality. Like I don’t think I was so drawn to the story that I was focusing on specific story parts or plotlines or anything like the script or even the actors. I was just really focused on quality and I think that comes from Jordan [our mutual friend who studied videography in college] because I’ve seen a lot of movies with Jordan, and whenever I have movie discussions with him, he’s all about cinematography, audio design, music, track list, how the actors are, do they really immerse you, do they make you cry, do they make you laugh, all that stuff. So that’s just been where my mind is these days. And so I think that was probably the biggest thing I focused on and that’s probably why I’m not like, “Oh, I love them.” Because their quality didn’t really pick up until later, which makes sense. I have to say, though, I was very impressed with *Breaking Dawn*, like those movies are definitely my favorite parts of the series. Just the jump in funding and quality of acting ability was just so incredibly noticeable. And it was just beautiful, I just loved how it looked. As far as the plot, I thought the love story was one of the weakest things—actually the love triangle, I mean, was one of the weakest things.



Figure 3: A conversation between Nichol and Kathryn about *Twilight*.



Figure 4: Middle school Nichol with Kellan Lutz, who played Emmett.

Nichol: So, now that you've finally watched them, have you engaged in any discourse about the series online? You mentioned the TikTok videos that you watched before you watched the movies, have you seen any since then that make more sense now?

Kathryn: I don't think I have actually. Not so much about theories and more serious stuff, but I've just seen a lot of people on TikTok do "If I were a Cullen, this is how I would act," or "If I invited the Cullens to my Halloween party, this is each person and how they would act," and I just laugh at those so hard. But I haven't really seen very many videos compared to before I watched them.

Nichol: Do you think that's your feed specifically or do you think that's a broader trend?

Kathryn: It makes me feel like it's a broader trend but I don't really know. To me it felt like, oh, as soon as it went on Netflix, everyone's flocking to see it, then everyone watched them in the first month. And now it's over, we're moving on with life. That's how it felt.

Nichol: Yeah, and I feel like that's pretty accurate. It was there, everyone was super bonded, we were all speaking in *Twilight* lingo for like a month. So we were all in on the joke, we were all insiders, and then it just kind of fizzled out, and we moved on to the next big thing. But, to wrap up, what are your lasting thoughts on the Twilight Renaissance, as a Renaissance woman yourself now?

Kathryn: I guess my lasting thoughts are just that it's kind of nice to go back and look at things that we experienced when we were younger, but from a different lens, like from that kind of fresh perspective. There's a lot of things that I think many people didn't experience but were at least aware of happening. So, if they go back and kind of revisit it with the minds of them now, it can be really interesting and I think it could rightly result in really interesting conversations. And so that's probably what I would take away from the Renaissance.

Kathryn's experience seems quite representative of this group who is just now watching the *Twilight* series. They do not have the same nostalgic and emotional connection to the *Twilight* films as prior fans, but they are still able to enjoy different aspects of the movies and participate in the community

discourse. In particular, I'd like to focus on the catalyst for Kathryn's decision to binge the series: TikTok.

The Power of TikTok

Leading up to the release of the *Twilight* films on Netflix, there was a surge in *Twilight*-related videos on TikTok. Whether this is because of the publication of *Midnight Sun* or a pandemic-driven need for nostalgia, we may never know. But these videos targeted certain demographics—such as twenty-something working women, like Kathryn—and pulled them into the *Twilight* community. However, TikTok played an important role on both ends: bringing people into *Twilight* but also engaging with *Twilight* as a response to the films.

This is where **reception** comes into play. The ISU Writing Program defines reception as “how a text is taken up and used by others . . . [it] is not just who will read a text, but takes into account the ways people might use or repurpose a text (sometimes in ways the author may not have anticipated or intended).” I can tell you right now, I sincerely doubt Stephenie Meyer ever anticipated the way that *Twilight* would be repurposed on TikTok. In her interview, Kathryn mentions a variety of TikTok trends related to *Twilight*, but truly the trends are endless. From cosplayers to memes to theories to behind-the-scenes trivia, people have taken up the text in a wide variety of ways. This represents the nuance with which the audience receives the text: acknowledging its flaws while also enjoying its entertainment value. For example, when *Midnight Sun* was released, many fans made sure to simultaneously promote the Quileute Move to Higher Ground movement, which is working to relocate the Quileute Tribe out of a tsunami zone in order to protect their community and preserve their culture. The audience and fans are not mindlessly reading a text, but engaging with the greater networks, communities, and ethics involved in that text.

The development of the memes on TikTok also reflect the evolution of reception over time. Sabrina—one of the creators behind Twitter's Twilight Renaissance account—shares, “Many of the memes we post are from lines in the movies that have become huge jokes within the fandom and the public in general. However, back in the day, as a thirteen-year-old, I never thought much of ‘Bella, where the hell have you been loca?’ as a joke but today, it's the

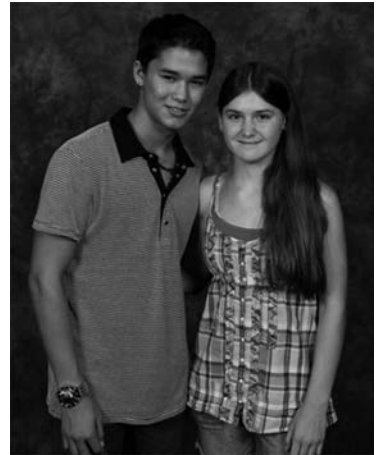


Figure 5: Middle school Nichol with Booboo Stewart, who played Seth.



Figure 6: Middle school Nichol with *Twilight* cosplayers at a convention hosted by Creation Entertainment.

funniest thing ever. I often see people referring to *Twilight* as a comedy and I'm pretty sure if you go into watching the movie with that in mind, you will likely enjoy it more" (Gillespie). She points out that the reception when the films first came out was very different from the reception now, as we perhaps took the films more seriously or did not notice the humor of some of the lines from our romantic tween perspective. I doubt Stephenie Meyer intended us to view *Twilight* as a comedy, like Sabrina suggests, as opposed to a high-stakes immortal romance, but that is nonetheless how many people have received it.

It is social media platforms like TikTok that have created an opportunity to receive and repurpose the text in a wide range of ways, which opens the text up to more audiences, like Kathryn. For example, Vee Elle has cosplayed as Alice Cullen since 2013, but only created a TikTok account in 2019. For *Vice*, Emma Kershaw writes, "Vee's cosplay TikTok—@maryalicebrandon—has grown by 10,000 over the last month, and with just under 150,000 followers, it makes her the largest TikTok creator who posts solely *Twilight*-focused content. She believes . . . that TikTok has exposed the franchise to a younger audience who may have missed its release and popularity the first time round." She cites Vee herself, who thinks that "TikTok has allowed *Twilight* to reach Gen Z who have connected with it in their own way . . . Their interpretation of the Saga is different to what millennials got out of it. New generations can still connect with the story despite how much the world has changed since its release and without that infusion of fresh blood—no pun intended—the fandom would die" (Kershaw).

TikTok has given us the opportunity to foster a sense of community—to reunite the community that existed ten years ago and to invite new members

into the community. To reconnect with our inner teenage girl and embrace nostalgia. To find comfort where we can and reject judgment, while also thinking critically about the texts we're engaging with.

So, to bring us back to my initial question: Why does the world hate teenage girls so much? Why do we judge everything they love? I don't know that I can give you the answer to that. But I'll leave you with the same words I ended my conversation with Kathryn on: "Teen girls, man, teen girls. Love them. Scared of them, but love them. Teen girls are the future." This one's for you, middle school Nichol.

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A Dive into the True Crime Community

Isabel Crabtree

In this article, Crabtree explores the true crime discourse community. Through P-CHAT, and other key ISU Writing Program terms, she works to better understand how the expanding true crime community functions and creates new members. She also takes time to understand why such a gruesome topic has grown in popularity and how its consumption can affect our personal lives.

How It All Began

It was ten o'clock on a school night and I couldn't sleep. I snuck out of my bed to get a glass of cool water to refresh my dry throat. As I made my way to the kitchen, I got distracted by the flashing red lights and violent stabbing noises coming from my Mom's room. I inched my head through her open door, trying to remain unseen. The screen captivated me. It was a show I now recognize very well: *Snapped*. *Snapped* is a nonfiction true crime-based TV show that explains a killer's motives with plenty of reenactments included. The show also includes interviews and stories from the families of the victims, adding an element of reality to the show. Back in the day, my Mother would watch *Snapped* every night religiously; her favorite segments involved the killer spouses. Looking back, I'm glad my Dad made it this far (all jokes). I would ask to sleep in her bed, just so I could listen in on the episodes. This sparked my fascination with true crime. The killer's motivation for killing captivated me and made me want to know how I could better defend myself against dangerous people.

The True Crime Discourse Community Today

My exposure to true crime at a young age only made my curiosity grow as I got older. I was obsessed with watching and discussing true crime cases so much, I joined the true-crime discourse community for the popular true crime YouTuber, Kendall Rae. There are many different discourse communities under the true crime-related umbrella. Typically, every true crime content creator (YouTuber, podcaster, etc.,) has a discourse community of their own, so their members can discuss their content and the contents of the cases. Kendall Rae's discourse community could function completely differently than the discourse community for *Snapped*. They could talk about different cases or use a different mode of communication. However, both communities are ongoing due to the creation of true crime related content. A discourse community can be a complicated phrase to understand, so let's look to the ISU Writing Program for help.

The Illinois State University Writing Program refers to a **discourse community** as “a group of people who have some common publicly stated goals, mechanisms of participation, information exchange and feedback, community specific genres, a specialized terminology and threshold level of members.” A person involved in a true crime discourse community may talk about the cases with others and watch, research, read, or listen to true crime cases. The goals of Kendall Rae's channel and inherent discourse community is to spread awareness about the cases, share the stories of the victims involved, and raise money for the victims' families. Everyone in the discourse community has an interest in crime but everyone's reasoning is different. Some like to understand the murderer's thought process and others want to know how to spot warning signs in others. There isn't a single specific reason people watch true crime and most of the time there are multiple reasons. However, you would join a discourse community that matches your reasoning for watching. For example, in Shawna Sheperd's article, “Is it More Than Morbid Fascination? The Empowering Effect of True Crime Podcasts,” she discusses how true crime communities can promote social justice and spread awareness to underrepresented cases. If that part of true crime interests you, you will join a community that seeks social justice and change. Someone who watches true crime for pure entertainment might lean away from this branch of true crime. That's not to say the two cannot intertwine but people join True Crime discourse communities that keep them interested and involved.

Multimedia in True Crime

The best definition I found for true crime would be, “a nonfiction literary, podcast, and film **genre** in which the author examines an actual crime and

details the actions of real people” (“True Crime”). Note the ISU Writing Program definition of a genre, “a kind of production that is possible to identify by understanding the conventions or features that make that production recognizable.”

Here are some notable genre conventions for true crime:

- A backstory for both the victim and the criminal
- The details of before and after the crime took place
- The status of the case: solved or unsolved
- Actions being taken to solve the case/actions that occurred to solve the case

The definition of true crime in the paragraph above fits into **multimedia**, which involves thinking about all the different media people can use when communicating (ISU Writing Program). Media itself can be *any* method or tool for making a production (a text) that communicates (ISU Writing Program). The way true crime cases are portrayed can fit into this definition of multimedia. For example, you will see true crime cases in the form of Netflix shows, blockbuster movies, research articles, and bestselling books. You will also see true crime cases being discussed on multiple different social media platforms. The true crime podcast, *Crime Junkie*, has their podcast available on Spotify, Pandora, Amazon Music, and Apple Podcasts, just to name a few. You can also follow them on Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter, or sign up for their newsletter. True crime does not simply exist in one medium, which is how it’s been made more accessible to so many people. Due to its accessibility, people have been able to form an interest in it and even join the community. These multiple media sources for talking about and presenting true crime stories are not just useful for people who take an interest as observers or participants of a true crime community. They can also be sources for victims or the families of victims to seek to publicize their case and encourage an ongoing investigation. For example, in the case of a missing person, family or friends might use different kinds of true crime media sources to try to spread information to advance the investigation.

P-CHAT and the True Crime Community

We use **P-CHAT** to help us think about and study the complex genres we encounter in the world (ISU Writing Program). P-CHAT stands for pedagogical cultural-historical activity theory and includes seven key terms, including production, representation, distribution, reception, socialization, activity, and ecology. I’m going to explore six of these terms and how they

pertain to the true crime community, in order to better understand the community and the ways in which they function. I will refer to the definitions provided by the Illinois State University Writing Program to get a better grasp of how these terms apply to real-life examples.

Production

Production deals with the means through which a text is produced. Many members of the true crime discourse community communicate via the Internet. Whether it be in a chat room, social media account, or under the comment section of a true crime video. To do this, they need access to the Internet. You will need an account on some sort of social media platform, so you can find other members and communicate with them. For example, I had to create both a YouTube account and a Discord account to comment on and discuss cases with members of Kendall Rae's following. To be a part of the community, you just need to watch true crime and form an interest in it.

Representation

Representation highlights issues related to how the people who produce a text conceptualize and plan it. People who lead or facilitate a true crime community might do this through the use of a particular kind of social media. They must establish their presence on the platform to reach out to true crime fans and gain new ones. Typically, the platform they choose will be one in which members of the community (fans) can interact in some way. YouTube is a wildly popular social media platform with plenty of true crime cases to binge-watch. In addition to creating a presence, a true crime host needs to discover cases to present, which involves all kinds of different writing work and research. For example, in the community I belong to, Kendall Rae puts her content on YouTube, so a lot of people can see her videos. To create one of her videos, she must research cases, edit the video, and create an outline of what she wants to say.

Distribution

Distribution involves the consideration of where texts go and who might take them up. It also considers the tools and methods that can distribute text, and how distribution can sometimes move beyond the original purposes intended by the author(s). The creators of true crime content will want to use eye-catching titles on a true crime video to get more people to watch it, which will create more true crime fans. Figure 1 is a thumbnail for one of Kendall Rae's videos ("The Zodiac Killer 'Identified'?!"). She has the word "solved" in giant letters with both a question mark and an exclamation mark. This would make a viewer question if the case were solved or not, which might

lead them to click on the video. The caption and thumbnail mention The Zodiac Killer, who is an infamous serial killer yet to be discovered. She knew his popularity, so she knew making a video about him would generate views. In one day, the video reached roughly 357,000 views, so her distribution tactics worked.



Figure 1: Thumbnail for Kendall Rae’s true crime YouTube video “The Zodiac Killer “Identified”?! Who is Gary Poste?”

A true crime content creator might also want to turn the comment section on under their video, so people can discuss their thoughts. The more comments there are, the more likely the video will be recommended to other viewers. People in the community might recommend a true crime video to other fans and share the link to it, increasing the view count as well.

Reception

Reception deals with how a text is taken up and used by others. A fan might repurpose a true crime video or article into a talking point during a true crime discussion. A fan will probably talk to their friends or family about a true crime case that interests them. As far as true crime content creators are concerned, the number of likes, comments, and views under a certain true crime video will indicate how interesting or important it is to the community. Kendall Rae usually has significantly more likes compared to dislikes, which tells me people receive her videos well.

Socialization

Socialization describes the interactions of people and institutions as they produce, distribute, and use texts. Those involved in the discourse community would share their viewpoints on a true crime story and ask other members for their opinion. They usually tag a friend or fan under a post to get them to communicate their thoughts. I’ve sent my sister cases I found particularly chilling, then we discuss our thoughts after. This communication keeps the community going and creates new members. It is also why multimedia in true crime is so important. As a case is reported and discussed through media, the details of the story are also shared and thus seen and discussed by more people.

Activity

Activity is a term that encompasses the actual practices people engage in as they create text. A true crime content creator would have to create or be a

part of a platform/server for fans to communicate with to create their own personal discourse community. Kendall Rae has her own Discord, which is a platform for her fans to talk about the videos she has made. She even asks fans for video suggestions. The creation of her true crime videos is what sparks new fans and members of her discourse community. To create a true crime video, you'd need a camera, editing software, plenty of research, and a script for the research. Most true crime content creators get their information from news stories or articles, social media posts, and videos made by other true crime content creators.

Thinking about the Ethics of True Crime Communities

People who host true crime podcasts or create documentaries, as well as people, like me, who follow and interact with these different kinds of media, all engage in a range of different kinds of literate activities, using different kinds of media, texts, and tools, and engaging in a range of different kinds of research. P-CHAT can help us look at these activities, but I want to consider one aspect of these literacies that P-CHAT didn't really help me to think about, and that is—are the kinds of writing and communicating that surround true crime ethical? Are they even healthy for people?

I love Kendall Rae's channel because she is always providing links to mental health resources and GoFundMe's or donation sites for the victims' families. Kendall Rae and her following actively practice **ethical communication**. The site Ethic Comm states, "to be an ethical communicator in this age means you are accurate, truthful, and honest. Principles within ethical communication are autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence, justice, and fidelity ("Ethical Communication Matters")." True crime dives into super dark topics like murder, kidnapping, and assault. There are real-life victims involved in these cases, so someone must discuss these cases carefully and respectfully. If the facts are not represented truthfully, the victim and their family will receive the consequences. Take the case of Georgia Leah Moses for example. Her police reports had her middle name down as Lee instead of Leah. A person's name is a key part of their identification, so it only made it harder for accurate information to spread about Georgia (*Crime Junkie*).

True crime content creators who take the time to get the facts down and seek justice for the victims play a key role in the ethics of the community. The *Guardian* article, "The Rise of 'Citizen Sleuths': The True Crime Buffs Trying to Solve Cases," mentions podcasters doing social justice work within their content creation (Tait). Much too often, the media reports focus on the

offender. Marissa Jones is the host of the podcast, *The Vanished*, which centers on the friends and families of missing people in its storytelling. Jones' podcast focuses on victims who are traditionally ignored by the media, amplifying their stories. In addition, she works directly with law enforcement. Her conversation with the husband of a woman who went missing in 2018 opened the door for detectives to try him again. This ultimately led to his murder conviction. Jones' work is just one example of real change being made by true crime content creators and their communities.

You do not need a giant platform to spark change. According to the same *Guardian* article, “more than 600 [million] people have viewed #GabbyPetito TikToks” (Tait). Gabby Petito was a missing woman whose body was found in September. More views mean more people are learning about a case and sharing possibly important information. Today, we can make progress within the palms of our hands. I call on people to make these changes in an ethical manner.

The Unethical Side of the Community

Over the years, the true crime community has gotten a bad rap. From glorifying serial killers to making money off a victim's case, the community does not always act ethically. There are different **subgenres** of discourse communities within the genre of the true crime community. One infamous group calls themselves “Columbiners.” This is the name given to the fanbase of the Columbine massacre. The YouTuber, ReignBot, made a detailed video about the Columbiners that idolize and sympathize with the shooters (“Exploring Obsessive True Crime Fandoms”). ReignBot stated some people are attracted to the shooters because they think they could change them or are attracted to the dangerous nature of the murderers. Romanticizing murder has been popular in entertainment and in the plot of television shows and movies. I can think of countless examples of TV shows that have a serial killer as the protagonist or love interest. My favorite show, *American Horror Story*, includes several real-life famous serial killers like Richard Ramirez and Madame LaLaurie. And just recently, Netflix released season three of *YOU*, a show about a serial killer that kills for the people he is obsessed with. Many fans will justify his murders because they sympathize with his issues and find him attractive. It makes you wonder: *would we obsess over this killer if they were not an attractive white man?*

Through my research, I discovered the term *hybristophilia*. The Rpg Monger made a video about bizarre true crime fandoms. They described hybristophilia as “sexual interest in and attraction to those who commit

crimes” (“[OLD] Deconstructing Tumblr’s Most Bizarre Fandom”). You will encounter many people that fit this definition if you explore true crime discourse communities. While there are people in the community that want to fight for justice, advocate for mental health awareness, and share the stories of victims, that doesn’t take away from the damage true crime entertainment has caused and continues to cause. From making a profit from the stories of victims to re-traumatizing families by bringing up old cases, the community has its flaws.

The Effect True Crime Has on Mental Health

I have witnessed firsthand what true crime can do to someone’s mental health and mental stability. Referring to the beginning of my article, my Mom would watch *Snapped* every single night. She became overly paranoid for me. I couldn’t hang out at a friend’s house, have a boyfriend, or stay out late. She was worried I could become a victim myself. While I understand now she was trying to protect me, her worrying led to unhealthy coping mechanisms. I could not make memories with friends or go to a movie with my crush because of my Mother’s irrational fear of losing me. The website, *Health Essentials*, did some research into people’s fascination with true crime and the effects in their article, “Is Your Love of True Crime Impacting Your Mental Health?” A Dr. Childs contributed to their post: “‘We want to watch true crime in part to learn how to avoid being a victim,’ she says. ‘It can teach us to be prepared in case we’re ever in that situation’” (*Health Essentials*). My Mom was doing just that. She wanted to avoid seeing me on *Snapped*. She wanted to avoid me falling victim to a horrible crime. The article from *Health Essentials* went on to say that true crime bingeing becomes unhealthy when you are scared or anxious all the time, you feel unsafe at home, and you are wary of others. These might be signs it’s time to stop. Personally, too much true crime heightens my anxiety levels. However, when I get invested in a case, it can be hard to take a step back. It is a never-ending cycle of anxiety I have trouble breaking. The *HuffPost* article, “This Is Your Brain on True Crime Stories,” explores the psychological aspect of too much true crime (Smith). They mention that indulging in true crime, especially before bed, can increase anxiety and nightmares. The article goes on to say, “consuming this genre in excess can potentially increase your feelings of paranoia and inhibit you from taking risks, even minor ones” (Smith). Part of true crime’s fascination is we get to explore our deepest fears from the comfort of our own homes. This hobby becomes dangerous when we fail to listen to our body’s responses and triggers such as increased symptoms of depression/ anxiety or trouble sleeping.

I include the effect true crime has on mental health for various reasons. For one, I want to illustrate that the texts and literary work we create and publish have various effects on people, even if some of those effects are unintended. A true crime reporter might create a story around a case to solely entertain people. However, their content could trigger the victims involved or the people with a similar story. What was meant to entertain could evoke trauma responses. This of course can damage the consumer's mental health. The reporters themselves could suffer from depression or anxiety because of reporting on such dark topics. Kendall Rae has been open about how the cases she reports on have not always benefitted her mental well-being. Again, this could be a sign to stop engaging in all things true crime related. Secondly, mental health, in general, is a talking point in the true crime discourse community. You will find members trauma bonding and talking about their experiences with mental illness and abuse. Most people that commit the crimes in true crime cases battle with mental illness and poor mental health. That is why it is vital to continue the conversation, have healthy discussions, and spot warning signs.

Concluding Thoughts

True crime intertwines with literate activity. You might engage in literate activity while interacting with true crime by reading articles or writing a script for a true crime video, just to give some examples. In this article, I question how the literary works we create or take part in affect us and society. We have observed how true crime can affect mental health negatively, so I've grown a curiosity about how other forms of literary activity affect us and to what degree. I think the key takeaway is what we create affects other people. We need to be responsible for what we create and how we intend to use it. Our creations can take on a life of their own and so we need to be extra aware of this.

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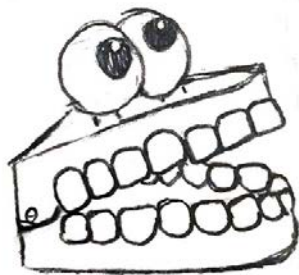
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Notes



Could ya give
me a hand? I
think I've got
somethin' stuck
between my
molars

a *grassroots* article that is a spiral

ulysses c. bougie

In this article, bougie (he/they) conducts a writing experiment in which he attempts to embrace their tendency to spiral when writing. They posit that spiraling writing is one example of a slightly off-key approach to (free)writing, a brainstorming exercise that might prove useful for writers who feel lost in the messiness of their own thoughts when they try to compose something.

I start my first draft of this article by composing out loud: I talk, and the Google Docs voice typing software writes for me. It drops in a period every time I take a breath, but that's something I can edit out later. I'm doing things this way, I tell my laptop, "Because I want to go to sleep. But I need to finish this article, and to do that I need to write anything at all before I go to sleep so I'll have something to work with tomorrow." My idea for this essay comes from Thursday night procrastination panic more than any official brainstorming session: this essay itself is its own brainstorming session, or the first draft of it was, anyway. It's not the kind of writing process I teach my students. I'm thinking that maybe I'll structure this article as a spiral. The first paragraph of the introduction to my Master's thesis was kind of structured in a similar way: I just kept talking and then letting this paragraph go on and on for several pages; I wrote about ADHD (recorded as "80HD" by Google Docs) and about rants that go on for a long time. And writing clearly. Queerly. Experimenting by really just letting myself go (whatever that phrase means) wherever my mind went. Rather than trying to make the jump from one paragraph to the next as if they were stepping stones, I imagined that the trajectory of my introduction was a different kind of movement.

Instead of forward, downward, I'm thinking that it would be interesting to format or structure *this* article like that, to just leap down the rabbit hole that is this first paragraph, list on hand of the things I want to talk about. And then just see where I end up if I just keep going and circling around. And I said rabbit hole—so I'm just thinking of Alice falling into Wonderland and how long that fall was. Lewis Carroll could have used two words to tell us about it in the original book, first published in 1865. (She fell.) Instead of dropping in one fast rush, Alice does so for several pages: “[e]ither the well was very deep,” Carroll writes, “or she fell very slowly, for she had plenty of time as she went down to look about her and to wonder what was going to happen next” (3). When I look back at that first chapter of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, actually, Carroll's narration itself feels a bit like a spiral. As one winding paragraph recounting Alice's fall goes:

Down, down, down. Would the fall never come to an end? “I wonder how many miles I've fallen by this time?” [Alice] said aloud. “I must be getting somewhere near the centre of the earth. Let me see: that would be four thousand miles down, I think—” (for, you see, Alice had learnt several things of this sort in her lessons in the schoolroom, and though this was not a very good opportunity for showing off her knowledge, as there was no one to listen to her, still it was good practice to say it over) “—yes, that's about the right distance—but then I wonder what Latitude or Longitude I've got to?” (Alice had no idea what Latitude was, or Longitude either, but thought they were nice grand words to say.) (4–5)

Like me, Carroll can't resist adding things in parentheses, relegating them into asides because he knows they're extra, in older and more contemporary senses of the word; parentheses are sidetracking the plot of the novel rather than moving readers towards what will happen next; they linger in description and idle meditation like an overextended sentence. Alice spends so much time falling that she makes several attempts to amuse herself as she drops, noticing different things, talking to herself, dozing off, beginning to dream. What would happen if Carroll just kept going with his parenthetical asides? Most of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is a sidetrack itself, a dream that its main character wanders around in before waking up to do something else more grounded in “the real world.” In the excerpt above, we get sidetracks running off that larger sidetrack, a mix of parentheses and Alice herself, even, talking in asides the narrator feels the need to interrupt with hyphens. (At least one of them needs to keep moving towards an end.) Maybe the narrator or Alice or both of them have ADHD (or maybe it's just me). I'm typing now, for the record, instead of dictating these words aloud. I never would've gotten onto thinking about Alice if I'd started out typing this document by hand, though, rather than rambling out loud alone in my

apartment, talking to my computer at ten at night on a Thursday and hoping to avoid disturbing my neighbors. I should close the window, maybe. I just love the thought of following this paragraph down, down, down: instead of concisely considering some of the ideas I've shared above and then moving on, I'm getting deeper and deeper into things, planning to weave other topics from my to-do list in as they become relevant (or as I see points in this spiral where they'd pop in nicely). (That's how I envision this essay, anyway.) Not just one long paragraph, but a few long sentences, as well. I meant for this to be an article about messiness and how it can be both a good thing and a bad thing when it comes to writing, or both a helpful thing and an unhelpful thing, but I wonder if that's what I want to focus on, or if I just want to talk about spiraling and about allowing one's self to do so. What if this article is a spiral about spirals? I was just thinking, anyway, about how I didn't really know where to go with the messiness thing, how to start or what I really wanted to say—so maybe spirals are where it's at. I'll talk about spirals by spiraling. I haven't thought much before about spiraling and writing, about spiraling maybe being a good thing: when I use that word, I'm usually talking about my mental health. If I tell a friend that I'm "spiraling," just the one word, what I mean is that I'm spiraling downwards, inwards, towards a direction in which I don't want to go. I mean that I'm sitting in class and I want to pay attention to what my peers or instructor are saying, but I'm caught up in my own thoughts and worries too much to stick to doing that, pulled around and around a circle that makes me think of hurricanes and tornadoes. I feel unable to eject myself from that trajectory, more and more unable to think about or perceive the world around me, people talking and moving and driving and walking away and towards me and in all other directions. I'm imagining spiraling with this article, though, as less of an anxious thing: I enter this storm giving it my consent, actually hoping that it will whip me around and pull me deeper and deeper towards a center. I want to use that energy to keep myself writing, to reach an ending, any ending, a word count or a conclusion or something that sounds very nice and very final. It's been a long week/month/first semester in which I'm slowly crawling—spiraling?—towards my PhD in English, and I'm tired and tempted to sleep, but a spiral has a shape to it that I can picture myself writing in, a movement that pulls me along. The five-paragraph essay, in comparison, seems all starts and stops, moving from one big idea to the next, trying to spiral just a little in the second half of every paragraph before transitioning smoothly into another. Like diving, those paragraphs are an art form about surrendering yourself to just think some shit for a bit and toss out a critical thought or another—something that isn't a summary or a quote—then coming back up from that dive, surfacing to catch a breath before the next dive. Writing that way is maybe more organized—although a spiral has

its own structure and organization, I think—but I don't think essay structures that use paragraphs the way I've learned to use them have the kind of raw, tugging energy that a spiral does. I might write a few paragraphs of a paper and then get stuck, have no idea where to go next, and I could keep writing from there, but what I write next might not have anything to do with the previous things I've written, or it might not support my initial thesis or be about the same topic at all. So I wait, in this situation, until I can think of something to say that does fit the five-paragraph essay structure: something that I can transition into smoothly from my last good thought, something on the same topic that I started with when I began to write. If my initial goal, topic, structure in mind, is a spiral, though, I have much less of an excuse to get or feel stuck; I only need to write whatever occurs to me next, and that thing *shouldn't* be what I was talking about at the beginning of my spiral. This isn't stream-of-consciousness writing: I'm not writing whatever comes to mind here; I'm still pausing to consider what to write next and tossing out ideas left and right, things that don't feel relevant or interesting or don't go in the direction I want to go with this spiral. I don't know at all where this article will end, or when, or what it will look like once I begin revising it—I don't know if this draft will be usable at all—but I'm not just writing down anything at all, either. I'm sticking to some goal or another, to writing what I want to write in this article and to the conventions I know I need to adhere to or at least stay near to. I can experiment like this in an article written for *Grassroots*, maybe, but I can't just start rambling about my favorite show (it's *Critical Role*, anyway). I need to keep audience in mind, original intentions: this is something for readers of *Grassroots* and not Twitter; I can't use too much jargon from my specific branch of English studies. There needs to be something here that other writers and writing researchers could find helpful or interesting or thought-provoking. I'm trying to steer my spiral, I suppose, through all those loops, wickets, constraints, whatever. The spiral provides a bit of its own energy after I feed an initial little bit of energy into it: a first sentence, a few 500-word stretches, now a first 1500-words. The spiral makes its own momentum, taking that initial push I gave and speeding up in the same way, maybe, that an object dropped off a tall building will fall faster and faster. An object in motion stays in motion, or something like that. I remember learning in high school physics that when we turn a curve when driving a car, some energy goes into that turn, some force, so we slow down a little, need to speed up again to get back to the speed we had entering that curve. I've noticed it while driving. In the same way, I think, I need to expend a little extra energy beyond that initial offering to steer the spiral I'm constructing here, to reject possible directions it might take, to try to write for a specific audience (to try to steer towards some kind of helpful, smart-sounding end despite my not knowing what that end will be as I write). There

are already things that I'd like to go back and change with this current draft as I write this all out for the first time; I'm expending energy, maybe, in not allowing myself to go back and revise things. That'd be exiting, the spiral, I think—and the thought of coming back to this frontier between words and no words, this half-written page I keep adding to as I type, makes me nervous. If I go back and revise, I'll have lost my momentum, and the spiral will have lost its shape; it would loop back into itself, if I did that, go back up (or wherever it came from), and, although I'm not sure I can say why at this moment, it feels like that'd be disturbing this whole structure that I'm building. I suppose I'm committing myself here to heading further down this spiral because I'm wondering if it could be a helpful process for some writers, an activity to try, or even just a different way of imagining the sessions where we sit down to write (if we sit while doing it at all). If we don't write in spirals, how do we write? How do we draft versus revise? It feels like the most obvious use of a spiral like this would be coming up with new ideas, brainstorming in a shape that's literally that of a storm. This exercise isn't unlike the practice of freewriting, just writing whatever comes to mind in an effort to get one's thoughts going, to get used to writing things down, to face one's fear of the blank page by just writing something, anything at all. I'd argue, though, that my spiral here isn't free: I hope it will head in one particular direction, that it will stay on this broad topic of spiraling as a way of writing, just digging deeper into it rather than hopping from idea to idea (each idea with a paragraph of its own, paragraphs like islands that I could hop to and from, or attempt to, anyway). There's such a thing as focused freewriting, which tries to linger more on a single topic, but even that term doesn't feel like it entirely covers what I'm trying to do with this article. I'm thinking of this document not as a means to some other end—as brainstorming—but as an end in and of itself. I'm trying to make something I could actually show to others, to work into a final product via revision. I'm not just spiraling for my own sake or to think of something to write; I'm spiraling with the thought that this way of structuring an essay—or just a series of ideas—could be an interesting way to present all these thoughts to readers, or to attempt to, anyway. The image that comes to mind for me here is a spinning pottery wheel, the kind that spins on and on with a lump of clay in the middle. People (in movies, anyway) put their hands on that clay in order to shape it, and the clay just keeps spinning; steady pressure on it in combination with that motion forms what end up becoming even grooves, a vase or bowl or cup whose base is always a perfect circle. Am I forming a vase by writing in this spiral? Is all of this spinning? Am I putting a steady hand to a spinning object, to the 2,300 words I've written thus far? Is the base of this essay a perfect circle? I'm not sure that it is—it feels very possible that I could veer off track in a manner that rendered this piece unhelpful or unintelligible,

something that didn't or doesn't stick enough to the conventions a *Grassroots* article might or must. Maybe the metaphor just doesn't stretch that far. Or maybe I'm trying to build something more specific than just *something* out of clay. I could make something/anything circular using a pottery wheel, but I can't do just anything to my clay if I want to make something that I can drink out of later. I can't bring the top of a bowl to a point, it wouldn't be usable (not as a bowl, anyway.) And I'm hoping that this piece, if it's not too oddly shaped, could prove usable or useful in some way or another. If it can't be used for one purpose, then maybe it can suit another. My eyes are red from staring at my laptop screen so long while writing this, from me being in class for three hours before this and doing five hours of work in my campus office before that. Maybe spirals aren't the best for one's health; they don't allow for too many breaks, if any at all, not if I want to keep the momentum I have going. My eyes are a bit itchy, and I'm at the point where I've fallen deep enough down my well, possibly, that I'm struggling now to remember how this article started, to try to think about how to land this plane. What does this whole mess have to do with writing, writing research, students, pedagogical cultural-historical activity theory, genre? Genre has come up a few times so far: I've mentioned my attempts to steer this spiral through at least some of the genre conventions of a *Grassroots* article. I've been trying to find a balance between this experiment that I'm conducting and the conventions I've decided are most important to stick with. I'm also rethinking my identity as a writer and writing researcher a bit here: I initially intended to write this piece about accepting my own messiness at times, but I'm finding a new way to think about the ways I can write an essay, instead. I've never written in a spiral quite like this one, not intentionally as I am now, and I'm thinking of my writing somewhat differently now. What new possibilities does the practice of spiraling open for me? What possibilities could it hold for others? Would it be interesting or relevant to touch on mental health again here? I just like, I suppose, that in this essay I've begun building I get to embrace spiraling rather than keep trying not to do it. I'm still limiting myself, not writing just anything, but the writing comes easier. Maybe it's flowing (whatever that word means). I tried something similar last week when giving a presentation in a class I'm taking this semester: I put everything I wanted to share on one slide and told my peers and instructor that I was experimenting by purposely making my presentation an ADHD ramble, just a few minutes of me raving about things that really got me. I ended up finishing my ramble with a few thoughts I hadn't planned on offering at all—I'd never put them into words before. Rather than trying to work against my ADHD (my desire to ramble rather than speak in concise bullet points), I tried just seeing what would happen if I just let myself head in the direction I wanted to at the speed and with the vehicle I wanted to use (dancing, maybe,

instead of walking in straight lines from point to point). My goal with that presentation wasn't sharing arguments or textbook information, anyway: I wasn't trying to put facts in my listeners' heads so much as offer a few ideas mostly related to the topic I was discussing, so rambling worked OK there, although it might not have in a different context. In other words: spirals and rambles can be very generative, can produce interesting thoughts or results, I think, but they're not going to be the ideal form for every form, genre, or context of writing or speaking or otherwise communicating with others. Perhaps it's possible, though, to spiral just a little on occasion, for writers to ask themselves when a spiral might aid them in achieving whatever goal they've set out to meet on a given day. I think here of one of my old professors, who, after talking to me for a few semesters and teaching a class that I took and wrote things for, suggested I plan ahead to do unplanned things in my Master's thesis. As she observed, I was always changing what I wanted to write about, so it could maybe be helpful to purposely plan to have parts of my thesis or thesis writing be more creative, less sketched out ahead of time. As it happened, I ended up writing my thesis in an entirely different field on English studies from the one I'd originally planned on working in. I don't know that I was even able to allow myself just *some* space for unplanned creativity: instead, I just kept changing what my thesis would be about and wrote most of it in the couple days before it absolutely needed to be finished. My finished product ended up being, in part, chapters made up of fragments, a structure that I rationalized by arguing that such a form suited the fact that the topic of my thesis was queer composition and queering composition. (It only made sense that my writing, then, would take on a few weird shapes.) In reality, I wasn't (and still am not) sure if I made my thesis a collection of fragments because it got my ideas across best to readers or because it was the only kind of collecting of thoughts that felt possible for me with limited amounts of time and energy available to me. I wouldn't change my thesis now, though; I'm not even able to picture it with a more conventional structure now. What points would I make into headings and sections? By writing in fragments, maybe what I was offering my few readers were ideas that *weren't* smoothly connected. I left space in between fragments instead, space that left room for my audience to make their own connections between them, to allow for any number of connections between them (an idea that I like, actually, now that I think of it). Could I make all the points I've made in this piece in a five-paragraph essay, with headers or sections or topic sentences? Could I make this essay's argument in the same way? I wouldn't be able to model what I was discussing, I suppose: I'd be talking about this idea of spiraling, but readers wouldn't get an example of what that spiraling could look like. I could *describe* a spiral like this, include excerpts from it, but readers still wouldn't be reading a spiral of the kind I'm describing here in its

entirety; their information would be second- instead of firsthand. As I begin spinning towards what feels instinctually like an ending, I need to wonder: how do I end a spiral? How do I close *this* spiral? Do I conclude in the traditional manner, restating major points I've made or considering where this conversation I've been having with myself might turn next? What I've tried to do with this piece is try something out for the first time while at the same time discussing that very experiment, modeling for readers how they, too, might experiment with spirals. Maybe I'm not just talking about spirals here: perhaps spirals are *my* thing, a way of moving from word count to higher word count that works well for and feels enjoyable for me specifically. Readers might ask themselves, then, how they feel inclined to write. What shapes do they find themselves falling into as they draft, and which ones give them the momentum to keep going? At what points do they stop themselves, try to force their work into a different shape? For whom are they doing that reshaping? Is there an ideal balance to be found between the structures they fall into and the ones they're trying to build as they write? What do they need to do, or what questions do they need to ask themselves in order to maintain that balance (if they even reach it, or if it's even possible in the first place)? What shapes of writing prove more successful in the long run at getting writers closer to whatever their goals in writing were or are? How might they shape their writing processes, and maybe from there their writing products (and perhaps, in the process, themselves)?

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ulysses constance bougie (he/they) is a creative writer, visual artist, and academic bitch with Bachelor's and Master's degrees in English from the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh and the University of Missouri. He's currently a graduate instructor with focuses in asexual and aromantic studies, composition studies, and multimodal + neuro/queer rhetorics at Illinois State University. They recently published a chapbook of old poems entitled *my god(s)?*. Find him via their website, cpbwrites.wordpress.com.



Notes



“I Should Quit, Right?” And Other Things I’ve Said While (Trying) to Learn to Play Chess

Charley Koenig

In this article, Charley Koenig traces the many paths that could have led to quitting as she learned a new literate activity: how to play chess. Though more of a story about the practices of teaching and learning something new than actually learning chess, Charley weaves in the concepts of antecedent knowledge, multimodality, and uptake to relay her struggles with pawns and frustration.

“I Should Definitely Quit.”

I cannot tell you how many times I said this to myself, to my partner Kyle, and to the universe. . . Chess simply did not feel like something I was capable of learning, let alone playing with any kind of understanding or enjoyment. Chess was just stupid. Or else, I was.

Chess was something that I hadn’t previously found very interesting. I knew little about it and its rules, and my partner’s level of knowledge and experience was intimidating. But chess has been experiencing a renaissance lately, with chess forums, like *Chess.com*, and live streaming, like on Twitch, gaining in popularity, and of course, the phenomenon that was *The Queen’s Gambit* on Netflix. And not to mention that my sweet husband had wanted me to play with him for years, though we had yet to sit down and try it together. Before starting to learn, chess seemed like an appealing way to spend our free time and challenge ourselves. It even sounded like it might be fun. However, after several attempts at figuring out this board game, I was profoundly questioning when the fun and appeal would come into play.

The frustration of trying to learn something almost entirely new put me in a disparaging state of mind.

Tracing the Many Paths that Could Have Led to Quitting

As happens a lot when you're learning something new, my expectations of what that process would look and feel like significantly differed from the reality of my **uptake** of this new **literate activity**. There were a lot of

Literate Activity

“Developed by Paul Prior (1998, p. 138), the term ‘literate activity’ is meant to address all of the many ways that texts are part of people’s lived experiences in the world. It extends beyond our typical ideas about ‘reading’ and ‘writing’ to include the broad range of practices and processes we employ in the creation and use of a wide array of texts” (Roozen, 2021, p. 96).

hurdles and stumbling blocks and straight-up brick walls that I had to adjust for in lots of big and little ways. The biggest was my intense frustration—with the game, with the process, with my teacher and tools. I wasn’t sure if I would ever be able to make sense of this game. In the end, it took a great many attempts to simply get to a place where I finally thought, “OK, I maybe don’t HAVE to quit.”

Take 1: Kyle Tries Teaching Me How to Play Chess

Full disclosure, this did not go well. In hindsight, diving too deep too quickly into the terms, references, in-jokes, even the lore that surrounds chess was not the best way (for me) to go about learning how to play this game. In fact, this first take—and, to a lesser degree, perhaps takes 2, 3, and 4—could be read as to how *not* to learn how to play chess. So, if you, like me, are new to chess, and this section feels confusing, disorienting, or even frustrating, now you know how I felt!

Optimistically, ambitiously even, I started this journey by simply asking Kyle how to play. His face lit up as he brought out the chessboard someone had gifted him years ago, something which for me had just become this background fixture of our living space for years. It’s a beautiful set: glass board and pieces, with half the pieces in transparent glass and the other half in this almost opaque, fogged glass. Similarly, the square spaces on the board alternated between transparent and opaque glass rather than the traditional black (or sometimes brown or dark tan) and white. At first, I didn’t think anything of these aesthetic choices; it was just a pretty set. But as Kyle started to set up the board and talk through the basic premise and first steps, I noticed a problem. He had just explained that the white pieces always go first in chess (an arbitrary rule that impacts board setup and openings, or first phase strategies).

“Wait, which pieces are supposed to be black, and which are supposed to be white on this board?” I asked him. He stared at me for a few seconds before responding.

“Ya know, I haven’t played with this set in so long. Let me see . . .”

We ended up having to Google how to set up a chessboard so that we could determine which glass opacity (clear or fogged) was intended to represent which color from a traditional board. That took a minute to figure out before we could move forward. To be honest, I *still* can’t quickfire the correct answer. I have to look up the proper way to set up the board every time I play. But I digress . . .

Once the board was oriented correctly and the pieces were all in place, Kyle said I could play white, so, enthusiastically, I—

“—Uh, well, nope, you can’t do that.” He said this immediately after I made my move. “That’s illegal.” (See Figure 1 for my valiant effort.)

So that’s how we got into how each piece moves, and wouldn’t ya know it? They all move differently and adhere to different rules. We started with the pawns. Pawns are simple. They move directly forward, one square at a time. Except on their first move, then they can move two squares directly forward. But when they take (“Take?” “Yeah, like capture. You’re trying to capture your opponent’s pieces until you can take their king to win.” “Oh. OK.”) another piece, they do it diagonally. And if the circumstances are right, you can do an en passant capture—



Figure 1: My first ever move—already illegal.

“WTF is ‘en passant?!’”

I might have yelled this a bit, but I was getting exasperated. How can one *simple* piece move this many ways? Kyle smiled, then explained this super fancy and cool move, how it works, and the rules for using it. He gestured as he explained, which helped. I listened and concentrated and did my best to mentally take note of this mini process within the larger system of the game (I started to wonder whether I should be taking actual notes). And then he had the nerve to say, “But you hardly ever get to use the en passant move, so you don’t really need to worry about that one.”

Are. You. Kidding. Me.

I think that's about when I walked away the first time. Between the somewhat confusing board setup, the different pieces with their functions, the flood of specialized terminology—not just take/capture and en passant, but also threat, attack, checkmate, endgame, rank and file, Elo, and so much more—and the frequent references to chess Twitch streamers and their in-jokes (just because we constantly have these streamers playing in the background at home doesn't mean I understand what they're saying or doing), I was just so overwhelmed and fed up.

Unpacking that First Take

What's up with that? According to a study done by De Bruin et al. (2005) on novice chess players learning to play endgames (in other words, strategies for the final phase of the game), a learner's prior knowledge, and whether they have acquired patterns for organizing information on a specific topic, largely determines how that learner will process new information on that

Antecedent Knowledge

According to Chapter 1 of *How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching* (Ambrose et al., 2010), drawing on antecedent knowledge effectively, or in a way that helps learning, depends on the nature of that knowledge. If someone is aware of their prior knowledge, and that knowledge is sufficient (there's enough of it), and that knowledge is appropriate and applicable to the situation at hand, AND that knowledge is accurate, it helps learning. When any one or more of those factors is lacking—when prior knowledge is inactive or unconscious, insufficient, inappropriate, and/or inaccurate—it can slow down, distort, or otherwise impede learning. In other words, antecedent knowledge can at times be problematic.

topic and whether their working memory will get overloaded. In other words, **antecedent knowledge**—or all the things you already know that come into play when you're taking up or engaging in something (Illinois State University, n.d.)—*matters*. The things we already know affect the way we approach, learn about, and participate in various literate activities, whether that be a kind of writing or more of a literacy, like being able to play chess. Sometimes it can be helpful; sometimes, it can hold us up. De Bruin et al. seemed to find that antecedent knowledge in playing chess was valuable in learning to play and preventing overload. I think this finding rings true: I had very little antecedent knowledge about the game before starting to learn to play, so it was difficult for me to gauge what information would be most relevant to me and where to focus my attention first. Thus, overload. Without any basic framework or context for how all of this chess information fit together, I became overloaded and frustrated.

But that was just the first take. We tried to learn from that attempt, but frustration can be a sneaky, complicated foe . . .

Take 2: Kyle Slows Down

Coming back to the board took some cooling off and thinking about what went so awry the first time. After talking through some of the things that might have gotten in the way, Kyle thought we should start again by slowing things down, taking it one step at a time. But first, what did I remember from the first round? What did I already know?

White goes first. I’m supposed to try to get to my opponent’s king. Pawns move forward (NOT diagonally, yet), two squares on their first turn.

“See, you did learn a few things,” Kyle pointed out. And he was right, I suppose. Even though I was still a long way from “getting it,” there was significant **uptake** happening here—meaning, I was going through the process of taking up a new idea (in this case, playing chess) and thinking about it until it made sense (Illinois State University, n.d.). Now we just needed to keep that process going.

Kyle suggested we play it out, talking through each turn and the various move options as we went. It was a practice round, like playing an open hand of cards when you’re still trying to learn the rules. I redid my first move, legally this time, and Kyle started demonstrating the variety of moves he could make, which ones he would most likely choose and why, and how I could try to look ahead and anticipate what’s coming. Seeing the pieces move around the board and connecting those movements to what Kyle explained helped make concepts like threat, attack, and take more concrete. It also helped show which pieces could go where and how. We got through several rounds of turns (over a pretty long period, but still) before we hit a snag.

“Now what I want to do next here is called castling,” Kyle said as he did several things at once. In the back row of his pieces, he moved his king two squares to his left and placed his rook on the other side of his king. With his rook protecting one side of his king and a neat little row of three pawns lined up in front of it, he had essentially created a mini fortress around his king.

“What is that?” I demanded. “You moved two pieces. That can’t be legal. You’re making that up.”

Kyle smiled again and pulled YouTube up on his laptop. Perhaps seeing someone else use this technique in an actual game would help it to make sense (and confirm its legality). He was getting excited again, trying to use all the tools and resources at his disposal, including looking through clips of chess Twitch streamers. But as the live streamer started taking us through her game against another online player in this clip Kyle found about castling—

talking quickly and easily in what might as well have been an entire other language that I didn't know—I could feel myself starting to frown, lose focus, and want to walk away again.

The frustration was coming in hot, so I decided to try and head it off before it picked up steam: I suggested a break. This video, I explained, was not helping, and we had reached as good a stopping place as any. Kyle put the board away just as we had left it so that we could pick up where we left off when I was ready. At that moment, I could not see that happening anytime soon. I mean, how was I supposed to respond to something like castling?

Take 3: I Give Up on Kyle (For Now) and Switch to Chess.com

Key Strategies for Learners

Even learners with motivated, enthusiastic, kind teachers can get frustrated. That's why, when you're particularly determined to figure out a new skill or literacy, it's so important to be flexible, persistent, forgiving of yourself, and constantly on the lookout for any tools or resources that might give you an edge or some insight into the task at hand.

The solution to my second overwhelm slump? More tools and resources! This time, Kyle directed me to Chess.com and let me have at it, stepping back to give me some space to explore the site and learn on my own. This plan made sense: I now had just enough basic knowledge to navigate the site and even start a few games without getting too lost. From there, I could let the computer show me what to do.

This worked well for a while. I would regularly hop on and play against the easiest bot, again and again, to solidify what I knew about how the pieces moved and to start to look ahead at what my next moves might be. I even won a couple of times (though not without the help of the hint feature—see Figure 2).



Figure 2: Screenshot of *Chess.com* giving me hints as I play a bot.

What was especially helpful about *Chess.com* was the wealth of articles that I could look through as I needed them. Instead of getting overwhelmed with too much information to memorize at once, I could pick and choose which terms or moves I wanted to look up at a given time as they became relevant to me, and then I could take them in at my own pace. See Figure 3 for the terms that proved the most useful to me and how I’ve come to define them for myself.

Terms	My Definitions
Take, or capture	When you make a move that removes one of your opponent’s pieces from the board
En passant	French for “in passing;” when your opponent’s pawn moves forward to be adjacent to one of your pawns and you move diagonally forward, past your opponent’s pawn, and take their pawn without landing on the same square as their pawn
Threaten, or attack	A tactic (move, strategy, etc.) against an opponent that they will need to defend against
Trade, or exchange	Back-to-back captures; you take one of your opponent’s pieces, then your opponent takes a piece of yours in response (or vice versa)
Blunder	A significant mistake that negatively affects your position
Check and checkmate	Check is when a king is attacked or threatened; checkmate is when a king is placed in check and can’t escape; checkmate ends and wins the game for the player who performs it
Endgame	The final phase of the game, after most of the pieces have been exchanged already; also used to refer to the strategies players use in this phase; where the magic happens, if you can get that far
Rank and file	Essentially just row (rank) and column (file) on the board, denoted by numbers (rank) and letters (file) and oriented from the perspective of the white pieces (e.g., square 1a is row/rank 1, column/file a, in the bottom left corner from the white side of the board)
Elo	A rating system used to measure the relative strength of chess players (apparently the term comes from the last name of the person who came up with the system, and it is not, as I originally thought, a phonetically pronounced acronym; who knew?)
Castling	A move to protect your king using your rook; you can only perform this move when neither the king nor the rook being used have moved yet and there are no pieces between them; the king moves two squares toward the rook and the rook moves to the other side of the king; this is the only time in chess when you can move two pieces in one move

Figure 3: The terms that I encountered the most and came to define for myself (with some help from and credit owed to *Chess.com*).

But though *Chess.com* had its advantages, there were also downsides to playing on the computer. I would repeatedly turn to the hints and articles for mid-game strategies and explanations, so much so that I wondered if I was becoming *too* reliant on the computer's assistance. Thus, a new chess-related anxiety—and more frustration—was born.

Take 4: The Computer Again

At this point, I felt I had come too far to quit, though the temptation to do so was constantly, steadily increasing. I was just too invested in seeing this through to a point where I thought I could say, “Yes, I play chess,” or even just “Yes, I know how to play chess.” So, I decided that I needed to push myself. I played more/different bots, tried to use fewer hints, took more risks, and played out all the options before me to begin to look ahead and build a strategy. I had a plan—I was optimistic.

But I hit a wall. I couldn't get past the “assisted” setting on *Chess.com*—couldn't win a single game unassisted. I was stuck. The game wasn't clicking for me past a very general level, and I wasn't improving.

“I should quit, right?”

Take 5: Computer Knowledge + Practice with Kyle = Some Progress?

It was around this time that Kyle's glass board started to catch my eye. Wouldn't it be nice to move the pieces myself? After all, my body is a factor, an agent even, in the learning process as well—that's part of what can make “hands-on” learning so effective. And while the computer certainly had its advantages, the screen was only getting me so far. I was starting to feel like I needed to experience a different kind, a different *mode*, of learning—or perhaps a combination of modes would make the best use of the interrelationships between my mind, my physical body, and the tools and resources available to me.

Kyle was all too happy to sit opposite me again. But this time, I was the one talking trades and blunders (hell, I even knew what the Botz Gambit was). I had the manipulatable physical board in front of me and my laptop nearby if I got stuck or backed into a corner or encountered a new chess term. And though I didn't ultimately use it much, having access to a computer and a site like *Chess.com* gave me the comfort and confidence of having something to fall back on. Thus, combining computer knowledge and real-world practice seemed to be the recipe for a much more relaxed and enjoyable way to learn chess.

I ended up being able to do so much more with this combined approach: I could talk out possible moves with an actual human that I know well; I was able to see how some of the terms and strategies I was learning about played out in real life; I got the tactile satisfaction of moving the pieces on a physical chessboard; and I got to “castle” on my own, in real life, in a game, something I would never have been able to do in previous takes (see Figure 4!)

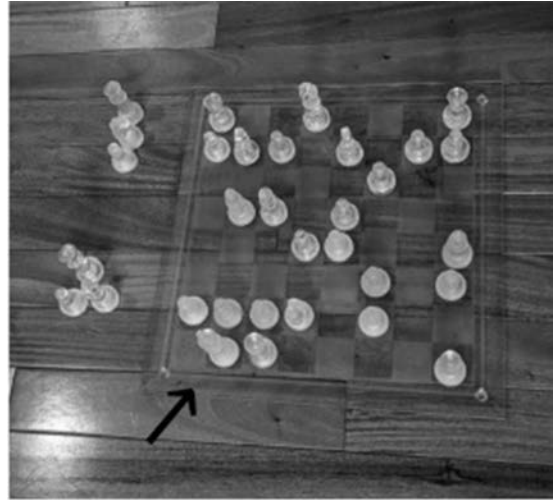


Figure 4: A moment where I felt like I knew things—when I castled all by myself.

I think the key here was **multimodality**, or using all the modes of human communication together, from alphabetical (writing) to visual (images and diagrams) (Illinois State University, n.d.). By adding Kyle’s human component to the process, we were able to add the oral (speaking) and aural (listening) modes to the ones I was already using via *Chess.com* (alphabetical in the form of written articles, visual in the form of pictures and animations of chessboards, and symbolic in the form of specific chess notations, like “+” to indicate check). The multimodality of this approach to learning chess is what made this take different, and more hopeful, than the rest.

I don’t know whether you could call this a major improvement in my chess skills. Kyle and I stalemated quite a few times, and I never won. But stalemating is not losing, and it *felt* better than before. It *felt* like an improvement from previous attempts. More importantly, I wasn’t so frustrated anymore. That more comfortable feeling, that breakthrough, seemed more of an accomplishment than any quantifiable measure of success.

Chess Frustration = 4; Me = 1?

As this story draws to a close, or at least a stopping point for now, it ends on a hopeful note: frustration can be overcome, progress is possible, and chess might not be so stupid after all. Of course, in the winding and often diverging and multiplicitous path(s) to figuring out a new literate activity, there will always be stumbling blocks to your uptake, which can be incredibly frustrating. But sometimes, it’s just a matter of finding the right combination of tools and approaches, modalities and resources, humans and computers.

Take 5 was my best, or at least my most promising, work. That try was the one where everything came together to create a rich, multimodal learning environment in which I could finally feel calm, even excited, about learning how to play chess. But this take could not have been as promising as it was without the work of the first several takes. Once I got through those frustrating, agonizing attempts and had built a solid foundation of antecedent chess knowledge, Take 5 was all but destined to advance my chess skills.

Still, I don't know that I have to go through all that same agony again the next time I want to learn a new literate activity. That's the thing about articulating your uptake—it helps you see what's going on beneath the surface as you're trying to figure something out, and then you can *use* that information going forward. So, what do I know now about myself, my process, and learning in general that I perhaps didn't before? Well, when learning something new, I can

- Consider multimodality—what other modes (alphabetical, visual, aural, etc.) could I use to approach, view, reorient, or accomplish the task or goal in front of me?
- Consider embodied learning—how might I experience this task or process more tangibly? How can I get my hands on this?
- Use more than just one method—how can I vary the ways in which I am doing and learning? What are some other ways of meeting my goals or getting the thing done? How can I change things up?
- Locate tools and resources—who else has done this before or is doing this now? How did they do it, what kinds of things did they use, and where might I find those things? Where might I find some help?

I must remember that this is just the beginning. My project of learning to play chess isn't over, it'll never be over (sometimes uptake just continues indefinitely, and that's OK). However, instead of wallowing in frustration at my current skill level as I might have before, I now find myself looking ahead at what's next. What's an endgame truly look like? *How* do you endgame? How do you win?? Maybe I should start watching chess Twitch streamers? LOL, yeah, right . . .

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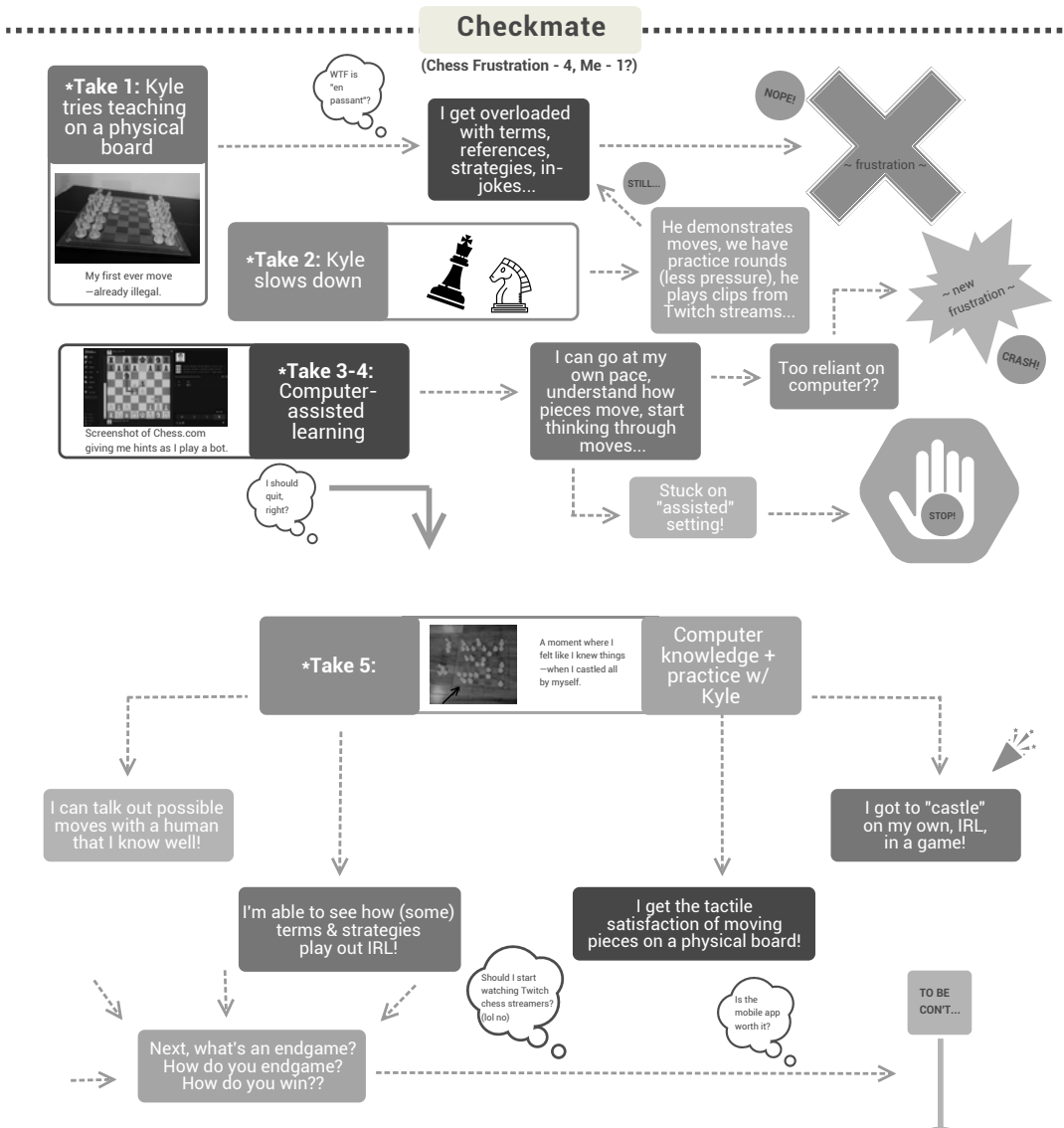
Charley Koenig is an English studies PhD student studying creative writing at Illinois State University. When she is not rewatching *Parks & Rec*, she is probably rewatching *Schitt's Creek* or listening to the *Harry Potter* audiobooks while trying to write, teach, student, parent, and crochet with her partner, daughter, and dogs in Bloomington, Illinois.

Checkmate: A Visual Companion to “I Should Quit, Right?”

Charley Koenig

In this infographic, I wanted to visually map out the various paths I took in my attempts at learning to play chess. Learning a new literate activity, or perhaps learning anything new in general, is almost always messier and more complicated than we initially think it's going to be. Those paths often got dicey for me—even discouraging at times. Starting with learning from my partner, Kyle, Take 1 was a combination of intense information overload plus intense frustration. Take 2 started a little better as we slowed down significantly, but it eventually followed the same trajectory as Take 1. For Takes 3 and 4, I tried playing on my laptop so I could look things up at my own pace. Although the computer helped organize the information I needed to learn, I could only get so far playing bots in assisted mode, so crashes and roadblocks were inevitable. But as I continued to come back to the task in different ways with various tools or supplemental resources, I slowly started to build my knowledge, comfort level, and skill in chess. Finally, during Take 5, the real possibilities of the game began to open for me. By combining the digital tools available via my computer with the physical board in front of me, along with a human I knew as my opponent, I was finally able to feel comfortable trying my strength. Unfortunately, I didn't get so far as winning

a game. However, there were a lot of little accomplishments that added to my confidence and my willingness to keep moving forward (I mean, sure, I understand a lot more chess terms now, but did you see me castle all by myself?). So, though it's an ongoing effort for me, I now know (some of) how to play chess. I'm also more aware of my natural uptake, and I'm conscious of learning strategies that might work well for me in future new learning (or writing) situations.



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Notes



Why Do Professional Dancers Need to Write?

Tava Matesi

Professional dancers utilize writing much more than people think. They have to write their own choreography, analyze past works, and even keep a journal. Writing helps with everything from discussing other artists' work to starting the creative process of making a piece. All in all, dancers cannot afford to blow off English class.

I am planning on being a professional dancer in a company. I would like to move to New York or London so that I can join a company, because they are two of the best places in the world for dance careers. They offer many opportunities to perform as well as schools that will expand my knowledge and experience. Although dance leans more towards being a physically-based career, there are many instances where professional dancers need to use writing in their daily life. There is a stereotype that presents dancers as careless and only good for their bodies. Anyone who believes dancers are like this needs to be educated on the various skills dancers need. Dancers need to have precise techniques and must be intelligent. When dancers end their performance career and go into other parts of the dance world, like teaching or choreographing, writing can aid them in their success.

My Professional Dance Aspirations

During my performance career, I would like to create my own work. I want to show audiences throughout different cities my authentic voice and what

makes me unique in a large number of talented dancers. As a choreographer, I will need inspiration for every piece I create. While the inspiration does not have to be a singular light bulb moment, it does have to play a role in my artistic decisions. Inspiration can influence any part of a dance such as the title, the style, the music, or the story being portrayed.

So How Is Writing Going to Help Me with Dance?

I decided to interview my dance professor, Laina Reese Carney, who has had an extremely successful performance and education career. She was a company member at the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, one of the most famous modern companies in the world, in New York and toured with them for several years. She also performed every semester during her undergraduate years at the University of Illinois as well as while she was earning her Master's in fine arts at Arizona State University. During this interview, she stated: "I want to end the stereotype that dancers are dumb. My goal as a professor is to build smart dancers. Scholarship is just as important as technique" (Carney). As a student of hers, I can say she does incorporate written assignments along with technique. An easy way to organize this process is to write down all your ideas in a journal. This form of writing allows the choreographer to write anything that could influence the piece and explain why a given choice was made. For our improv class, she has us bring a journal to record thoughts and lightbulb moments we had during a "jam sesh." Dancers can find inspiration for choreography through improvisation and use their notes to guide them later on.

Journaling is a great example of the P-CHAT term activity. Joyce Walker introduces P-CHAT terms (which she refers to as CHAT terms) in her article "Just CHATting." P-CHAT stands for pedagogical cultural-historical activity theory and "it refers to a set of theories about rhetorical activity" (Walker, 71). The term **activity** applies to the journaling process dancers engage in, because this kind of writing requires people to actually dance and learn from their mistakes. They can find a deeper understanding while recording what just happened and how it can be improved or used in the future. Journaling allows dancers to collect their thoughts while also having a physical copy of ideas they had while doing improv, choreographing, finding a concept for a piece they are creating, as well as many other focuses. I find journaling very therapeutic and a great tool to track progress throughout my college and professional careers. It has helped me find where I get stuck and how I can push further to have a steady flow while dancing. It has also brought my attention to what I feel are my strengths. Figure 1 is an example of my

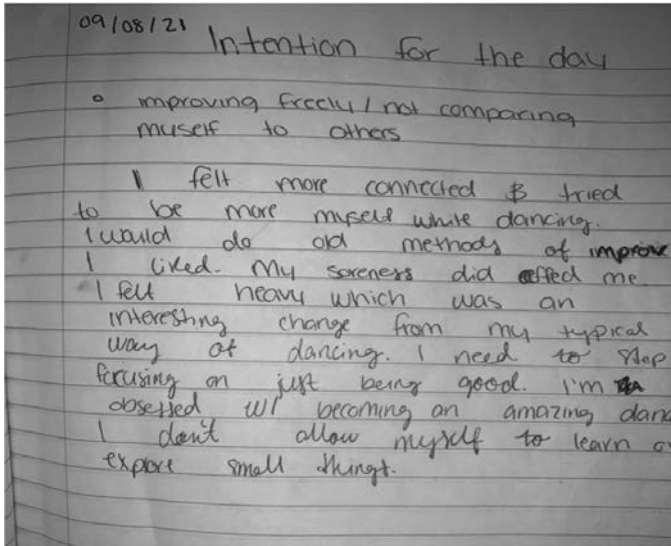


Figure 1: An entry in my improv journal about my intentions going into an improv jam and how my mindset was impacting my improvisation.

journal where I can look back to see how I can continue to grow in that area, as well as why I am uncomfortable with other techniques and styles we have learned this semester.

Steps of the Creative Process

Creating choreography not only requires creativity, but also planning and writing skills. Knowing how to write choreography is crucial because it is how a choreographer can add multiple details into one piece and it helps people who will go on to teach the same choreography in the future.

One way to document choreography is **labanotation**. As described by Christian Griesbeck in “Introduction to Labanotation,” it is “a way of writing which tries to record every aspect of motion as precisely as possible” (Griesbeck, 1). The reception of labanotation is limited to those who understand dance theory and movement analysis. Dancing, or knowing about the history of dance, is a necessity in order to properly read this genre of writing. It also helps people have an idea of how the choreographer wanted the piece to look and how it should be performed throughout time. Dancers should know how to correctly use this form of writing because it has been a successful way of preserving choreography for years. To write in labanotation, there are multiple rules that you need to follow. These rules include that the setup has to have three vertical lines with a horizontal

line crossing through them to signify the beginning of a phrase; shapes are drawn to represent limbs; small horizontal bars are drawn after a phrase is completed to show the timing with the music; and the filling of a shape has to be in the form of lines, a dot, or shading to represent the level in which a move should be completed (low, mid, or high). Look at Figure 2 for a basic guide to labanotation. Writing in this style is a difficult skill to master. This is an example of why dancers need to have a solid understanding of how to communicate through writing. It teaches dancers, choreographers, and pioneers in the dance world what can be passed on through various forms of writing.

Labanotation Is Difficult. Can I Explain Choreography Differently?

A simpler way to record choreography is writing down the composition. Composition can be written in different ways depending on the goals in mind. It can be freestyle or an outline the choreographer follows. Dance composition is another way meant to organize the creative process so small combinations of choreography come together to form a full dance. Compositional writing is a way to record the choreography on paper. Choreographers do this because it ensures they, along with the dancers, will not forget the movement they learned.

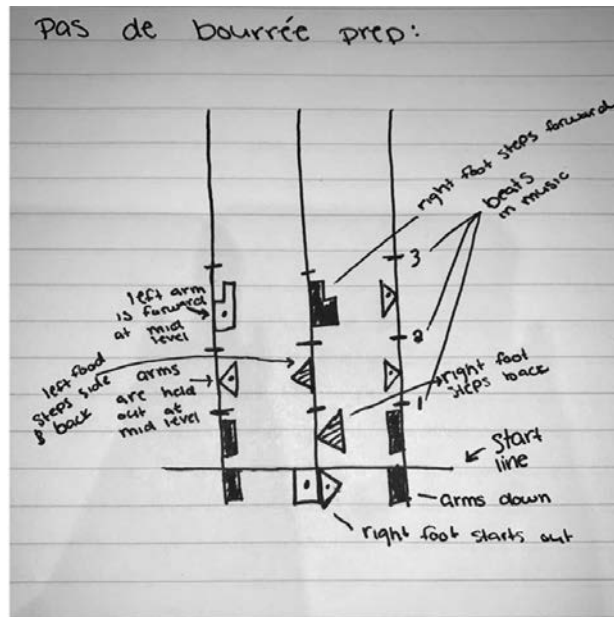


Figure 2: Example of labanotation. A pas de bourrée preparation step has been drawn.

Writing the composition is a combination of labanotation and creative writing. It gives dancers more freedom in how they chose to explain their thoughts, ideas, concept for the piece, and the choreography itself. This concept is further looked at in chapter 4 of *Discovering Dance*, “Exploring Dance Composition:” “you evaluate the movement and determine what works and what does not work as part of the dance work. The final step in the process is elaborating on the movement ideas you have selected” (Kassing). It is crucial to record unique movements on paper because it is very easy to forget a complex step. Composition focuses on writing choreography, so it is easier to add on right where you left off. If the original movement was not described thoroughly, it is likely it will not be done the same way in the future.

Dancing Requires More Than Just Writing

Another way composition aids dancers is when pieces require collaboration. While working with others, it is important for all those involved to have experience with writing and good communication skills. Talking about ideas is effective, however recording these thoughts on paper or an online document will allow the collaborators to be more organized and professional. The difference between people who want to have a career in dance and those who only want to dance in general becomes very clear when they are asked to write anything about dance. In these situations, it is crucial to be able to thoroughly explain your reasoning through writing. For some people, it is easier to explain their thoughts by speaking rather than writing because it flows more naturally and does not have the formality of writing. But writing clear explanations demonstrates the professionalism a dancer has, which will help them stand out while trying to get a job at a company. Professional dance is more than prancing around in a costume, it is a career that demands scholarship and a good grasp on multiple forms of communication. The P-CHAT term, **socialization**, comes to mind when discussing dances created by multiple people. While writing the choreography, the artistic directors, choreographers, and dancers all must come together in order to create one piece. This can influence different parts of the dance since everyone comes from different backgrounds. Everyone can bring new ideas which will make the dance more intriguing to the audience and even for the dancers that are in it.

Yes, Dancers Are Smart

Wrapping up, there are multiple ways to incorporate writing into dance. Most of the writing for dancers tends to be personal and a way to emotionally

connect to the dance. Writing can also be beneficial when remembering why certain artistic decisions were made in the moment. Dancers should utilize writing more because it shows others that more goes into this form of art other than just being pretty on a stage. The stereotype that dancers are careless or are only good for their bodies is insulting. Dancers need to take many classes that prepare them for the professional dance world, and writing is a skill that shouldn't be overlooked.

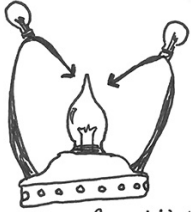
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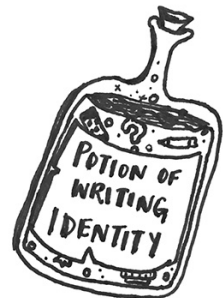
Tava Matesi is enrolled as a dance performance major in the ISU Theater and Dance program. She hopes to join a professional company in New York or London soon after graduating. She values traveling and seeing different parts of the world. One of her personal goals is to visit every National Park in the United States.



Notes



Meta-Cognitive
Thinking Cap
Wondrous Item
grants +2 to Wisdom Checks



House Hunting as an Activity System

A B M Shafiqul Islam

Finding housing is challenging for any new international student. It is not just because the students are in a different culture but also because the process of renting itself entails a plethora of interconnected components of a complex activity system. In this article, Shafiq attempts to explore how this activity system works, seeing the complexity behind the apparently easy-to-do task of finding housing.

New School, Old Problems

In March of 2021, when I was officially offered a place in the PhD program in the Department of English at Illinois State University (ISU), I became super elated thinking that my teaching career was about to get a commercial break and I was going back to my age-old identity of being a student once again. But this temporary excitement started disappearing when I began to think about the bulk of preparations needed to make the transition smooth and easy.

Because I'm from Bangladesh, I needed to engage in all kinds of writing and research activities, like filling out the paperwork to apply for US visas for myself and my family, choosing the courses for the Fall semester, making regular contacts with ISU, buying air tickets, and knowing and coming to terms with the ever-changing COVID-19 protocols (such as travel requirements, etc.), one concern really made me panicky and put me on edge. Since I was travelling with my family, finding housing around the ISU campus was of paramount importance to me, and almost all the new students face some kind of challenges regarding managing accommodation. For international

students, these challenges become more acute because they are in a foreign land where the culture, systems, and people are equally foreign to them.

Though I had a concern about housing, I thought it would not be a big deal for me. When asked by my Dad, “Where will you stay once you reach the US?” my prompt reply was, “In an apartment,” of course. The source of such confidence mainly originated from my previous experiences of leasing apartments in Saudi Arabia, where I lived for more than a decade and worked there as an English language teacher at a state-run university. For that self-belief and self-confidence, I took that matter lightly and because of that, the price I paid was costly. I had to stay in a hotel in Normal for forty-five days.

While at the beginning, I showed laxity in looking for apartments, I was trying to be more serious with the time of departure for the US approaching. I preferred to find housing close to the ISU campus because I thought it would help me commute between the university and my apartment easily. The more concerned I became about housing, the more agile, proactive, and communicative I was trying to be. When I started to dive deep into the whole process of renting an apartment in a foreign land, I became more informed about the complexities of this process. Until then, I was not quite aware of the fact that there existed multiple layers of procedures in finalizing housing. I also got connected with some of my fellow countrymen from Bangladesh studying here at ISU who informed me about the acute crisis of accommodation in Bloomington-Normal area. In the meantime, my date of departure arrived, and I had to fly for the US without finalizing housing. I reached Normal on 26th of July 2021, and rented a room in a hotel as a temporary stay. With that, my in-person search for housing began here in the US. Let’s go into the details of the whole story.

House Hunting as a Genre or an Activity System

In most cases, any genre we might consider will intersect with one or more activity systems. According to Carolyn Miller (1984), who was one of the first scholars to help define the field of Rhetorical Genre Studies, “genre can be said to represent typified rhetorical action” (p. 151). That might sound complicated, but it just means that **genres** can be understood as texts that are produced over and over again, and over time, humans become used to thinking of this kind of text in a certain way. So, when we see a document with a person’s name at the top and a page filled with very short, concise details about that person’s work experience, we say, “Oh, a resume.” Resumes, as a genre, are used in a range of different kinds of activity systems, like

applying for jobs, or applying for scholarships. They aren't the only genres in the system, though, and they interact with a range of other genres (cover letters, phone calls, interviews, conversations, background checks, etc.) and these genres also interact with a whole range of different people and tools. So, we can't really understand genres very well unless we understand the systems where they are operating. As Julie Hengst (2020) says,

sociocultural activities are best identified in terms of the goals or objectives people are working to accomplish. For example, eating dinner at home after work and eating dinner on stage during a play may involve many similar features, (e.g., table, chairs, plates, silverware, food, patterns of dinner table talk). However, when we consider the different goals and objectives participants bring to these two settings, we recognize that these are two quite different sociocultural activities.

When looking at the activity system of “house hunting,” it's also important to remember that genres are more than just texts—they are *tools* that the participants use to achieve a particular goal. Understanding an activity system also allows us to see the complex ways that they interact with people and communities. Throughout my housing search in Bloomington-Normal, I eventually realized that finding housing is not a straightforward activity; rather it involved a complex process consisting of activities at different levels, and a whole range of different kinds of texts.

Activity Systems

The term activity system refers to the idea that human activity is often goal-directed and always (in at least some ways) social. When studying different kinds of writing and texts (genres) it's often really useful to also study the kind of human activity they are part of.

As already mentioned, I had experiences of renting apartments in Saudi Arabia and Bangladesh (my home country). The ISU Writing Program might describe these prior experiences as my **antecedent knowledge**. Antecedent knowledge refers to the knowledge that people bring with them from their past to new situations and venues. In ISU writing, antecedent knowledge *is* a term used to describe all the things a writer already knows that can come into play when a writer takes up any kind of writing (ISU Writing Program website). But my antecedent knowledge of renting an apartment in Saudi Arabia and Bangladesh did not help me in the US. Instead, it led to serious misconceptions, misguided generalizations, and untold sufferings, including living in a hotel for around forty-five days with my family.

Since this was my first ever visit to the US, I did not have any hands-on experience on how to deal with the housing crisis. All I learned about renting was from the websites of the leading leasing agencies located in Normal and Bloomington. Some of the fellow Bangladeshi students studying at ISU also

provided me with some basic information. What I realized was that in the US, managing housing was not as simple as I thought. Previously, I assumed that things like Social Security Number (SSN), credit history, bank accounts etc., were not required for renting, though later, they all were considered essential. The very fatal misconception that I had developed was that renting an apartment would be possible, even if I was not physically present in the US. Later I came to know that I could rent an apartment in my absence only if someone else would guarantee the full-year payment on my behalf. After reaching the US, I started looking for apartments in person, and that helped me unlearn all those misconceptions about renting.

Through all of these experiences, I've realized that the process of finding housing is a deliberate, complex activity. The first activity I engaged in was asking myself questions to try to understand what I was looking for (and what I might be willing to settle for)—and I had many, many questions! The first concern was about the location (whether in Normal or Bloomington) of my apartment. If I go for choosing Normal, what should be the maximum distance between ISU and my apartment that I can effortlessly cover on foot? Do I prefer off-campus or on-campus housing? Should I rent an apartment from the leasing agencies or from the private owners? Should I choose a two-bedroom or three-bedroom apartment? Can I afford an apartment that does not include utility charges? How are my neighbors? So, all these aspects/issues needed to be considered while renting an apartment.

Housing in Bloomington-Normal

While searching for housing in the Bloomington-Normal area, I got acquainted with different types of housing arrangements. Needless to mention that they are different in size, shape, and rent cost and serve various purposes. Single-family detached homes are the single most common housing type here. Other types of housing that are prevalent in Bloomington-Normal area include large apartment complexes or high-rise apartments, duplexes, homes converted to apartments or other small apartment buildings and a few mobile homes or trailers. Students mostly prefer university-run dorms and other close-to-campus apartments. Students who are accompanied by their families usually live outside the campus in family apartments or houses.

Housing Back Home

In Bangladesh, we do not have as much diversity in housing as in the U.S., so figuring out all the different choices was also a kind of house hunting literacy I needed to acquire. In Bangladesh, students mostly live in the university

halls (also called dorms), and in bachelor quarters (also called students' mess). Besides that, people in the cities mostly reside in multi-story apartment buildings. Very few people live in their own houses. My past experiences that I accumulated from my stay in Saudi Arabia and Bangladesh involved similar kinds of activities and were primarily based on in-person visits to the apartment buildings. In Bangladesh, there were hardly any reliable online agencies which could be contacted for leasing. Recently, some online platforms emerged, though their reputation and public reviews are quite unsatisfactory. People looking for apartments need to walk around the streets of the neighborhood of their preference and look for the signpost "To let" hanging outside the buildings. Buildings having that signpost indicate that there are vacant apartments. Sometimes, we notice some printed stuff with "To-Let" written on it and glued on the street walls. Often, information about vacant apartments is passed on through our acquaintances. Nowadays, people are using social media platforms for house rent. In every case, the potential tenants must contact the owner of the building to negotiate the rents and other required formalities. In some cases, they don't even need to go through a bunch of paperwork except submitting a handwritten completed form. Even in this age of digitalization, a lot of these activities are still done manually.



Figure 1: "To Let" sign at the main gate of a building in Bangladesh.

My experience was almost the same in Saudi Arabia. Anyone can rent an apartment even if they are not present on the spot. Though there exist some leasing agencies, most people don't use them. It does not require much paperwork to rent an apartment, although that has begun to change recently. So, considering my antecedent knowledge about renting apartments in two different countries, I remained confident until I reached Illinois, USA. When I found out that securing an apartment here is altogether a mammoth task and incorporates a plethora of other related attributes, I started realizing that my antecedent knowledge simply hindered the accomplishment of the goal: finding an accommodation.

House Hunting Activity in Bloomington-Normal: Finding the "Normal" in Normal

When I started sensing difficulties, I made contact with some current ISU students from Bangladesh. My sole purpose was to get ideas about finding ways of securing housing. I was desperately trying to explore all other possible sources. At one point, I also thought about approaching some of the

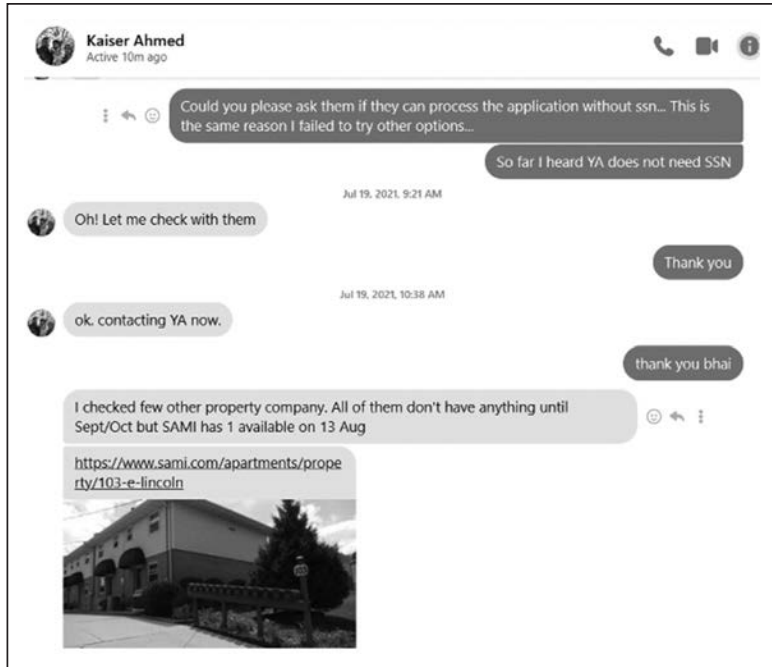


Figure 2: My conversation with Kaiser Ahmed.

fellow Americans who I already knew though later I discarded that idea. It was because I had to keep in mind that culturally, we were poles apart.

At first, the amount of information I received from different sources was wide-ranging and to some extent, quite misleading. As a result, I became very selective about people I would talk to. I decided to contact someone who I thought must have been ISU students. I further narrowed down my choices and contacted people who belonged to my home country, Bangladesh. This is where the sense of being in the **community** came to my mind. I realized that what I needed was not just information about housing in Bloomington-Normal area, but information from people who would understand some of the kind of confusion I was experiencing, and the kinds of new things I'd need to learn. Things that an American house hunter might know without even knowing how they know it. Again, as Julie Hengst (2020) says in her discussion of sociocultural interactions, “As skilled social actors, we tacitly recognize and navigate the many sociocultural activities of our everyday lives, but rarely need to name them in any systematic way or trace the complex ways they are accomplished” (2020). The community I needed were others who had also made the leap from a different understanding of the activity. With that view, I got introduced to Kaiser Ahmed, a Bangladeshi national working at ISU who showed utmost integrity in helping me to find

an apartment. He went out of his way to do things like contacting the leasing agencies, and even visiting their offices in person, but nothing went our way.

Simultaneously, I also got to know some new students who were to join ISU in the Fall of 2021. Among them, one name that really stood out was my friend, Mohammad Akbar Hossain, a PhD student in the English Department at ISU who was also planning to come with his family this Fall. I spent hours after hours of virtual conversation with him discussing the ways of finding affordable accommodation. Another Facebook group I got connected with was *ISU Fall 21* which was basically the group of the new students from Bangladesh coming to ISU this year. They shared some useful stuff, but it was insufficient for my goal of finding an apartment.

By the end of July 2021, I reached Normal, but my suffering did not end here. We started living in a hotel with very little or no hope of getting an apartment within the next couple of weeks at least. My desperate search continued. The only significant change that occurred was in the method and process of searching. It was nothing but a shift from purely online to a mixed method—both online and in person. But one thing I must mention here is that I never stopped visiting different leasing agencies. By that time, I had done some more preliminary research about renting an apartment. While researching, I tried to find answers to the following questions.

1. Who should I talk to and consult with to get a true picture about the current situation of housing?
2. What tools do I need to use in securing housing for myself?

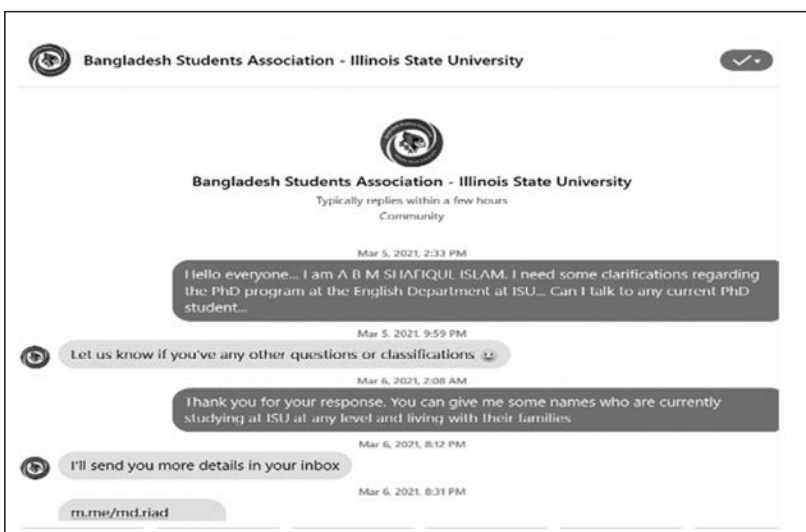


Figure 3: I got connected with a Facebook group called *Bangladeshi Students Association (BSA)* at ISU that provided me with some other names of students.

3. Are there any local traditions about housing in Illinois that I should take care of?
4. What are the documented and unspoken rules in dealing with managing housing as an international student?

When I looked for answers to the above questions, I discovered a pattern of researching which I think can be compared to other kinds of literate activities people might engage in when engaging in a new situation or new ways of writing. **Literate activity**—another ISU writing program concept—refers to all the things that people do when they produce and use different kinds of writing in the world. Thus, literate activities exist in different rhetorical situations.

For me, finding housing was akin to producing a new kind of writing or a type of text or genre. The act of writing does not merely refer to the process of converting the ideas and concepts into pages in alphabetical forms; rather it incorporates many other contextual forces ranging from personal, physical, mental to social and community level collaboration. So, writing can never be seen as an isolated activity; instead, we always need to acknowledge how writing as an activity draws on influences from sources from the outside world. It is necessary to mention that my search for housing as a literate activity has its goal, which happens in real time, incorporates



Figure 4: Another Facebook group named ISU Fall 21. Here, most of the conversations are in Bangla, my mother tongue. Our discussions went to a variety of directions but mainly centered around housing, air tickets, and COVID-19 protocol for travel requirements.

different representations of literacies, uses various tools, and seeks help and information from many people (a community). For all the above reasons, I love to call it a **literate activity** (or maybe an activity that required many new literacies). For a person to reach their goals in a particular activity system (like house hunting) all the components which are interdependent in nature need to work coherently—and that can include a lot of research, learning and communicating.

The (Finally!) Successful House Search Activity System

In an activity system, the subject is one who carries out the action. The object and objective is the purpose or goal for which the activity is being carried out. In this case, I was the subject whose objective was to find a place to live in Normal. The tools I needed to be successful included many things, like browsing the Internet, talking to friends, communicating with leasing agents, visiting their offices in Normal, filling out an application, paying the application fees, and more.

In my activity, the community for the task consists of the people and the student population living in Normal, Illinois. So, for carrying out an activity, the sociocultural context and its rules and regulations also play a pivotal role. The ISU Writing Program adheres to the idea that any/every piece of writing/rhetorical activity is a complex artifact—one that was not created in a vacuum but was instead molded and shaped by the person who created it, the people who received it, and the environment in which it was created and received (“Nursing Care Plans”). Since I was new to Normal, I had to get myself used to the underlying norms and implications (both explicit and implicit) to identify the things that this particular rhetoric situation requires.

Once I reached Normal, I got a little orientation to that culture and came to know what sort of processes I should follow to find my place. Then, I contacted people across various nationalities living in Normal. This is where the **transcultural** aspect started to play its part. In transcultural writing, nearly all humans are communicating across cultural boundaries and our communications constantly blend different linguistic and cultural traditions and specific, socially constructed ways of thinking. When I contacted people to ask for help, some people offered excuses or weren’t able to be helpful. But a few of them expressed genuine interest and inclination to help me. In this regard, I must mention one name. She is Moumita Saha, an outgoing grad student at ISU from Bangladesh, whose immense help was unforgettable. She was the one whom almost all the new Bangladeshi students approached for help. Before coming to the US, I had some phone conversations with



Figure 5: Moumita in front of the First Site office in Normal.

her to discuss the matter. Her friend, Shuvro, another Bangladeshi student, was always with her. They visited almost all the leasing agencies located in Normal and Bloomington to see if there was any available apartment for me to immediately move to. After my arrival to Normal, our efforts continued, though nothing was working in my favor. When I asked Moumita, “Why is there a huge crisis of accommodation in Normal this year”? This was her reply.

“You know, it seems to be quite unprecedented here in Normal. Family apartments always remain available all the year round. Usually, it does not take even a week to secure a two-bedroom apartment for a family. But this year, the scenario is totally different. It is because a new car industry called Rivian just started operating in this area for which there has been a huge influx of people coming from outside to live in the city. Moreover, you contacted me quite late and by that time, almost all the apartments within your budget range have been rented”.

To find a way out, we never stopped meeting people and talking to them to figure out what course of action could be followed. It was also to ascertain what more things I needed to do, what documents I should have, what time of the year would be the best to look for housing, what type of housing would be available within a limited budget etc. This kind of dialogue has always a place in the activity system. Though my activity of finding housing does not have any direct connection with producing a particular text, it involves the reasons why and how the contexts are important in understanding a particular activity. For me, this activity of research was to identify the whole process of getting an apartment, particularly for students coming to ISU for study. In a literate activity, a writer accomplishes a set of activities like doing research, knowing the sociocultural context, setting the goal etc., while producing a particular text. This means that literacies do not occur only on pages in the form of alphabetical text; rather, they exist and occur everywhere even if we are unaware of them.

Besides Moumita and Shuvro, I personally talked to many other American leasing agents. They always advised me to keep an eye on their websites (Young America, First Site, SAMI, Core3, Class Act, Dowd Properties). When any apartment appeared available on the website, I directly contacted that leasing agency either by going to their office or calling

them. The only piece of advice they came up with was to apply for that apartment, and each application cost no less than twenty-five dollars. But the problem was that there was always at least one who had already applied for the same apartment, and I was on the waiting list. Though I was physically present here in the US, there were certain activities I needed to do online. By that time, I had already stayed in the hotel for more than a month.



Figure 6: Crestwood Apartments where I finally managed my housing.

One fine morning, I got a phone call from Moumita who informed me about a vacant Crestwood apartment and asked me to come to the First Site office immediately. Without any delay, I rushed to the office where I found her engaged in conversation with one of the leasing agents. On the same day, I applied for it and got the confirmation call in the afternoon. That confirmation call from the agent seemed to me one of the sweetest voices I had ever heard.

After a collective effort, I finally got a place, although there were still some more texts that needed to be produced. Once I signed the leasing agreement and paid a one-month deposit, I was handed over the key to the apartment. After going through such trials and tribulations for about two months, I was able to move to the new apartment on the 14th of September. This transition brought my almost two-month long suffering to an end. What a great relief for me and my family! That feeling was like the feeling of being at ‘home.’ While exploring the literate activity of finding housing both online and in person, I engaged with the activities that are summarized as following:

1. Researching what kinds of housing options are available
2. Looking at the key features like price, size, distance, date of availability, neighborhood, etc.
3. Choosing the most suitable one
4. Applying online
5. Paying the nonrefundable application fee and submitting proof of income
6. Waiting for the outcomes to be communicated by the leasing agent

7. Apartment jointly visited by the leasing agent and the tenant before finalizing
8. If everything goes well, a leasing agreement needs to be signed
9. Handing over the key and the checklist
10. Getting the Electricity and Gas connection (For electricity, need to contact Ameren and for Gas, need to contact Nicor)
11. Returning the checklist to the housing agent after inspecting if anything still to be repaired
12. Getting into the apartment

I had to complete all the above activities to secure my housing. It is quite similar to the various processes a writer always engages in to produce a genre or text. The end product often doesn't show the evidence of all the work a person might engage in to get there. The process I went through was difficult, frustrating, and even harrowing at times, as the days ticked by and we sat in our hotel, but in the end, I was successful. And I learned a lot about America, and about Bloomington-Normal, as well as about the activity system of house hunting. As Edmund Ankomah (2020) rightly says, in his *Grassroots Journal* article about learning to navigate cold weather as an international student from a warm country, "understanding how a particular genre works, engaging with all its moving parts can be very rewarding for other literate activities we engage in."

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A Note on Resources: Although I didn't end up citing the following *Grassroots Journal* articles in my piece, I want to note that I used them as a resource to help me think about my writing as I engage in the activity system of "writing a *GWRJ* article." But that's another story. . .

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A Guide to Writing as a Nurse

Alex Helderman

This article focuses on the different forms of writing found in the nursing field, how they relate to P-CHAT terms, and why they are so important to the profession. Helderman also explores nursing in general: what nurses do and some of the skills needed to be a good nurse (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Two nurses at ISU.

Let's Get it Started in Here!

In many fields, communication is critical to success. Nursing is a prime example. However, not all communication comes from talking with one another around an operating table. Rather, the majority of nursing communication comes in the form of written language. From SOAP charts¹ to care plans, nurses read and interpret texts constantly to know what their residents need and learn how they should best provide for those needs.

In order for us to know what texts are used in nursing we need to know the context behind the system. Nursing, according to *Britannica*, is: “The profession that assumes responsibility for the continuous care of the sick, the injured, the disabled, and the dying” (Buhler-Wilkerson). The key

1. SOAP Charting Format: A medical chart system, in which S = Subjective (what the client says, or their subjective impressions), O = Objective (what the provider's findings are, or the clinical data), A = Assessment (any changes, the diagnosis, or what the client's condition is), and P = Plan for the next treatment (further studies and suggested treatment).

Activity System

According to the ISU Writing Program, activity systems are cooperative interactions aimed at achieving a goal. As a lens, the activity system helps us to analyze the psychological and social processing of achieving that goal. Each system a goal(s) which is achieved through the work of people and the tools they use.

word here is “continuous.” Nurses work around the clock, day in and day out, providing all the care necessary to the patient. The American Nurses Association claims that “21st Century nursing is the glue that holds a patient’s health care journey together. Across the entire patient experience, and wherever there is someone in need of care, nurses work tirelessly to identify and protect the needs of the individual” (“What is Nursing?”). Nursing is an **activity system**—it is a field that has existed since the days of Florence Nightingale, and nurses communicate

not only with patients, but also with the doctors and other nurses caring for them. Nurses constantly have to navigate changes happening in the field as dialogue and research evolves in the medical world.

As defined by the ISU Writing Program, P-CHAT is “An attitude and approach to studying texts that acknowledges them as complex and situated in specific histories, cultures, and activities that can never be divorced from one another” (ISU Writing). P-CHAT is essentially a new way of breaking down and thinking about all different kinds of writing and information. P-CHAT is divided into seven key terms:

- Representation: how we think about and plan texts;
- Distribution: how we distribute texts;
- Reception: how the text is taken up;
- Socialization: how people interact with the text and each other;
- Activity: the actions and practices accompanying texts;
- Ecology: the forces that exist beyond the text;
- and Production: the means by which the text is made (ISU Writing).

Each of the core components of P-CHAT are key in the nursing field, as nurses are constantly socializing with the texts and each other, distributing texts amongst the members involved with the resident’s care, producing charts and reports on a patient’s well-being, and so forth. Production and distribution, in particular, are key to success in the nursing field, as they are closely tied to nursing documentation. Nursing can be looked at through the lens of P-CHAT in order to help us understand the complex activities taking place, the different engagements amongst the nurses, and the texts that are key to the job, the patients, and the medical unit as a whole.

You Must File Your Paperwork, Wazowski

Charting and documentation is crucial to the profession of nursing. An old mantra I picked up from a former teacher, Diane Schreifels—who was an RN and the Director of Nursing at Carmi Manor—was: “If you didn’t document it, it didn’t happen.” In many cases, not documenting something properly, or forgetting to document at all can lead to serious problems for the resident, from something as minor to showering a resident twice to potentially killing a resident due to the wrong dosage of a certain drug. This isn’t like *Monsters Inc*, where you can just forget to turn in your paperwork and have everything still run fine. There are people’s lives on the line, and one mistake could have enormous consequences, so nurses must ensure that their charting and documentation gets in on time and is done properly.

The SOAP Chart

Throughout my research on this topic, one of the most important forms of writing was the Subjective, Objective, Assessment, and Planning Chart, or the SOAP chart (Figure 2). According to the National Center for Biotechnology

SOAP Notes are used in MOWINS for high-risk participants. Standard Abbreviations list is available in the Health and Nutrition Assessment Handbook (HNAH), located in the WOM.

SOAP Note

Start Note by: MOWINS will capture this
Date & Time: MOWINS will capture this

S

1. Patient, significant other, family, or staff tells the professional
2. Can include symptoms, feelings, history, and progress
3. May be in format of 'patient reports...' or given as a direct quote, as, "I don't have any appetite at all today."

Subject 4. THESE STATEMENTS ARE CHOSEN TO ILLUSTRATE A POINT MADE IN THE ASSESSMENT

O

1. SPECIAL DIET:
2. ANTHROPOMETRIC DATA: (Height, weight, IBW, % IBW, % usual weight, TSF percentile and/or % std, AMC percentile and/or % std)
3. LAB RESULTS: (1/21 Albumin 3.5, Total Lymphocyte County 1367, etc)
4. CLINICAL OBSERVATIONS RELATING TO NUTRITIONAL ASSESSMENT: (+ or – edema, emaciation, decubitous ulcer)

Objective

A

Interpretation of

1. Caloric needs for ... (weight loss, breastfeeding, or weight gain, as instructed by physician)
2. Diet and/or weight history. Limit to several sentences, summarized, most relevant to the problem

Action (calories consumed, about food or exercise habits, pattern of meals/snacks (or lack of it), nutritional adequacy of overall intake)

3. Nutrient inadequacies from nutrition assessment
4. Need to provide different food...: to instruct or not

P

1. Will...gather more information...say which YOU will gather
2. Recommend... as, further referrals
3. Recommend diet change to...
4. Recommend vitamin mineral supplement...
5. Will monitor....food selection, weight every other day, food intake

Plan

obfuscata.com

Figure 2: Sample SOAP chart.

Information, or NCBI, “The SOAP note is a way for healthcare workers to document in a structured and organized way. It helps guide healthcare workers to use their clinical reasoning to assess, diagnose, and treat a patient based on the information provided by them” (Podder et al.). As the name suggests, this charting is broken down into its key four components. Using Diane Schreifels’s words, Subjective is what the patient tells you, Objective is what you see or measure, Assessment is what the patient’s status is, and Planning is what you are going to do next to care for the patient.

SOAP charting can be produced on paper but is usually done using a tablet or computer. The nurse is the person who produces the chart, but the software is made by IT developers, as well as hardware companies that make the computers and tablets. As stated before, charting is commonly done online, so not only does the chart’s production matter, but so too does the means in which it can be produced. There is also a lot of socialization and use for the document. The SOAP chart is a very valuable tool to communicate what the patient is going through to the other doctors and nurses caring for that patient. This coincides with what P-CHAT defines as socialization, which is how people interact with the text and each other. The chart helps all the members of the care team to know what their roles are and how they need to interact with their partners and the patient to provide the care they need.

I Just Want to Talk; or, How Communication Can Save Lives

Everyone communicates each day in various ways. After all, reading and writing are communication skills, so you wouldn’t be reading this if you lacked them. Though for nurses, good communication skills mean so much more than just saying words well. As the University of New Mexico puts it, “Every step of the way, from patient intake to patient discharge and beyond, nurses must communicate well to provide comprehensive care” (“Importance of Communication in Nursing”).

Communication is key to ensuring patient trust as well. According to the NCBI, “What of course in any case should be avoided by the caregivers is silence and indifference to the questions of the patient. In the best cases, the patient will leave disappointed and, in the worst really indignant with nurses” (Kourkouta and Papathanasiou). So, communication not only has great upside when done properly, but also great consequence when done poorly.

The Care Plan

The care plan is another form of writing (Figure 4). Diane Schreifels described the care plan as the “roadmap” to patient care. According to Matt Vera of *Nurselabs.com*, the care plan should “Promote evidence-based nursing care and to render pleasant and familiar conditions in hospitals or health centers,” “Support holistic care which involves the whole person including physical, psychological, social and spiritual in relation to management and prevention of the disease,” and “Identify and distinguish goals and expected outcome.” (“Nursing Care Plans (NCP): Ultimate Guide and Database”). Essentially, the care plan acts in the long term, whereas SOAP charting is more built around short-term treatments.

Like SOAP charting, the care plan’s production is completed by the nurses and makes use of either computer technology or traditional paper-and-pen methods, the means of production varying depending on which form the nurse chooses. The care plan also showcases **activity** and **socialization** in each step of its production and use. The information used

The form is titled "PLAN OF CARE KARDEX" and includes a "Month/Year" field. It is organized into several columns and rows of checkboxes for different care categories:

- HEARING:** Includes checkboxes for "Adequate", "Kind of hearing", "Wears hearing aids", and "Place resident when speaking".
- TRANSFER:** Includes checkboxes for "Independent", "Assist of 1", "Assist of 2", and "Mechanical lift".
- SPRINKLES:** Includes checkboxes for "English", "Other (specify)", "Writing language", "Illness age language", "Social", "Sign/pictograms/cards", "Communication board", and "No communication skills".
- PERSONAL HYGIENE:** Includes checkboxes for "Brush teeth", "Comb hair", "Perineum care", "Shaving", "Make-up application", "Independent", "Assist of 1", and "Assist of 2".
- ALLERGIES:** Includes checkboxes for "Code status" and "Allergies".
- VISION:** Includes checkboxes for "Adequate", "Goggles", "Wears glasses", "Wears contacts", and "Other".
- DRIVING:** Includes checkboxes for "Independent", "Assist of 1", "Assist of 2", "Day driver", "Paperwork/insurance", and "Adaptive equipment".
- FEEDING:** Includes checkboxes for "Independent", "Dependent (specify)", "Use sp.", "Preferential feeding", "Dependent on staff", "Food tube", "Location of drug", "Intrast", "Bottle", and "Other".
- MOBILITY:** Includes checkboxes for "Independent", "Assist of 1", "Assist of 2", "Situated wheel", "Stair", "Stretcher", "Adaptive equipment", and "Other (specify)".
- TOILETING:** Includes checkboxes for "Continence Decision", "Training of Device", "Etiology", "Labs/bedside test", "Urine temperature", "Independent", "Supervision", "Assist of 1", "Assist of 2", "Waste incontinence briefs", and "Scheduled toileting plan (specify)".
- BATHING:** Includes checkboxes for "A.M.", "P.M.", "Shower", "Bath", "Whirlpool", "Hot Bath", "Independent", "Supervision", "Assist of 1", and "Assist of 2".
- TOILET USE:** Includes checkboxes for "Independent", "Assist of 1", "Assist of 2", "Care of", "Toilet use", and "Adaptive equipment".
- RESTRAINTS:** Includes a "Specify" field.
- RESTORATIVE:** Includes checkboxes for "Incontinent check and change", "Ostomy care", and "Adaptive equipment".

The right side of the form features a grid with columns for "DAY" (1-31) and "INITIALS" (Days, Evenings, Nights). At the bottom, there are fields for "Transcribed by:" and a signature line with labels for "Nurse", "Unit", "Middle", "Residing Physician", "Phone No.", and "Room No.". The footer includes the logo for "BRIDGE" and the text "PLAN OF CARE KARDEX".

Figure 3: Sample care plan.

to fill out the care plan comes from day-to-day interactions with the patient and the care team, which includes the doctors, nurses, and even the patient themselves. The care plan then influences how the members of the care team go about treatment for their patients so that they not only get what they need, but also that the patient is happy and has a say in what care is done. The care plan often looks different depending on the institution.

The Future Is Now, Thanks to Science! Or, How the EHR Brings It All Together

As time has gone on, most of the forms done on paper have been converted into digital formats. This has happened in all professions, and nursing is no exception. As said before, nursing is an activity system and adapts as new innovations are made to the industry. Nowadays, rather than having each form of writing separate from each other, they are all compiled into something called the electronic health record, or EHR. This has changed how documents are produced, as the EHR has made it possible to eliminate the use of paper charts entirely and allows for all of the work to be done online in a single, centralized system. The EHR, according to *Medical Terminology: A Word Building Approach*, 9/e., “is an electronic record of health-related information for an individual that is created, gathered, managed, and consulted by authorized healthcare clinicians and staff. Included in this information are patient demographics, progress notes, problems, medications, vital signs, past medical history, immunizations, laboratory data, radiology images, and personal data such as age, weight, and billing information” (Rice 17).

While both the care plan and the SOAP Chart are being compiled into the EHR, each component maintains its original characteristics. The EHR, rather than being just some mega-document containing everything in a big block-o’-text, it instead acts like a folder, housing each individual part in a simple and easy to access space.

Closing Time

Nursing is an extremely complex job, and documentation is just one small part of the profession. Yet, it is also one of the most needed jobs there is. Automation and technology have been taking over many professions, from manufacturing to middle management positions. The way that nurses socialize with patients and their co-workers and the activity that happens in and out of producing these works cannot be understated, and throughout all the advancements we have made in technology, I have yet to find a robot or



Figure 4: Screenshot from Semisonic’s music video for their song, “Closing Time.”

an AI who can comfort a patient and show empathy. There has never been a machine that can make a care plan that represents all the patient’s needs, nor one that can socialize with the doctors and nurses to find the best course of action. Until that happens, nursing will always be around, and, along with it, all the paperwork. So, that’s all I’ve got. You don’t have to go home, but you can’t stay here (Figure 4).

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Food and Family: Cookbooks as Genre and Activity

Brianna Zangara

In this article, Brianna Zangara explores her family's Italian cooking traditions and how these have impacted her knowledge of cookbooks as a form of literature. Using a personal cookbook that is over 150 years old, she draws on the various components that make up her family cooking history and how her antecedent knowledge has influenced her learning as well. Lastly, Zangara provides her personal story to accomplish a genre analysis to discuss how P-CHAT relates to cookbook literature.

I'm (Mostly) Not Writing This because I'm Hungry

Dating back to my great-grandparents on my Dad's side of the family, who were born and raised in Italy, cooking was a huge part of their family tradition. Whenever there was an event, there were massive amounts of food produced from breakfast to dessert. As time went on, and more social events required more cooking, my Dad's family began forming recipes with the ingredients they enjoyed for a particular dish—and these were not necessarily the standard required ingredients. This blend of preferred ingredients and required ingredients within a recipe created authentic Italian meals. The collection, now a family cookbook, has been passed down generations to where my Dad is the owner. Did I mention this beautiful and fascinating cookbook is over 150 years old?

When I put on my scholar goggles and think deeply about how tradition has shaped my relationship with food, I realize my family history is also a part of this antecedent knowledge. According to the ISU Writing Program, **antecedent knowledge** is a term that describes all the things a person already knows when they enter any given situation. This is another



Figure 1: The author's Italian family in the middle of cooking.

Genre

The ISU Writing Program defines genre as “a kind of production that is possible to identify by understanding the conventions or features that make that production recognizable.”

way of saying “previous experience,” and this knowledge comes simply from being a person who interacts with the world and the people in it. My antecedent knowledge in food has helped me feel comfortable within the world of cooking. This knowledge allows me to demonstrate to others the power tradition holds when it comes to cooking food and enjoying it with loved ones. To enrich my previous knowledge, I informally interviewed my Dad, who has been a part of this long-going tradition of writing recipes with his siblings. Cookbooks are a **genre** and as such they have conventions that make them recognizable to the people using them. Additionally, cookbooks represent different ways of preserving our traditions. Likewise, family recipes express individuality among family members and highlight beloved pastimes.

When asking my Dad about our family cookbook, he told me who the recipes' authors were, and many of the recipes were composed by both my grandparents and my great-grandparents. My Dad's parents were immigrants who arrived in America through Ellis Island—a cool, added factor! As both his parents were born and raised in Italy, cooking was a shared talent. They took cooking to an extreme but made it enjoyable for everyone

around them. Anywhere they went, their aromas of cooking followed their path. Their joyous cooking lives on in our family cookbooks, full of love and laughter, and these cookbooks have become a vital genre for my family.

The Activity of Cooking

Anyone who's ever prepared a meal or watched someone cook knows it's a complex **activity system**. An activity system is made up of the cooperative interactions of people, tools, genre, and space to achieve a goal. So, no matter what someone's cooking purpose may be, the process to achieve that goal includes a lot of moving parts, rules, and interactions. Family tradition can significantly influence the activity system of cooking because tradition,

family, and cultural backgrounds can play a significant role in what we eat, what we like or dislike, and what we've had exposure to eating and preparing.

I know coming from an Italian family implies a large family that values and loves food immensely. With these values, my family has established these recipes over the decades, through opinions and through learning by watching. Some recipes are more intense than others, but each deserves patience and time to be true to my family's history and the flavors they desire. Following the recipe exactly how it is written is one of the most important components; missing one measurement can cause the recipe to be ruined. As strict as the recipes are, they are so easily enjoyed when completed precisely.

Additionally, activity systems are complex, and while systems are always changing and evolving, they can also be fragile. This can happen when a tool or component—part of the system—isn't present or doesn't work, and the goal fails. Think about the last meal you ate, and all the moving parts and steps needed to achieve the end goal. What if you didn't have the ingredients or money to pay for them? What about the utensils or the time to prepare the meal? Without all these components, you might be able to eat, but you might not eat the meal as it was intended. In this instance, the activity system of cooking a meal has failed. For example, if my grandmother's Italian seasonings aren't in the gravy, the whole dish falls apart.

Understanding an activity system's particulars helps us realize its interrelation to the specific genre working to achieve the distinct goal. All activity systems come with genres or texts people use to achieve their goals. Regarding cooking, cookbooks are one of the most significant genres when it comes to learning about different dishes.

Cookbooks as Genre

Even though we briefly touched on *genre* in the beginning of this article, now it's time to talk about cookbooks and their genre conventions. A genre is defined as a text that is produced and created to respond to a situation. For example, a cookbook or recipe is a type of genre because it is a text created to achieve the goal of making a meal, baking a dessert, or something else along those lines. A genre is also recognizable by its conventions or characteristics. Across most cookbooks, there are similarities, such as ingredient lists, photographs, cooking times, and measurements. Although cookbooks can be considered a cohesive genre, there are many different subgenres of cookbooks because there are so many goals within cooking for various occasions.

One of the many things I find fascinating about the genre of cookbooks is how they can change over time. Recipes are updated, reimagined, forgotten, and found again in my family. I must admit that I found this confusing and even annoying when I was younger. For me, spaghetti was spaghetti, no matter what. I had no idea why it would suddenly become crucial to add oregano or disregard the beef stock. I would ask an older family member food-related questions, and then another would cut in with their version of our family tradition.

Much like understanding antecedent knowledge, I see how cookbooks and recipes aren't stationary concepts that never change; they have trajectories. When I say **trajectory**, I'm referring to the path a text takes throughout time, like a text's "life span." Trajectory also refers to the type of people the text we might reach or encounter. I enjoy tracing a cookbook's trajectory. It's fascinating to discover the history recipes carry with them as well as the stories the food brings along the way. The family members who live on through their ingredients. Even the ingredients' quality says so much about the author's living situation. In our family's cookbook, I can tell that some of the entries were created in Italy, not the United States.

P-CHAT, A New Recipe

Another way we can examine cookbooks, how their genre works, and how cookbooks meet the end cooking goal, is with P-CHAT. **P-CHAT** or

P-CHAT:

The ISU Writing Program uses P-CHAT to "help us think about and study the complex genres that we encounter in the world." P-CHAT is a CHAT-based model for thinking about the complexities of literate activity and includes seven key-terms that help to describe different aspects of making and using writing in the world.

pedagogical cultural-historical activity Theory is used to help understand and analyze texts. This examination includes social interactions that happen while creating a text, motivations, rules, tools, distribution methods of the text, and interpretations.

The use of P-CHAT helps me to investigate cookbooks, as well as examine how they represent the focus of humans acting in a collective cooking society. We are learning through doing these specific activities, as well as learning through the ways in which we are communicating with our cooking actions. There are seven key terms within P-CHAT, though this article will focus mainly on representation, distribution, and production. These three P-CHAT elements will demonstrate how complex the activity system of cooking is and how enriched and diverse the cookbook genre can be.

The P-CHAT **representation** is how a text is portrayed or described in a specific way. This can be seen as how a cookbook is thought out. In my Mother's potato salad recipe, she wants everyone to taste the freshly mashed potatoes. She bolds the ingredient of boiling and mashing fresh potatoes yourself, as it gives it the taste she desires. **Distribution** is how a text is shared or spread throughout the public. More specifically, this would be the publication of the cookbooks through social media, local stores, potlucks, etc. My Father received his grandfather's personal cookbook in a will. Lastly, **production** is the process of manufacturing the text. For this article, it is the manufacturing of the cookbook itself. What's really cool about the recipes and cookbooks in my family are that some are written on scratch paper and pencil. It's so much more personal and inviting, and it makes me more invested in the recipe and trust the information. The one P-CHAT term that is most predominant when analyzing cookbooks as a text is representation. The representation for a cookbook involves how the author thought about the meal and its recipe. They talk about the food's taste, smell, look, and feel. In many recipes in my family's cookbook, the scent of the spices is one of the more urgent parts of the representation.

Understanding what cookbooks reflect and represent furthers our understanding of how impactful family cookbooks are. I previously mentioned how my family alters recipes to promote their uniqueness and value to our likings. This practice speaks to my joy for cooking because creating is not an exact measurement. There is no singular or right way to cook a dish, which makes cooking even more fun! Cooking off recipes keeps the traditions and helps make dishes distinctive to their audiences. Then, as the cookbook passes down, they continue to change but always hold their value and appreciation to the generations before them.

Little Italy in Dad's Kitchen

My Dad has been teaching me how to cook since I was about eight years old. Now I'm a twenty-year-old my Dad still teaches me new cooking secrets. Recording these recipes keeps my family alive and helps carry on our family traditions. I have seen practices from over 100 years ago still used in my family. They have been preserved over time, which is inspiring as I can see how far my family customs have come along. As much as these recipes and cookbooks are valuable and appreciated by my family, I want to carry this legacy on to my kids to have them pass along one day.

Old photo collections, cherished clothing, and collective items are lovely, but I want my family cookbooks to express those happy and warm feelings. I

want my recipes to hold power and value as they are centuries-old pieces of history. The article *Cookbooks Are So Much More Than Recipes and Photographs* by Joshua Raff contains a quote that defines this idea. They state, “If the author brings personal elements into the book in an elegant and entertaining way, the book can become memoir through food” (Raff). Family cookbooks are more than lists of ingredients to make meals. They contain past experiences, personality, and humor. Flipping through my family’s cookbook is like reading a story. I get to learn and laugh. I can say hello and meet relatives I never would be able to otherwise. Most importantly, I can open the book and feel connected to my family, no matter what.

My Cooking Journey

When my Dad teaches me, it is challenging to understand his terminology because I am new to the measurement abbreviations. My Dad can also easily picture all the tools needed when saying the name of a dish, but I do not typically use these objects. I am certainly not my great-grandparents despite my Italian heritage. As fun as learning traditional cooking methods, I struggle to get things right, be quick, and find the necessary items around the kitchen or grocery stores. However, after years of practicing and watching with my Dad, it is starting to become easier, especially as I learn more about the activity system of cooking. There are many different ways to prepare,

cook, and serve food, even when utilizing traditional cookbooks and recipes. Perfecting these delicious formulas is fun, especially putting my twist on it. My grandmother’s oatmeal cookies recipe, shown below, is one I’m currently playing with.

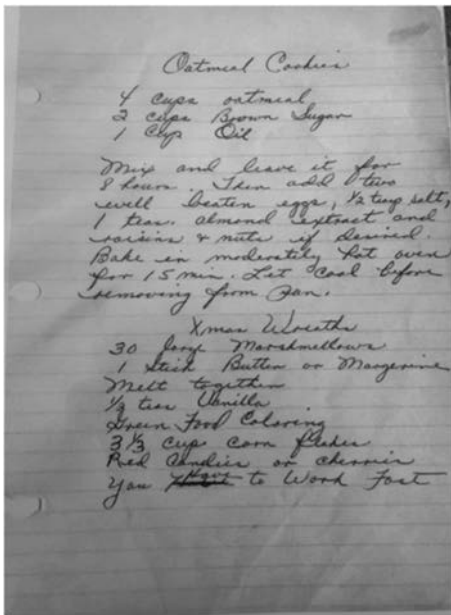


Figure 2: Writer’s original family recipe for oatmeal cookies.

Developing a love for cooking while in high school let me grow close to my family and gain an appreciation for our traditions. These traditions would soon be a significant part of my life as I found recipes from my Mom, who passed away when I was ten years old. Now, I cherish both my parents’ recipes and my grandmother’s, and I plan to incorporate those into my cookbook one day. Now at college, I cook in my apartment and often

find myself utilizing the recipes my Dad gave me that he obtained from his parents. When I use these recipes, I send an image to my Dad, and it brings joy to him knowing I will be carrying these family recipes into my future with my kids. This opportunity has enriched my knowledge of the cooking world and has allowed me to express myself within recipes. I have even formed my types of recipes with twists on them, too, so that I am contributing to my family's current recipe book, which will add to my cookbook one day for myself and then my kids. In addition, I have a set up in my current cookbook binder at school for organizational purposes.

I will be creating several sections in my cookbook binder to keep it organized. Since I have struggled reading older recipes within our family cookbook, I want to make it easier on myself and my kids so that they do not have the struggles I once had. So, one section of the cookbook will be dedicated to my Dad's recipes. Then, one will be entries from my ancestors, such as my great grandparents and grandparents. Another area will contain my recipes. And lastly, a section for my kids to be involved in this tradition.

After losing my Mom, I needed an appreciation and reminder of her. When I found that through cookbooks, I saw it as a memory that I knew could hold and feel as if she is still with us. These recipes help me express memories, traditions, culture, and love. I would not trade this tradition for anything else. It means the world to my family and me. Cookbooks are not just words. They are genres filled with everlasting memories and joy, one bite at a time.

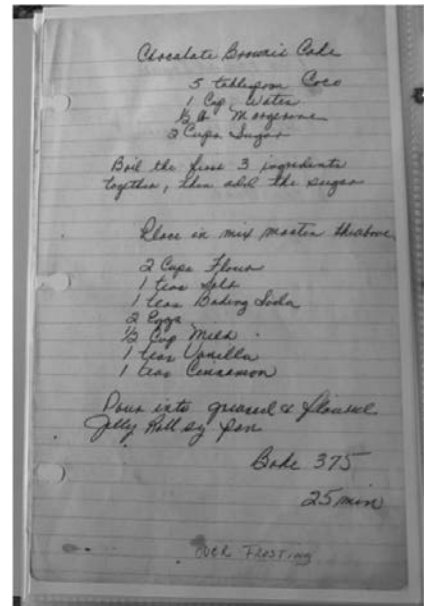


Figure 3: Writer's original family recipe of chocolate brownie cake.

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The Journey of Becoming a CPA

Nicholas Gajda

In this article, Gajda presents research about some of the activities and texts a person working to become a CPA might encounter. However, it's not an article solely for accounting students. Instead, it might be useful for anyone who wants to pursue a degree that they are passionate about. Gajda explains his reasons for choosing accounting, provides some information on different types of accounting and accounting careers, and discusses one of the primary texts a person has to understand in order to become an accountant—the Uniform CPA exam.

Background Information

An accountant is a person who collects, analyzes, and communicates financial information. Some people believe accounting is a tedious, boring job. My Father was not too pleased to hear that I wanted to be an accountant. He does not support my decision of becoming an accountant because he believes that I will end up not sticking with that major at Illinois State University (ISU). From my perspective, I understand where he is coming from. He thinks accounting will be a dull job and I will end up switching my major, as his understanding of accounting is limited to the act of logging finances into the “books.” However, this understanding of accounting is built on a misconception which confuses bookkeeping with accounting. The Cleartax website offers the following definition for bookkeeping: “Bookkeeping is the process of maintaining and recording all financial transactions in the original books of entry of a business. The bookkeeping process involves summarizing and organizing all the company’s financial transactions chronologically in a systematic manner” (online). On the other hand, the definition of accounting, according to the Cleartax website, is “the

process of interpreting, analyzing, summarizing, and reporting the financial transactions of a business. The financial statements prepared in accounting are a precise summary of financial transactions over an accounting period.” This can include preparing taxes, but accounting tasks are not limited to that single activity. Accounting has a wide selection of fields, including financial, managerial, and forensics. According to the FreshBooks website, financial accounting is concerned with external users of a company’s financial information. Managerial accounting serves internal users of a company’s financial information. Forensic accounting is the practice of accounting for legal purposes. The position I am currently pursuing in the field is a CPA, who earns their accounting license by passing the Uniform CPA Exam.

Deciding To Become an Accountant

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who served as the twenty-fourth President of Liberia, once said, “If your dreams do not scare you, they are not big enough.” This quote struck a chord with me. Everyone has great potential within themselves whether we see it or not. Sometimes we can surprise ourselves and do things we never expected to do.

In high school, I was better at math than I was at English. I have always been very successful in all my math classes in high school: algebra, geometry, precalculus, and calculus, hence the reason behind my favorite school subject being math. In my experience, it is a subject that is purely logical. It does not need much memorization like other subjects. Now, this doesn’t mean that one needs to become an accountant because they like math, even though it’s important to know basic math (regardless of if you are seeking a position in a non-math related field). Also, ever since I was a child, I have been fascinated with money and big businesses.

When I applied to ISU, I knew I wanted a Spanish minor, but I was undecided about what my major should be. When I was a freshman at ISU,

I took BUS 100: Enterprise. Towards the end of the semester, we were put into a group of five people and each group had to produce a research presentation about a business related major. My group’s major was accounting. We had to interview two professors, two alumni, two professors, and two students, in addition to researching the major itself. After this was completed, we had to prepare a slide show of at

Literate Activity

Literate activity, as Paul Prior explains it, understands *writing* as multimodal, situated, mediated, and dispersed. It sees writing as located not only within the tasks of **doing** reading and writing, but as a part of our lived experience, which is saturated with textuality (adapted from Prior, 1998, p.138).

least fifteen slides and dress in business casual attire to present to the class. I learned a lot of information while working on this project, and it helped me decide my major. I am forever grateful for that moment in my freshman year of college because doing that kind of research is extremely important when deciding what one will be doing for the rest of their life. So, when thinking about the **literate activity** of choosing and pursuing a major, these class activities can be understood as contributing. The interviews and presentations were not, themselves, the kinds of writing that accountants do, but engaging in them helped me to learn about and choose accounting as my major.

ISU offers a housing choice for freshmen to live at the Hewett-Manchester dormitories called Themed Living-Learning Communities. These floor communities consist of residents who are interested in pursuing the same general major and other common interests at ISU. Some themed living-floors are business, fine arts, honors, and so forth. I was on the Business floor my first year at ISU because I knew I liked business and wanted to choose a major in the College of Business. I met a ton of people that I am proud to call my friends today. Some residents on that floor were accounting majors, marketing majors, finance majors, etc. Choosing to live in a themed residence hall was one of the best decisions I made my freshman year at ISU. For example, friends I made during that time will also be taking the CPA exam, so we can help each other prepare (more of the important literacies involved in the CPA exam are in the next section). I strongly recommend incoming freshmen or sophomores to take this opportunity as a way to network with as many people one comes across with as many people as they can.

Requirements to Become a CPA

The requirements to become a CPA have changed over time. In their article, “150 Hour Requirement” Rimerman and Daroca explain that starting in 2000, students have been required to earn 150 hours of college credit, including a bachelor’s degree, to be eligible for AICPA (American Institute of Certified Public Accountants) membership. To receive a bachelor’s degree in accounting, students will need to complete 120 hours of education. This means that, after an undergraduate student receives their bachelor’s degree in accounting, they will have to go back to school and complete at least thirty more hours of education to be eligible to take the Uniform CPA Exam. The additional year in college could be a good or bad thing. It can be a good thing because someone can learn more about being an accountant and this can benefit the student when he or she takes the CPA test. On the

other hand, it can be a bad thing because they have to go back to school and spend more money on their education. Understanding and figuring out how to comply with these requirements is a crucial step in becoming a CPA. Again, this example isn't specifically about learning a particular kind of writing or genre. But the aspiring CPA needs to be able to do this kind of research, which, in a way, is a type of literacy (we could call it CPA literacy). For example, they need to know about the AICPA, because that organization controls how CPAs get certified. They also need to know about the requirements for certification. This kind of information can come from a variety of networks, such as peers (like my friends from the residence hall), or classes (like my BUS 100 class), or from personal research. So, engaging in activities like making friends with similar interests, attending classes, and doing web-based research can all be counted as "literate activities" related to pursuing a career as a CPA.

My own plan for certification is to get my B.S. in Accounting and then to go back to school and get the extra thirty hours of education, because I feel like this demonstrates a commitment to the profession necessary for those who want a higher level of authority and responsibility.

Preparation for the CPA Exam

The CPA Exam is a rigorous test; in order to be a certified Public Account, every aspiring CPA has to pass it. If the test was easy, then everyone could take it and become a CPA. People put in hundreds of hours to prepare for the test and still barely pass the exam. An article I found, "Best Bets to Prep for The CPA Exam," cites Andrew Temte, the president of Kaplan CPA Review, as suggesting that test takers should plan to spend 450 to 500 hours studying, which would amount to thirty hours a week for fifteen or sixteen weeks (about three and a half months). According to Temte, "You have eighteen months to pass all four sections after you pass your first, but if you don't meet this deadline, you start over from scratch."

As Temte notes, there are four separate sections of the exam, and it can take up to eighteen months to complete all of them. There is a ton of information in each section of the test; you cannot cram all the information in one or two days. It is about learning the material and applying it to different situations. If a person doesn't pass all four sections of the test within eighteen months, then he or she will have to retake the entire test over again.

Sharon Onuma, a Certified Public Accountant, has a YouTube channel where she provides helpful advice and tips on how to pass the exam. Onuma

discussed in one of her YouTube videos that she started studying four months before she took the exam. She would go to her local library at eight in the morning until twelve in the afternoon, watching Becker lectures. After that, she would take a break and have lunch. When she completed her break, she'd go back to studying for another four to five hours. She did this every single day for four months; that's a crazy amount of studying! In addition, she wrote down what she studied/accomplished each day. When the test day was getting closer, she would take multiple Becker Practice Exams to test herself on the material. Doing all of this meant she was ready to take the exam, and she passed all four sections of the test on her first attempt.

Students can be involved in programs that can help them perform well on the CPA Exam. Some of these activities offer real-world chances to get practical experience, which can help with the exam. The article "Growing Tax Experiential Learning Opportunities for Students" offers the following advice: "The Voluntary Income Tax Assistance program provides evidence that NABA student chapter activities have been effective in increasing the diversity of individuals in the profession. . ." (Prather-Kinsey 49). When students were involved in the VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Association) program, they received experience working with low-income clients. This program can help provide students with internships because of the experience and skills they have developed that a company or firm may be looking for in a candidate. The VITA program gave students the experience for the CPA Exam because the students could think of specific examples that they had viewed to help them recall the tax law. In addition, getting this kind of real-world experience is another form of "CPA literacy," which not only helps students on the CPA exam, but helps them to also have a more practical understanding of the everyday literacies of being an accountant.

The Uniform CPA Exam

In order to understand how to study for the exam, one of the best kinds of writing research might be to get a better idea of what kind of information the exam actually tests on, and how the exam will be administered. The test is divided into four sections: Auditing and Attestation, Business Environment and Concepts, Financial Accounting and Reporting, and Regulation. According to the article, "CPA Exam Structure," "Each of the four Exam sections is broken down into five smaller sections called testlets. These testlets feature multiple-choice questions (MCQs) and task-based simulations" (TBSs). It is uncommon for test takers to take all four sections at once because it is a difficult exam to take in one sitting. Most people take it one section at

a time, so they can study and master each topic. However, if they do take all the sections at once, then the test taker will be sitting for four hours with two breaks. Everyone has to pass the exam within eighteen months, or they will have to restart from the beginning. A sample question from the CPA Exam, according to the New Jersey Society of Certified Public Accountants, from the Auditing and Attestation section, “What is the most likely opportunity for theft or fraud by employees?” This question is a multiple-choice question: the belief that theft is a common practice, needlessly complex transactions (correct answer), access to assets that are easily traced, and stock options that expire soon after the release of financial statements. Many test takers perform well on the Business Environment and Concepts section which seems to be the easier section out of the four. People usually plan to take the harder sections first, so they do not have to worry about them when the deadline is near.

CPA Exam Costs

In order to pass the CPA Exam, you have to invest time, money, and effort. In Figure 1, the fee of the CPA Exam and preparation is listed as well, according to “CPA Exam Costs 2019 [Save on Fees].” The total cost to take the entire test is \$1,290. Study and other preparation are \$2,000, but that is optional. If you take the cost of the test and add it to the study preparation cost, the total will be \$3,290. However, if you do not pass a section of the test then you can retake it for \$300. As a reminder, you only have eighteen months to pass all four sections of the test. That is quite an investment!

CPA Exam Costs At a Glance				
<i>Simplified for a rough estimate</i>				
CPA Exam fees		+	Study and other costs	
Initial application fee	\$130		CPA review course	\$2000
Registration fee	\$75/section		Lifestyle expenses	\$\$
Examination fees	\$833.60		University courses	\$\$
Background check	\$25			
	\$1,290	+		\$2,000+
Total CPA Exam Cost: \$3,290				
<i>Also consider</i>				
Retake or Reschedule?		Applying internationally?		
If you have retake	\$300/section	Fee for international site	\$356.55/section	
If you reschedule	\$35	Foreign credential evaluation	\$200	
		Travel	\$\$	

Figure 1: CPA Exam Fees
Gleim Exam Prep website.

CPA First Time Pass Rates

Many people study for several hours each week, for multiple months, to pass the test. Even so, a lot of people don't pass it the first time they take it, and they may not pass it at all. Here is a table of examinees' pass rates by exam section through 2016–2017 that was provided by the "CPA Accounting Institute for Success."

Section	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
AUD	48%	55%	52%	48%
BEC	58%	59%	63%	59%
FAR	44%	49%	50%	41%
REG	50%	58%	58%	56%

Figure 2: Passing Rates for Each Section of CPA Exam
Accounting Institute for Success.

Out of all the examinees in 2016–2017, less than half of the examinees passed three of the sections of the text. However, more than 50% of examinees for the Business Environment and Concepts section pass it on their first try for each quarter. Reading this table, I can assume that the Auditing and Attestation section with the Financial Accounting and Reporting section are the hardest sections on the test, because they have the lowest first-time pass rates. The test is grueling, and it is not easy. Here is a graph of the pass rates that occurred in 2016–2017 provided by the "CPA Accounting Institute for Success."

Key: The CPA Exam is offered four times a year, hence the reason for Q1, Q2, Q3, and Q4, which stand for Quarter 1, etc. The American Institute of Certified Public Accountants have collected data through 2010 to 2017 and the passing rates are given in the chart above. By looking at this graph, the pass rates for the Business Environment and Concepts section exceeds all the other sections of the test. The pass rates for the other sections are nearly the same.

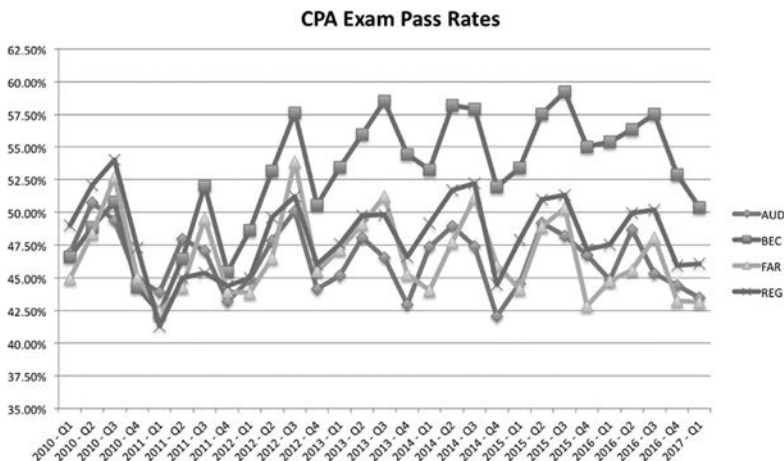


Figure 3: CPA Exam Pass Rates
Accounting Institute for Success Website.

Benefits of Becoming a CPA

Many people take the CPA test to further their career as an accountant. According to the website, *Top Accounting Degrees*, “While these activities are essential for achieving certification, they are also big benefits on their own. The certification process allows both new and experienced accountants to test their abilities, refine their skills and increase their knowledge of the discipline overall.” (What Benefits Does a CPA Certification Give Accountants?). The exams allow them to summarize and remember all that they’ve learned in their month of studying, and (hopefully) it will stick with them after they’ve passed the test. Certification is important because certified CPA, they have the chance to earn a higher salary than a non-CPA. Salaries of accountants can range from \$40,000–\$75,000. On the other hand, the salaries of CPAs can range from \$70,000–\$124,000 per year. CPAs have a chance to earn 10% more than non-CPAs. In addition, CPAs are in high demand, because the certification is valued by companies and potential clients, hence why they are more likely to get a job than someone who is not a CPA.

Wrap-Up

Anyone who is interested in becoming a CPA or not can learn something from this article. To succeed in any career, one has to put in the work and dedication to pursue their goals in life. As an undergraduate accounting student, I feel like I have only scratched the surface of the accounting field. I have taken many accounting classes, but I don’t necessarily feel ready for my future. There is an organization at ISU that could provide an opportunity to discover more about some life experiences with accounting called the Student Accounting Society. This club offers many events such as guest speakers, job fairs, etc. By participating in this club, I could network with Accountants that could help me get an internship. An internship can help me gain experience in a professional work environment. Internships are crucial to obtain because students can learn more about their career. Becoming a CPA is an extensive journey and there is no step-by-step book on how to reach the end of the finish line. Like all careers, there are important steps to take to fulfill one’s passion towards their desired job. With all the hustle and hard work, anything is possible to reach the stars and to succeed in life.

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A Conversation about *A Conversation with a Grassroots Author*: A Look at the Podcast Series Created for the Writing Program Community

Edcel J. Cintron-Gonzalez, Charley Koenig, and Samantha Moe

In this article, authors Cintron-Gonzalez, Koenig, and Moe pulled from episodes of *A Conversation with a Grassroots Author* (a Writing Program podcast series) to highlight examples of how two *Grassroots* authors (Sammy Moe and Edcel J. Cintron-Gonzalez themselves!) approached and researched their own unique articles. After introducing the podcast series, the authors walk through the ways in which they performed research, made theoretical connections, and studied literate activity, all while writing for the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*.

A *Grassroots* Podcast? Documenting Writing Processes

A Conversation with a Grassroots Author is a podcast project originally created by Emily Capan, that involved her interviewing of *GWRJ* authors about their writing process, ideas, and research on their *Grassroots* articles. Edcel J. Cintron-Gonzalez has continued this project by reaching out to authors from the current *Grassroots* issue, and from past issues, to keep this project growing as a writing program resource for Writing Program Instructors.

Using a pedagogical cultural-historical activity theory (P-CHAT), genre studies, and multimedia, the ISU Writing Program encourages students to seek out additional resources when reading and studying the variety of articles within the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*. The podcast series offers our community the opportunity to learn in more detail about the brainstorming and literate activities of our different *Grassroots* authors. Readers will also gain an understanding of the review process from the *GWRJ* editors, and the conversations authors experienced when receiving feedback on their articles. Additionally, this podcast also offers advice on how people can get started in writing their own *Grassroots* articles.

A Conversation with a Grassroots Author is also a great resource for aspiring authors to learn more about the literate activities that occur when authors are composing their articles. There are a lot of steps that go into writing each article, and each individual writer composes differently with different resources, timelines, and goals. These podcast episodes are a way to learn more about how we are all writing researchers and our methods for composition reflect that. In any given podcast episode, an author might talk about the motivations behind writing their specific piece and the inspirations behind their writing, as well as the steps each writer took to edit their article as they were preparing for publication. The podcast series is a great example of genre research that we hope will benefit students who are writing their own *Grassroots* articles. As not all instructors assign the same *Grassroots* articles in their classrooms, these podcasts can be helpful to students who are working on different types of writing-research projects, such as their own podcasts, or even **genre remediations** (taking one genre, such as a text-based artifact, and remediating it into a different modality).

From *Grassroots* to Podcast: What Inspired this Project?

We had the opportunity to ask Emily Capan what inspired her to start the series. Emily explained how there were two primary reasons. First, many of ISU's writing program instructors teach a *Grassroots* project in their ENG 101 classes. Emily thought this might be an effective resource to use in the classroom to show students a "behind-the-scenes" look into how articles are created. Emily explained how getting to hear from the *Grassroots* authors directly makes these texts feel that much more real for the students. Writing instructors can also use these podcasts alongside a discussion of P-CHAT—thinking about how production, activities, ecologies, and other concepts present in *Grassroots* articles—form this genre. Second, this podcast can be used by graduate students and undergraduate students who are interested in contributing to the journal. For example, not everyone is going to be writing a *Grassroots* article for a class, but they may still want to submit their work to the journal. This podcast gives this group of listeners insight into how they can make their own articles.

We also asked Emily why she thought having a podcast about the *Grassroots* articles was important:

Emily: By having conversations with a variety of different *Grassroots* authors, it helps to illuminate the different perspectives and writing processes that folks can have. Each writer has a particular identity that is exhibited through their work. People create differently and

this should be celebrated, as well as examined. It is my hope that students, instructors, and writers who are thinking about uptake will find these conversations enlightening and useful.

In the two podcast episodes we’re looking at in this article, each author (Sammy and Edcel) explained how they used both antecedent knowledge and genre research to investigate particular literacies in their everyday lives, as well as wrote compelling *Grassroots* articles about those literacies. For Edcel in his article titled “Tools Add Agency in Mario 3D Platforms: How F.L.U.D.D. Engages in Activity Theory in *Super Mario Sunshine*,” this investigation investigated the use and agency of tools, specifically F.L.U.D.D., in the 3D platformer *Super Mario Sunshine*. In his discussion of the idea for and process of composing his article, Edcel explains how he was able to use material rhetoric and games studies to argue that tools add agency. For Sammy, her article, “In the Weeds with Literate Activity in the Restaurant Industry”—which was also prefaced by a menu of her own design—explored the restaurant industry as a complex activity system. As she walked through the steps of drafting and revising her piece, Sammy kept coming back to literate activity and menu design as crucial factors in her writing and process.

Taking What You Know and Finding Out What You Don’t: A Combination of Antecedent Knowledge and Genre Research

Antecedent knowledge, which is all the things a writer already knows that can come into play when they take up a new kind of writing or literacy (“Key Terms and Concepts”), was the crucial starting point for both Edcel and Sammy’s *Grassroots* articles, and they each talk about this in their own ways in their interviews for the podcast. Edcel relied on his antecedent knowledge of previous Super Mario video games to help him identify an idea for an article about *Super Mario Sunshine*, specifically. Alternatively, Sammy talked about drawing from her experience and knowledge of the restaurant industry and serving as she thought about and composed her article:

Sammy: I actually read through a few of my journals from the years I was still working in the restaurant industry. I also was re-reading Stephanie Danler’s novel, *Sweetbitter*, to help get me in the mindset of what it was like to be a server (and I was watching the show of the same name).

But one cannot live, and write, on antecedent knowledge alone—that’s where genre research comes into play. **Genre research** is “research that focuses on

Genre: What does “genre” mean again? In the ISU Writing Program, when we talk about genre, we mean productions that can be identified by the features or conventions that make it recognizable (“Key Terms and Concepts”).

how to go about creating a specific kind of text for a specific kind of situation” (“Key Terms and Concepts”). In the case of writing about video games and tools, Edcel found it most helpful to look closely at the different iterations of Super Mario games and how they differed in mechanics and tool use:

Agency: Using Abate’s perspective on agency, this is the social action when a character uses their own voice and autonomy to call out moments of injustice oppression, and fight against pre-determined structures of power. However, **agency** looks different for tools (non-living agents) because in part, tools are co-actors with the characters and their agency is dependent, in some ways, on whether the character uses them for good or ill.

Edcel: I grabbed my Nintendo Switch, started playing *Super Mario Sunshine* again to relive my GameCube years and thought about what made this game from the Super Mario franchise unique from its other titles. This is when the idea hit me! This is the only game where Mario’s game mechanics are adapted because Mario is using a tool to defeat different goo-like enemies in the game, while also helping restore the natural sunlight while at the same time cleaning the environment in Isle Delfino. . . This was just the idea

I needed to write a paper to explain why F.L.U.D.D., the water cannon tool Mario uses in the game, adds to Mario’s game mechanics as a form of agency.

By figuring out the “genre” of Super Mario tools, so to speak, Edcel was able to better analyze and comment on the ways in which the F.L.U.D.D. tool stood out and added agency. And when it came to writing about the genre of menus for the *Grassroots*, Sammy’s genre research looked a little different:

Sammy: I also looked up genre conventions of menus, to try and draft what would ultimately become the first page of the article, designed with a menu layout from Canva. In the end, this became a genre “mash-up” as I adapted the genre of a menu to try and make it work for what I wanted to say about “server literacies.” My goal was to use the genre conventions of a menu as an outer shell of sorts, with each section explaining a different section of my article (like how a menu might move through meal courses and drinks). Lastly, I did some research into the genre conventions of headings and subheadings in the *Grassroots* journal—most authors use really quippy or funny language, and so I tried to design my headings in a similar format (using personal anecdotes and humor).

By familiarizing herself not just with the ins and outs of menu design but also with the features of the *Grassroots* journal, Sammy was ultimately able to craft an article that both cohered with the style and tone of the journal and included a new kind of feature that does not appear in previous issues: an activity-rich menu to preview the article and tempt the reader. In this way, Sammy remediated the menu genre—a document that shows customers

what they can order, usually organized from the beginning of a meal to the end—into something to help readers move through the sections and content of her article from start to finish. The result was a helpful, useful genre mash-up of sorts, one that guides readers through her work, as you can see in Figure 1.

Using Theoretical Concepts to Make Connections with Everyday Life: Edcel's Connections with Material Rhetoric and Video Games

Part of the challenge of writing a *Grassroots* article is thinking of ways to use the cool theory you have been studying and apply it to everyday life. When reading a variety of information, it is important to learn how to involve this knowledge in conversation with the key terms and concepts of the Writing Program, and in turn, learning how to involve into the conversation the key terms and concepts you learn in the Writing Program. Edcel also had these thoughts when he was figuring out how to incorporate activity theory, autonomy, agency, and material rhetoric in his *Grassroots* article. It is interesting he got inspiration for his article just by doing one of his favorite hobbies, playing video games. During the time he was working on his article, *Super Mario 3D All-Stars* was released for the Nintendo Switch. Edcel got to play his favorite video games again after years of not playing them. It was interesting because after Edcel had studied enough theory about activity systems, autonomy, agency, and material rhetoric, so he was able to identify how these terms connected with *Super Mario Sunshine*—one of the *only* Mario 3D platformer games where Mario uses a physical tool named F.L.U.D.D. on his adventures. The following section is pulled from Edcel's podcast interview, explaining how he made connections between theory and video games:

Edcel: I had a lot of fun writing this article. It gave me the space to play my favorite video game and have a real hands-on experience with the game mechanics used on *Super Mario Sunshine* for the Nintendo Switch. It's very different writing about video games if you are watching another player engage with the game via live stream or as a YouTube video. Me playing the game allows me to really experiment with how useful F.L.U.D.D. is in the



Figure 1: The first page of Sammy Moe's article, "In the Weeds with Literate Activity in the Restaurant Industry."



Figure 2: A QR code for Episode 7 of *A Conversation with the Grassroots Author* featuring Edcel Cintron-Gonzales.

game. I got to use the different nuzzles available for F.L.U.D.D., listen to F.L.U.D.D. dialogue in the game, which made me think of how F.L.U.D.D. was given a lot of agency by its creator because it had the ability to talk and communicate its thoughts throughout the game. As I played the game, I would take notes on Mario and F.L.U.D.D.'s gameplay and interactions in the world of *Super Mario Sunshine* and used Activity Theory to break down how these characters expressed their autonomy and agency to help form my original argument. It was also refreshing to write about Mario 3D platformers in general and talk about my favorite video game as a joy in itself.

In this next excerpt, Edcel explains why using theory is important when writing a *Grassroots* article.

Edcel: My main advice would be to have fun writing your grassroots article. If you ever feel like your idea is not worthy of writing or it can't be academic enough, then push those thoughts away. Theory and scholarship are meant to be used for action and do real work in the world. And I do agree that as a scholar, I want my writing to be accessible to a wide audience, so other people can read my work and start thinking about their favorite video games and media in different ways.

Literate Activity and Menu Design

Sammy returned to the restaurant industry the first semester after she started at ISU. She worked at an entirely new restaurant since the restaurant she had previously worked at (for ten years) had shut down. Sammy used what she had learned about genre research and literate activity to help her understand this new restaurant system. There were a lot of familiar steps for her to learn, such as where to stock certain items, and how to support the kitchen staff when they got busy. After returning to Illinois, she began the rhetoric and composition seminar. Though she had a lot of antecedent knowledge that helped her write this article for class, she still had a lot of genre research to complete before the article would be ready for publication in the journal. The following quotes are from her article, and they detail some of the steps she took to recall vital information about working in restaurants. These steps included reading novels set in a restaurant, reading through her journals (which contain recipes on note cards as well as memories from her time in the industry), and lastly, reading different *Grassroots* articles to ensure Sammy was abiding by the genre conventions for the journal:

Sammy: The writing process looked like a lot of drafting and revision. I tend to write in a really cyclical manner, which means I

might repeat a thought, and so when I go back to revise, I have to do a careful read-through of my own work to make sure the piece actually flowed correctly.

Sammy: I actually read through a few of my journals from the years I was still working in the restaurant industry. I also was re-reading Stephanie Danler’s novel, *Sweetbitter*, to help get me in the mindset of what it was like to be a server (and I was watching the show of the same name). I also looked up genre conventions of menus, to try and draft what would ultimately become the first page of the article, designed with a menu layout from Canva. Lastly, I did some research into the genre convention of headings and subheadings in the *Grassroots* journal—most authors use really quippy or funny language, and so I tried to design my headings in a similar format (using personal anecdotes and humor).



Figure 3: A QR code for Episode 8 of *A Conversation with the Grassroots Author* featuring Sammy Moe.

Check Out our Podcast Series: *A Conversation with a Grassroots Author*

Using a variety of Writing Program concepts and individual composing practices, Edcel and Sammy have produced not just two unique *Grassroots* articles, but also contributed to the podcast series in enlightening ways. With that, we leave you on this encouraging note:

Sammy: I would say to embrace your own unique voice and style when writing a *Grassroots* article. I also try to advise new authors to read older issues of the journal, to give them some sense of the genre conventions and style choices other authors make.

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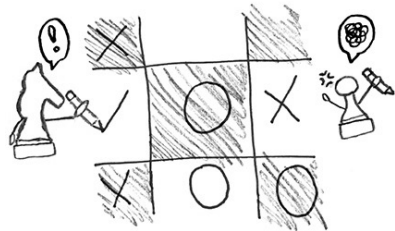
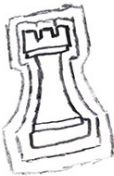
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Sammy Moe is a PhD student studying creative writing. When not researching and reading, she is currently working on a novel about her experience in the restaurant industry.



Notes



Dungeons and Dragons and Literate Activity: Locating Writing (Research) Identity

Madi Kartcheske

In this article, Madi Kartcheske discusses the role of Dungeons and Dragons in developing her confidence as a writer. She breaks down the influence of tabletop role-playing games in her creativity and her ever-expanding writing community.

I've always been equally enchanted and intimidated by writing; I wanted to be the lone writer sitting in her beach house, staring wistfully at sea over a cup of black coffee, struggling with writer's block in a fashionably frustrated manner. Instead, my parents gifted me a clunky gray PC without access to the Internet, and I spent my days starting and stopping stories in the 1998 version of Microsoft Word. I desperately wanted to claim a writing identity. Still, mountains of one-page documents sat untouched in my hard drive, and my fear of failure prevented me from doing much writing outside of school assignments.

When it came time to take my first "real adult" step in applying to college, I wanted to forge my path and, once and for all, become a writer. I thought the official title of "college student" pursuing my bachelor's degree in creative writing would magically fix whatever issues I was having with writing. But, of course, it wasn't that easy. My professor would assign 1,000 words, I would start and stop a paragraph repeatedly, and then I would churn out a string of incoherent words to turn in at the last second. It was demoralizing! How am I supposed to live my dream of being the intensely prophetic hermit routinely writing the next great American novel if I can't reliably write a single flash fiction story?

As improbable as it may seem, developing my confidence in writing has run parallel to my journey as a budding Dungeons and Dragons (D&D) player. I started listening to *The Adventure Zone* when I was a sophomore in college and I have played a few pickup games in recent years. When the time came to write my first *Grassroots* article as a certified graduate student, I knew I could find a topic by fulfilling my goal: to play in a long-term game (called a campaign). I signed up for a Discord server and got set up with six strangers that I've gotten to know over the past few months we've been playing.

Suddenly, I was spending hours at my laptop and my grandfather's typewriter, hunched over them, furiously typing real, actual words. It seemed that I'd become equal parts the kind of writer I've always wanted to be and absolutely nothing like her.

Looking back, it seems obvious why D&D propelled me into being an excited and productive wordsmith, and explaining that process will, I hope, raise implications for writing and storytelling. With a reputation for being nerd-exclusive, this tabletop role-playing game (TTRPG) uses its **literate activity system**, highly social and historically situated components of the writing process, which change based upon its contexts, as the foundation of the story. Instead of hiding the process by which authors create text, D&D makes the activity system visible and allows its authors to access and manipulate it explicitly. As I've been co-authoring a story about a high-elf variant half-elf warlock, I've been re-inventing my writing (research) identity.

The Writing I Thought They Did

Dungeons and Dragons is pervasive enough now that many people have some **antecedent knowledge** or understanding based on their prior interactions. Though I had friends in high school who played D&D and my Dad played TTRPGs when he was younger, I still assumed it was mostly for middle-aged men who wanted to pretend to be cool for hours on end. I was overwhelmed by the different handbooks, the unfamiliar language, and (most of all) how cringy the whole thing seemed.

Essentially, I thought the general lore of D&D was negligible. The writing was dry, boring, and served one purpose: to help middle-aged men play in medieval fantasy land. I also presumed the players, maybe, had to do some complex, boring math to figure out whether their created character was allowed to hit a giant dragon—a character I always guessed to have a predictably tragic backstory.

I don't know where I got those particular images from—perhaps the odd episode of a sitcom or an overheard conversation—but my image of D&D

began to change around the time that the fifth edition of *Dungeons and Dragons* was released in 2014, known commonly as D&D 5e or simply 5e (pronounced “five ee”). My favorite podcast hosts released a joke episode of their comedy advice podcast where the three brothers and their dad played a session of D&D together. It was so well-received by their audience that it extended into its show, *The Adventure Zone*, and the hosts begin the very first episode by addressing the discomfort felt by those who share this antecedent knowledge:

Griffin: Let’s. . . I mean, let’s talk about our D&D experience, because I think we’re all pretty uncomfortable right now, and it seems like a pretty good icebreaker (McElroy, 00:02:47).

[. . .]

Justin: I think for a lot of people, *Dungeons & Dragons* was the last bastion of nerd-dom; the nerdiest thing you could do. [. . .] And it was like, the failsafe, like, emergency, —Well, at least I don’t play *Dungeons & Dragons*. But the good thing is, now LARPing is a thing (McElroy, 00:04:05).

The Adventure Zone is now in its fourth season, has multiple volumes of a graphic novel adaptation, and is in the works for an animated series. They even cosplay at live events! It’s clear that they’ve become comfortable with the experience of playing the game. But most people don’t get that far. The antecedent knowledge a vast majority of us carry about *Dungeons and Dragons* prevents us from even attempting to play. The amount of effort that players must put forth to start a campaign—acquiring rulebooks, learning mechanics, becoming comfortable with language like “death save,” “spell slot,” and “D8”—why would I put in all this effort for something I know to be so unforgivably exhausting?

Along with the rise in popularity of Actual Play/Real Play podcasts with shows such as *The Adventure Zone* and *Critical Role*, another cultural milestone shattered the rest of my misunderstandings about D&D—Netflix released the first season of *Stranger Things* in 2016. The show plays on our antecedent knowledge:

Features of the Show	Our Antecedent Knowledge
The show is set in 1983.	This game is nostalgic for adults today, not something aimed at younger folks.
The protagonists are a ragtag of outcasts (reinforced by letting us know that Nancy dressed up for their campaign four years ago, but she won’t do it now that she’s <i>cool</i>).	This game is only played by people widely regarded as weird or different.
The kid’s first campaign takes weeks of planning and runs nearly ten hours.	This game is for folks who have that kind of time and don’t have anything better to do.

D&D, for the first few episodes, is perfectly recognizable to us, and we're more than happy to root for these loveable underdog kids. The show uses our antecedent knowledge to get us on board. But as the season progresses and the kids become cool, so does D&D. They start using language from the game to visualize the unexplainable—they theorize what happened to Will based on how he played his character, the Demogorgon is named for a monster, and the upside-down is visualized by flipping the gaming mat. D&D soon becomes the framework the underdogs use to save the world in the show.

Stranger Things' representation changed D&D for me and tons of other folks, contributing to a rise in popularity for more and more folks to start playing, myself included. I started playing pickup games here and there, acting as Dungeon Master (DM) for some and role-playing as a character in others. Though the writing I did never felt dry or dull, it was pretty straightforward. D&D was no longer the irredeemably nerdy game I thought it would be, but I was still mystified by the rules and conventions of the game. Like the writing process, I was passionate about parts of it, but my antecedent knowledge kept getting in the way. I couldn't get invested because it seemed as if there was something I was missing. Is the game just kind of lame? Am I just kind of a bad writer? I didn't realize the potential D&D held, both as a game and as a lesson in writing, until I started my first full-fledged campaign.

The Writing We Do in Community

It's not easy to get a campaign together. A good-sized party is between five and seven players with a committed, detail-oriented DM willing to put in a lot of time and energy to create a story that can stretch for multiple months. At the beginning of the semester, the group I joined had a DM who used the same world lore between the two campaigns he guided. So, moments after being added to the group's Discord, we had access to various regional maps, a pantheon of gods to choose from if we needed them, and a general synopsis of the world's history and current events. After that, it was up to us to develop our characters and their backstories and determine the game mechanics we would need.

Even being familiar with the genre and understanding the roles we each play and the fundamentals of playing, I was overwhelmed. The DM presented so much information—how was I ever going to live up to all this?

The game itself seems intimidating. The rules are housed in three main books, priced at \$50 apiece. Furthermore, there are multiple supplemental books

with additional information, each priced at \$50. The principal first step is selecting your class (like your occupation), such as a wizard or fighter, and selecting your race (like your species), such as an elf or orc. Next, you must determine how those selections impact what your character can do—spellcasting abilities, charisma or dexterity statistics, and your character’s attack and armor class. Then, you adjust the modifiers, select spells to prepare depending on the upcoming situation, and decide on a set of dice to use.



Figure 1: A snapshot of my desk right before playing.

Whew! It’s a lot to take in. And akin to writing, I had no idea how anyone got good at this; there are so many things to get wrong!

It isn’t until you start playing that the game becomes simple. When we get past the fancy jargon and the hefty price tag, we can see how D&D makes its literate activity system visible to its writers.

At its core, the fifth edition of D&D is a storytelling game. The DM creates and presents a conflict, and the characters respond, relying on their wit and chance dice rolls to overcome it. D&D is a real-time negotiation of interests, desires, and personal entertainment, all of which can conflict with our character’s interests. The DM writes the conflict, and the players write their reactions.

Players use the rules to help shape and guide their narratives, almost identical to how we use **genre** in writing, as a general guideline composed of conventions that writers constantly use to render the thing recognizable. It would be hard to play together if we didn’t have a common language to draw from. For example, if my half-elf warlock has Darkvision (the ability to see in complete darkness as if it were dim light for a range of sixty feet) and a fellow player’s dwarven paladin has Darkvision (the ability to make their vision purposefully darkened to avoid the effects of blinding light or fire), then we would have a challenging time role-playing at the same table. If our understanding of these terms are too different from one another, then we’ll spend more time arguing over how Darkvision works rather than saving a village from a band of marauders. So, the game stops, the fun stops, and, ultimately, the writing stops.

The rules of D&D are, in fact, a genre. They are constructed, followed, and broken by their players. For example, a huge component of spellcasting

is spell components (which I don't pretend to know enough to explain fully). *The Player's Handbook* describes them as "the physical requirements you have to meet in order to cast [the spell]. Each spell's description indicates whether it requires verbal (V), somatic (S), or material (M) components. If you can't provide one or more of a spell's components, you are unable to cast the spell" (*The Player's Handbook*, 204).

That, to me, sounds boring. Don't get me wrong—there are some interesting implications of not being able to do a verbal spell while sneaking around a silent cave or needing enough of a rare gem to cast a high-level spell. But part of the creativity and fun inherent to D&D is finding unique and fun ways of approaching a problem. For example, if my character is carrying something with both hands and wants to cast a spell, she needs to gesture to cast it, which requires two free hands. So, the constraint of not being able to release until I say, "Rhubarb puts down the jug she's carrying, casts the spell, then picks up the jug again," might be much less fun than just letting her do the action as mentioned earlier.

In every game I've ever run or played, when the rules stop being fun, we get rid of them. Who cares if the big, expensive book says I'm not allowed to do this fun and exciting thing? The rules, the genre, should be flexible enough to accommodate what I'm doing. Instead, we pass around PDF versions of the books to save money, provide summaries of rules while we play to help new players, and invent new "homebrew" rules to fit our games better. When DMs are super picky about rules, they give good reasons for doing so—maybe they want this dungeon to be challenging and pedantic for the sake of the story. Perhaps we're in a town where law and order abide above all, so we have to be careful not to leave any taverns without paying our full tab, no questions asked. The point is to find fun, productive ways to tell a story, not make a player obsessively gather incense to transform their familiar from a bird back into a cat (no shade, *Critical Role*).

One of the reasons D&D 5e can allow for so much flexibility is because the story is designed to be impermanent. Apart from Real Play/Actual Play podcasts and videos, these campaigns will never be experienced by anyone who isn't actively creating it. The game lives in its players, and it's affected by the things around it. We can obtain sneak peeks of it through notes or memes in a group chat, but the story never leaves the room.

Since it is near impossible to remove any campaign's story from its original context, we can see the direct impact of the whole literate activity system as it's playing out. My writing research identity impacts how I produce my character—how she talks, reacts, and problem-solves—but the activity system is much broader than that. Am I exhausted from the week, struggling

to stay engaged, or am I well rested and energized, needing to be careful not to interrupt or talk over other players? Are we in a public place such as a library? A semi-public place, like an apartment complex with thin walls, or private space, like a spacious house with access to a stocked refrigerator? Do we have an inside joke about one of the characters that keep leaking into the story? Did someone just watch *Sailor Moon* and is now spending a lot of time inserting magical-girl transitions into every scene? The writers are hyper-aware of how these factors impact the story because we make it in real time.

Additionally, since the story only exists because we engage with it in real time, it's impossible to make perfect. We aren't tied to our decisions a month ago, a week ago, ten minutes ago if they don't serve our purposes now. Similarly, NPCs (non-playable characters which the DM controls) can change throughout sessions based on what we remember. The physical distance between a player and an enemy can also shift if we need to retcon an action, and a character's attitude may turn slightly before or after taking a bathroom break. So, the story is constantly in flux, it's never perfect, and it's not hung up on continuity or solidity. It just is.

D&D storytelling isn't different from "real" writing, but these activities are sometimes invisible when alone. We assume that since a single person is in charge and the text is presented as a physical artifact, these unstable factors don't apply. Instead, playing D&D together reminds us that the world around us impacts every aspect of how we produce texts.

I can imagine you reading this article, circling every time I've said "we" and "together." You might be thinking, "Madi, it's different! When you co-author something in real time, you have to pay attention to more stuff!"

My response? "Yes, yes, reader. I might be inclined to agree with you if I didn't also do *so much* writing by myself . . ."

The Writing We (Might) Do Alone

I mentioned above that most, if not all, of the genre conventions of a campaign are entirely optional. Most parties play with a "take what you like, leave what you don't" policy, interacting with the genre conventions only so much as they make the game recognizable and fun. The nature of D&D is that it's flexible and fluid, saturated with homebrew content and rule-breaking and general absurdity.

Keep all that in mind as I say this: the writing we do on our own as players are explicitly optional. Commonly, players will keep notes to

remember what has happened in sessions. Most players appreciate their past selves for taking good notes, but some are more than happy to jot their hit points down on a napkin and promptly throw it away. I'd never been a particularly intense note-taker in one-shots, but this campaign was different in many ways. Since I was going to play for an extended period with online strangers, I wanted to make sure I had some support systems in place for myself to alleviate my anxieties about walking into the space. So, I did what any self-respecting zillennial would do: engage in some recognizable genre research via YouTube videos. Here, I could flip through videos of players creating detailed scrapbooks, aesthetically pleasing bullet journals, and even players who take detailed notes while in character.

A quick aside, role-playing is ridiculously difficult for me. And when something's difficult, I have a lot of trouble doing it. However, I know that role-play is a massive part of story development in D&D, and, honestly, it's what makes playing fun for me. I get the chance to step away from what Madi might do and, instead, step into the shoes of a half-elf warlock named Rhubarb Sophic. She's a socially ambivalent archivist studying sentient arcane artifacts who made a pact with a goddess of divine redemption, is slowly becoming immortal, and (it maybe goes without saying) she's way cooler than I am. She approaches the world differently, and it's fun to figure her out.

But roleplaying is a super vulnerable, uncomfortable step. Much like writing the first few pages of the novel, I've been kicking around, opening my mouth, and speaking as if I'm someone else is scary. What about my antecedent knowledge of folks who enjoy D&D being publicly humiliated? So, if my sheer force of will isn't enough to get me to play, I must rely on other systems to take those risks. This, for me, took the form of my notes.

I knew Rhubarb would be a no-nonsense nerd, following the adventure looking for artifacts. Still, that foundation wasn't strong enough to risk stupidity in front of a bunch of strangers. So, I wrote about her backstory, detailing her life from an omniscient perspective. That wasn't enough; the backstory gave me more information about her, but it didn't let me practice *being* her.

I turned to role-playing my notes. Rhubarb is an arcanologist who studies arcane or magical items. I know little about field reports, but I know that many ethnographic studies in the humanities are relatively basic and boring to the outside observer. I would never break my notes into arbitrary categories or write from an unbiased, outside perspective. However, Rhubarb would.

So, I began to write her story through these reports, treating herself as an object of study and hypothesizing about her emotional responses as if she could only observe her feelings. I got to practice her experiences with loss, adventure, and unexplainable events. The original intention was to put all my notes into one place and assist my admittedly poor memory after each campaign session. Instead, the field reports helped me practice getting into character, performing research on the character herself, and knowing how to make her recognizable. Since I could practice Rhubarb Sophic before entering the space, I felt ready to take risks and contribute.

But it wasn't just the content of the notes that helped me feel more secure. The **production**, the tools I used to create the text, aided the process immensely. I began thinking about the technology that a fantasy character may have access to, and I thought about my grandfather's typewriter. I use it for random writing projects here and there, but its old wooden case primarily acts as a laptop stand on my desk (the irony of placing a laptop routinely on top of a typewriter does not escape me). I thought since Rhubarb would be more likely to use an analog writing method than a MacBook, producing her field reports that way would lend some accurate aesthetics to it.

The typewriter is tricky to operate as it hasn't been used in decades. Some keys malfunction because of the lack of upkeep, leading to stray letters in random places, strikethroughs, and ugly blots of White-Out. Editing is time consuming while using this physical medium, so the format is never perfect. If I forget a line of a field report, I have to find somewhere else to put it on the sheet. If I run out of space, I can't go back and delete unnecessary words, and I'll have to go back and retype the whole thing or switch out the pages. I have to decide which mistakes I can live with and which errors I need to correct.



Figure 2: My grandfather's typewriter.

My typewriter editing is wildly different from how I've written personal work in the past. I agonize over paragraphs, getting stuck after an introduction. Using the typewriter is a physical reminder, asking me to negotiate my time, energy, and enthusiasm with each line. Is it worth retyping the whole report to replace a single verb? Seeing these mistakes as I play is another reminder that there are mistakes, I can live with. If I flub an attack

or my dialogue is awkward as I play, there are ample opportunities to redirect and six other players to save the scene.

This writing practice led me to research I didn't even know I needed to do!

One of the players in my campaign off-handedly asked me for the description of Rhu's glasses. It caught me off guard and thrilled me at the same time! I spent ten hours (that I really could've used for higher-priority responsibilities) sculpting, painting, and repurposing materials until I had something of hers in my hands. Upon looking at the finished product, I suddenly knew Rhu better. She takes care of her stuff, even when it's old and rusted. She prefers intricate designs, but they must be functional, too. I can hold and manipulate and *wear* something that she owns, making her



Figure 3: The glasses I made for my D&D character.

more real than anything I've ever written before.

The fact that D&D doesn't *live* anywhere tricks me, as a writer, into taking more risks. And those risks result in confidence, and a depth of knowledge that excites me makes me want to learn and create even more.

The Writing I Do Alone, in Community

You, I assume, at this point: Okay, so, cool. D&D is an interesting literate activity system. Why does this matter? When are you going to tell me how to be a better writer?

Me, of course: Sorry, champ, there's nothing that will *make* you a "better writer."

Playing D&D didn't buy me a house on the beach so I could stare wistfully out at sea, and it didn't minimize the obscene amount of milk that I put in my coffee. It didn't turn me into the writer I thought I wanted to be. But I started playing D&D, started writing this story of a nearly-immortal half-elf, and it made me curious. What tools can I use to make writing Rhubarb less intimidating? What practice can I do to help support the ideas I want to write? How can I remind myself that the rules are supposed to exist when it's productive and get rid of them when they stop being fun?

I think these fundamentals—utilizing creative tools, practicing, and having fun—have made me a more comfortable writer. But it’s not as though playing D&D *gave* those things to me. I’ve always been able to do this. I’ve always had these skills available to me. The magic of playing Dungeons and Dragons (pun, unfortunately, intended) makes these things *accessible* to a writer. The entire literate activity system centers on the fact that the writing process is complicated and fluid, so writers can’t help but tap into their instincts to produce innovative text! Being a “better” writer isn’t gaining some quick skill that will change your life. It’s paying attention, being curious, and having fun.

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Shuffling The Literate Activities of



by Madelyn Morrow

Track 1: Multimodality

When considering the large population who engage with Spotify, it is evident that these literate practices have cultivated a prosperous discourse community through which users interact with countless songs and playlists as a prominent literacy in their everyday lives. With that in mind, the discourse that takes place in the Spotify community involves many mechanisms that enrich its communicative goals and the exchange that takes place between users and their music. Let's begin to dive deeper into the root of this discourse by considering its composition.



Distributed Authors

The composition of Spotify itself exists in two different manners, from two different kinds of authors: the composition of songs by the artist, and the composition of playlists by the listener. Both of these activities are composed with multimodality, as the authors of these texts consider many different modes to communicate while composing on Spotify. The central focus that these users considered are the aural, visual, and alphabetic modes of these literate activities.

Multiple Modes



Aural Modalities
focus on *Sound*.



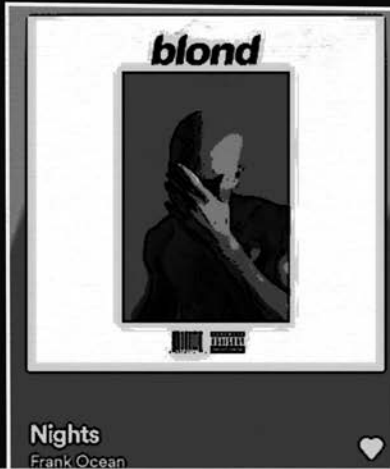
Visual Modalities
focus on *Images*.



Alphabetic/Linguistic
Modes focus on
Language/Writing.

Visual

The visual mode involves what can be communicated with the use of still or moving images. This component allows people to immerse themselves in the music and take part in the story being conveyed by the song. Visuals often add aesthetics and context to songs, which is especially true in the composition of Spotify.



Artists mainly use the visual mode to consider what image they want to associate with each specific song. If the song is a part of an album, it usually displays the album cover. If it is a single, the artist may select a specific image for the individual song.



A new, innovative technology has also been made available for artists during composition with the visual mode. This tool is called the Spotify Canvas. While listening to some songs, a short video loop will repeat in place of the still cover image during the duration of the song.



These video clips offer more spaces for creativity during composition, as artists use the Canvas feature to show clips from the song's music video, behind-the-scenes, graphic reels, and more.

Listeners compose with the visual mode in the "edit" feature of playlist construction on Spotify, as listeners can "upload" an image of their choosing for the cover of their playlist. This may be a personal image taken from their camera roll, an Internet image, or some other media source.

Alphabetic

The alphabetic mode involves what can be communicated with the use of alphabetic products like words and sentences.



Beautiful Crazy
Luke Combs

Beautiful, crazy
She can't help but amaze me
The way that she dances
Ain't afraid to take chances
And wears her heart on her
sleeve



Heat Waves
Glass Animals

Last night all I think about is you
Don't stop, baby, you can walk
through
Don't wanna but I think about
you
You know that I'm never gonna
lose

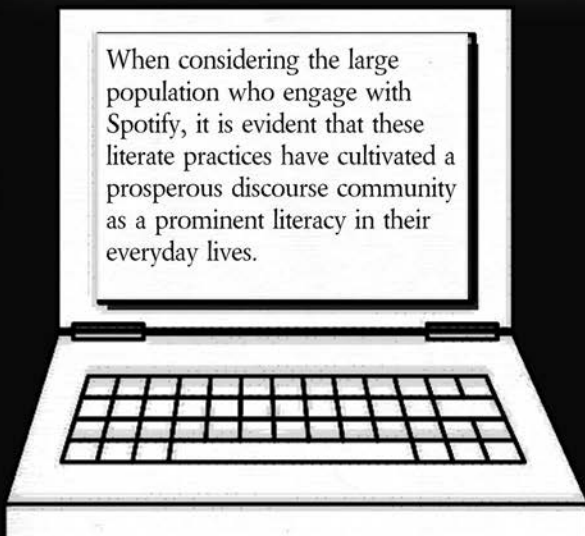
On Spotify, artists have the opportunity to engage in the alphabetic mode by linking the song lyrics with the piece itself. To do this, artists can use Spotify's partner Musixmatch to make the listening experience an interactive one. By using the Musixmatch technology, artists can compose their song in the alphabetic mode by giving the listener in-app access to the lyrics, so the listener can follow along with the words as the aural sounds of the song unfold. While this feature is relatively new in its availability, it has made a massive stride in enriching the literacy of Spotify by enabling its users to now engage with the alphabetic mode while engaging with the music itself.



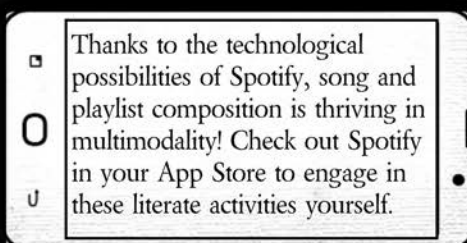
Listeners predominantly engage in the alphabetic mode when composing the title of their playlists. An additional alphabetic mode that has been implemented in a few settings recently is to organize song titles in a sequence to communicate a message when read in order on the playlist. One user's example of this alphabetic mode in playlist composition is included in this QR Code:



When considering the large population who engage with Spotify, it is evident that these literate practices have cultivated a prosperous discourse community as a prominent literacy in their everyday lives.



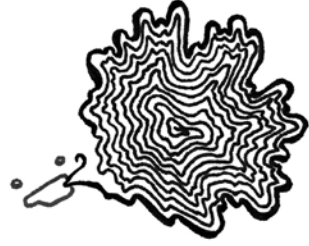
Thanks to the technological possibilities of Spotify, song and playlist composition is thriving in multimodality! Check out Spotify in your App Store to engage in these literate activities yourself.



Madelyn Morrow is a junior from Silvis, Illinois, who studies Secondary English Education at Illinois State University. After she graduates with her undergraduate degree next Spring, Madelyn plans to seek a career in the education field, as well as continuing to pursue her passion for writing in various projects. In her free time, Madelyn enjoys reading, exploring, and updating her life's soundtrack on Spotify through her expansive library of playlists.



Notes



Our Mission Statement

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

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

General Information

Submissions

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

Queries and Drafts

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

Honoraria

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

Style and Tone

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

1. The readership of the *GWRJ* is writers. It is not “students,” even though the journal is used by writing instructors and students. (The *GWRJ* remains the primary text for Writing Program courses at Illinois State University, and it is 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. While writers (especially of first-person narratives) may write about successes, they need to complicate the genres with which they are working.
5. Tone or content that situates the reader as a certain kind of writer (whether as a master or novice) with shared experiences can be

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

6. Whenever possible, articles should make use of published research about writing practices, but the research should be incorporated into the text in a relevant and accessible way so that readers who are not used to reading scholarly research can still benefit from the references.
7. Articles should be as specific as possible about the genre or set of writing activities they are studying. Generalized studies or discussions of “writing” are not encouraged. Additionally, examples of “writing-in-progress” are always encouraged and are often necessary for articles to be useful to our readers.

Media, Mode, and Copyright Issues

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

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

Researching for Grassroots

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

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

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

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

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

Investigating Genres

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

Personal Explorations of Literate Practice

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

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

Composing Practices

This kind of research looks at particular composing practices, including invention (coming up with ideas), research, revision, etc. It often overlaps with personal exploration research because authors are 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, people might assume that composing practices work in similar ways across all kinds of genres and writing situations. While it is possible to trace similar kinds of literate activities or composing practices across different situations (and, in fact, it can be really interesting—see, for example, Kevin Roozen’s writing research, “Tracing Trajectories of Practice: Repurposing in One Student’s Developing Disciplinary Writing Processes”), it is important to remember that we really can’t talk about an activity like “revising,” for example, as if it is something that a person does the same way in every kind of situation.

Literate Activity in the Wild

While writing in classrooms or for school settings can often seem very cut-and-dried, these practices are more complicated than they seem. Part of the reason we 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 as well as different cultural norms and practices.

Case Studies of Individual Literate Practices

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

Linguistics Writing Research

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

Global or Intercultural Literate Practices

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

The Researcher's Process

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

Step One

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

Step Two

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

Step Three

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

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

Step Four

Because *Grassroots* articles are a fairly unique kind of writing, authors may find it useful to consider past writing experiences that they might be able to draw on as they write. We call these “antecedent genres,” and they can be important to think about because these prior experiences always shape how an author writes, especially when 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 add interest and information to a text, but copyright issues will need to be considered. Charts, graphs, and other illustrations that highlight important aspects of the data you have collected can also be important.

Step Seven

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

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

Step Eight

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

Step Nine

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

Step Ten

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

Questions?

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

Works Cited

ISU Writing Program. "Key Terms and Concepts." *Grassroots Writing Research*, 22 September 2015, <http://isuwriting.com/key-terms/>.

Roozen, Kevin. "Tracing Trajectories of Practice: Repurposing in One Student's Developing Disciplinary Writing Processes." *Written Communication*, vol. 27, no. 3, 2010, pp. 318–54, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0741088310373529>.